

Peak performance

Chaney Heinbaugh

I'VE PLAYED SOCCER PRACTICALLY my entire life. I remember watching my older brothers' games on the sidelines as I eagerly awaited my turn to "tear up the field." As soon as I was old enough to play the game, it became my passion, so naturally I was thrilled when I had the opportunity to play for my high school.

I finished my freshman season of soccer filled with satisfaction. I had made varsity and felt like a valued member of the team. But sophomore year was an entirely different story. Fresh off of a disappointing year for club soccer, I was nervous for the upcoming high school season. A swirl of doubts took hold and seemed to inhibit my ability to be successful on the field. I hesitated to make essential runs offensively and second-guessed each of my shots on goal.

With each additional game I didn't score, I felt consumed by shame and noticed when my playing time began to wane significantly. I couldn't shake the fear that my skill had "peaked" the previous year.

When junior year rolled around, I still felt stuck, and as the first game of the season approached, I became hyper-focused on having a healthy diet and on getting the perfect amount of sleep in order to do well in the match. Ironically, these superficial "fixes" only increased my nerves,

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and again I finished the game having done poorly and feeling dejected.

That was when it suddenly clicked for me: Why was I accepting the idea that something I loved could be turned into something that filled me with dread? I realized I'd been caught up in thinking that the ability I'd shown on the field in the past had been my personal ability. No wonder I was feeling like my performance was limited and that I could lose my skills.

But I knew that couldn't be true because of what I've learned in Christian Science. I've learned that I'm the expression of God, which means I'm the expression of every good quality, like strength, agility, discernment, and grace. These qualities are sourced in God, so they're always present; we can't lose them, and they can't ever diminish.

For the first time I was able to see that the reason I'd been successful in the past was because of all that God is and how that was expressed through my playing. I could recognize the expression of Life and Soul as I energetically raced down the line before crossing the ball. I could recognize the presence of Spirit and Love as my teammates and I shouted a cheer before a match. I could see the expression of Mind and Principle as I watched developing plays with discernment and made dynamic runs toward the goal.

I realized that all the fear I'd been feeling was like radio static, which was preventing me from hearing the truth God was telling me about who I really am as His daughter. So before and during our next game, I made sure to tune out the static and keep my thoughts in tune with my Father-Mother. I felt so much more free!

The more I understood that my ability comes from God—and always has—the easier it was to let go of the belief that I'd somehow lost my skill. I stopped playing rigidly, and my composure and confidence returned. My "scoring drought" ended, and I went on to put the ball in the net more and more as the season progressed. I was also able to develop a feeling of camaraderie with my team and discovered that playing together with more of that childlike joy was far more energizing than carbs ever could be.

That year I ended up being the top goal-scorer for my high school team, but that wasn't the most important way my game changed. Now when I play, I'm way less focused on myself and much more focused on supporting my teammates, having fun, and glorifying God. I'm so grateful God helped me rediscover the joy of playing soccer. ●

Healed of depression

Stephanie Summerlin

MOST DAYS DURING MY sophomore and junior years of high school I didn't want to go to school, didn't feel like engaging with friends, and was uncommunicative with my family. It seemed as though all was dark, and I felt fearful about almost everything. I was struggling with depression.

My parents tried their best to help me. My mother talked with me about passages from the Bible and from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. I'd grown up reading both of these books, and they had healed me in the past. I was also attending Christian Science Sunday School and would feel comforted as I listened to the teacher and other students talk about God and many inspiring Bible stories.

And yet, as quickly as the comfort would come, it would disappear. It felt as though I could never quite outrun the fearful and downward-spiraling thoughts. I even contemplated suicide, thinking I would finally find peace.

Just before junior year, the mental and emotional struggle became more intense, and I found I couldn't sleep. My mom encouraged me to call a Christian Science practitioner for healing, but I was unresponsive, thinking a practitioner's prayers

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would be of no use. It seemed like no one—not my parents, my teachers, or my friends—knew how to help me.

It was then that a neighbor stepped in. This dear lady, who also happened to be a teacher in our Sunday School, very lovingly offered to talk with me whenever I needed support. I'm embarrassed to say that there were times when I woke her up in the middle of the night. Many evenings we would sit on her porch swing, and she would share powerful assurances of God's love for me.



BETH GRIFFIN — STAFF

Ever so slowly, I became aware that I wasn't just passively listening to these ideas anymore, but was asking more questions about God and thinking more deeply about what was real. I began to recognize that the times I found the most peace were when I was pondering the good and loving nature of God and what that meant for me.

I began to read and study the Bible and *Science and Health* regularly on my own. And little by little, I found that rather than needing my parents or neighbor in the middle of the night, I could rely on these two books to lift me out of whatever darkness I was facing. One night, as I was reading the Bible, the thought came that I wanted to devote my life to serving God and to eventually become a practitioner. It was like I'd finally begun to see the big picture of the mental struggles I'd been working through as a quest to understand God.

I realized I'd been burdened by a feeling that I had to figure everything out on my own. But when I read Christ Jesus' words "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30), I realized that I really couldn't do anything on my own, but could rely on God. From that moment forward, I felt a deep desire to acknowledge God and to turn to Him for guidance. And baby step by baby step, I did this.

Though I still sometimes struggled, I was beginning to understand that I could reject the dark thoughts—one thought at a time—and replace them with pure thoughts from God. This passage from *Science and Health* explains what I was learning to do: "Stand porter at the door of thought. Admitting only such conclusions as you wish realized in bodily results, you will control yourself harmoniously" (p. 392). I was talking back to—and rejecting—the evil thoughts that

for so long had kept me down, and finding courage, confidence, and conviction as I allowed in only what God, good, was telling me.

At school, I was invited to be part of the yearbook staff, and instead of turning it down, I accepted. This activity led to even more activities and greater feelings of confidence and lightness of heart. By the end of my junior year, the emotional

struggles and darkness had disappeared completely, and the following year I was elected senior class president. Through several months, I had been focused on keeping my thoughts filled with the light of God, and I believe this is what my classmates saw in me, and what propelled my progress.

For this permanent healing and so many others, I am deeply grateful. ●

I felt the fear wash away

Ellison Colarossi

IT WAS A HIGH-WATER year. That's a rafting term that describes the state of the river we were about to tackle. Not only was the water level high, but the river was racing extremely fast. The whole scene felt very intimidating, given that I was about to co-guide on the rapids that had flipped my kayak the year before.

During that incident, I'd had a scary experience. Not only had my kayak flipped, but I'd banged my wrist against a rock, which left me with a bad bruise. The Christian Science practitioner at the camp I was attending prayed with me for several days, and though the pain and bruise went away and I was grateful for that, the fear lingered through the rest of my time at camp.

And now here I was again. As we approached the starting point, I had a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach, and fear-filled thoughts flooded my

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mind. I tried to push them away as we unloaded the boats, but to no avail.

After the boats were prepped to enter the water, I realized that I needed to ask for help; I couldn't be an effective guide with waves of fear crashing over me. So I approached my co-guide for

insight. He took me off to the side and began praying the twenty-third Psalm aloud. I've heard this psalm hundreds of times during my life, but this time was different, because one line really stood out to me: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou [God] art with me” (verse 4).

I had been feeling alone, and like the only way I could get through this experience was through my own human will. But now I could see that what my co-guide and I were talking and praying about was true: If the river was like the valley in the psalm, then we could count on feeling safe, because God is our ultimate “guide.” I felt the waves of insecurity and fear wash away immediately. It was as though everyone there—campers, fellow staff, and I—had been wrapped in the most perfect comfort and protection.

We walked back over to the campers and began explaining the fun new rapids they would experience that day. I was able to speak with complete confidence about the river, and I even ended up being able to guide four of the five main rapids. The fear was gone, and everyone was safe.

I'm extremely grateful for what I learned about trusting God during this experience. And I've been able to take this trust and freedom with me into the high-level training and guiding I've been doing this summer. ●

A quick healing after a mountain biking accident

Caleb Shillinger

MY FAMILY AND I were in Jackson, Wyoming, for a midsummer vacation. One day, we went up to a resort to do some mountain biking. My brother and I quickly hopped the chairlift to the top of the mountain so we could drop in for our first run of the day.

After getting off at the top and deciding which trail to take, we were on our way down. I felt comfortable and fearless on the bike and was full of joy. The trail was fast, and we soon neared the bottom section, where it opened up into a series of jumps.

It's smart to check out jumps at a slower speed before trying to clear them, but I was feeling confident enough that I hit them going very fast. I cleared the first two, but on the third, my back wheel came up too short on the landing, and within a split second, I had flown over the handlebars and landed hard on my side.

I'd ended up at the bottom of the landing area, and my bike was in the bushes. I took my full-face helmet off and crawled to the side of the trail to rest. Nothing immediately hurt, so after a short break I tried to stand up—then winced. My left hip,

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which had taken most of the impact, was throbbing. I limped to my bike and rode slowly down the fire road the rest of the way. I couldn't even stand up on the pedals, which is the most effective way to travel downhill.

As I rolled in to the bottom of the trail at the front of the lodge where my brother was waiting, I felt bombarded by fears and worries. What if something was out of place? Would I be able to go up for another run? Would the rest of this trip be ruined? And what about my service trip to Canada a week later?

I was raised by two parents who actively practice Christian Science, and I've also always relied on prayer for healing, no matter what I've faced. That's why, in spite of these worries, it was my natural instinct to hop back on the chairlift and to use the ride to the top to pray about what had just happened.

On my way up, I took time to notice the beauty of my surroundings. Everything was so peaceful. This helped me feel close to God, and then I was able to begin praying about the fear I was feeling. I thought of a passage from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy that says, "There is no pain in Truth, and no truth in pain; ..." (p. 113). Truth is God, and I knew that since there's no pain or fear in God, there can't be any pain or fear anywhere in God's creation. God is everywhere, which leaves no room for anything bad. I realized I wasn't trying to get rid of something negative like pain or fear, but was knowing more fully that God really is All. At the top of the chairlift, I got back on my bike and started for the same trail.

As I was flying down the mountain, I kept affirming that I am spiritual. Because I am spiritual, I am safe. I knew that God's protection of me is infinite and uninterrupted. Filling my thoughts with the truth about God left no place for anything else—including fear. This time, when I hit the section with the jumps, I cleared all of them with confidence.

That evening, after a full day on the mountain, I felt so grateful for the way I'd seen more clearly that God really had been with me at every moment. And the rest of the trip was great, too—and I was able to enjoy it without any pain or any sign of an injury.

This experience was a helpful lesson in how to pray effectively—on a trail in the mountains, or wherever I go. ●

Who cares if I'm spiritual?

Jenny Sawyer

LIKE MANY OF THE questions I get as the teen editor, this one really got me thinking. We do talk a lot about being spiritual in Christian Science. So it's a fair thing to ask: Why is the fact that we're spiritual so important? What does it have to do with your daily life, dealing with school, sports, boyfriends and girlfriends, and parents?

And perhaps a question that goes along with that is: What are we even saying when we're saying "I'm spiritual"? What does that even mean?

Let's tackle that second question first. When Christian Scientists say "I'm spiritual," they don't just mean that they have an interest in spirituality, like someone who says, "I'm a spiritual person." In Christian Science, being spiritual refers to everyone's real identity. It's not something we *choose* to be, like adopting a certain political affiliation; it's *what we are*. There isn't one single individual you'll ever meet who isn't actually a spiritual being, because whether we know it or not, whether we believe it or not, we are each the expression of God, who is Spirit. And Spirit's expression must be like Spirit—spiritual.

Now I understand why that concept might not feel very concrete. Being spiritual doesn't seem to be as easy to grasp as, say, having brown hair or being a certain height. But here's something to think about. There are plenty of things about you that

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are "intangible" qualities that you do easily identify with. For example, maybe you're someone who's always happy. Maybe you're the one who's always caring and who knows how to help your friends. You might identify as brave, confident, or strong. The qualities that make you what you are—qualities that express God, good—these are your very real, very tangible spiritual identity, which is sourced in God.



Which brings us to the first part of why it matters that we're spiritual and that we identify this way on a regular basis. Knowing that we're spiritual is like armor. Here's why. Going back to the quality of strength, for example: If you know you're strong, and you identify as strong, then if someone called you wimpy, you wouldn't buy it. You wouldn't even give any thought to whether or not you were *actually* strong. You'd dismiss the suggestion of wimpiness with total authority, based on the understanding of what you really are.

Knowing that we're spiritual gives us real authority, a much bigger sense of authority. To know that we're spiritual means we're immune from every single belief of mortality—all the so-called laws that say certain circumstances inevitably make us sick or sad and the overarching belief that our lives must be full of ups and downs, good and bad, health and illness, order and chaos.

Think about what that means—how much freedom, health, and happiness are actually ours if we would just recognize that, yes, our identity really is spiritual, and, yes, that matters in a huge way. In my own life, I can see how every physical healing I've ever had has come down to some aspect of the realization that I'm not a sick, helpless mortal. I'm God's spiritual expression. Whole and safe, because that's the way God created me—and that can't change.

In fact, being spiritual relates to everything we deal with, anything we face. It's our defense against every suggestion of inadequacy, purposelessness, anxiety, or hopelessness. It comes to our rescue even in the small moments. Like recently, when I felt angry about a thoughtless, insulting comment someone made in an email. Right in the moment when I could feel a reaction welling up in me, the most simple thought stopped me: that since I'm spiritual, anger isn't part of what I am. It was like extinguishing a candle. As I accepted that one basic but powerful spiritual fact, the flame of reaction went out, and my thought about the person changed. It even occurred to me that he is spiritual, too. And as a result, I was able to respond in a way that was genuinely kind and constructive.

So who cares if you're spiritual? You do. It's what's real, powerful, and significant about you. It's why you can overcome whatever obstacles you encounter—in school, sports, relationships, or anything else that matters.

And here's the best part. Far from just being a "quick fix" when you're faced with a problem, knowing that you're spiritual actually opens up a



whole new world. It helps you see beyond limitations, rise above fears, and makes your relation to God so much more real. For me, understanding my spiritual identity has been one of the greatest adventures of my life. If you care to embrace it, it can be in yours, too. ●



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