

The surprising vitality of one small word

In a 1395 translation of the Bible, God tells the prophet Ezekiel: “I shall bind that that was broken, and I shall make sad that that was sick” (Ezek. 34:16). Around the same time, Chaucer describes a beautiful woman as “debonair, good, glad and sad.” *Sad*, these lines show, didn’t mean what it does now.

In one of its earliest senses, *sad* signifies “steadfast, firm” and “strong” or “valiant,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary. “I shall make sad” thus means in modern English “I will make strong,” giving us a more familiar translation of this line: “I will strengthen the weak” (New Revised Standard Version).

Sad was also used to describe a “dignified, grave, serious” appearance. Chaucer’s lady is “glad” – cheerful and affable, but his poem “The Book of the Duchess” also depicts her as a moral exemplar with a stately – *sad* – mien. *Sad* sometimes also meant “solid.” “Sad stone walls” were

thick and strong in the Middle Ages, not miserable or weepy.

But the heaviness of *sad* could be emotional as well as physical. Since the 14th century, the word has also carried the sense of “sorrowful” or “mournful.”

I’ve been thinking about *sad* because of a reader’s question about the use of the word in “Christ My Refuge,” a poem by Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of The Christian Science Monitor.

*O’er waiting harpstrings of the
mind
There sweeps a strain,
Low, sad, and sweet, whose
measures bind
The power of pain.*

Here, Mrs. Eddy is describing divine music with the power to control pain. It doesn’t seem *sad* in the sense of expressing or causing sorrow, since it inspires rapturous thoughts in the next stanza. In-

stead, her use of *sad* seems to hark back to its earlier meanings. The music is very likely dignified and serious, as befits a divine melody, and powerful as well – able to “bind” pain and lift the human spirit.

Sad here also reflects aspects of a related word that became popular in the Renaissance: *melancholy*. Melancholy is a poetic kind of sorrow, tinged with aesthetic pleasure, and often referred to as “sweet” or “delightful.” In Jane Austen’s “Northanger Abbey,” for example, a character speaks of “the delightful melancholy” that a grove of fir trees inspired. Eddy’s “low, sad, and sweet” strain might very well be melancholy, too.

I love poetry, how just one word can spark different interpretations. One thing is clear, though; the poem’s *sad* has nothing to do with the meaning the word is currently developing on social media. Here, it is an insult, connoting “pitiful” or “pathetic,” largely because of President Trump’s use of the word in his tweets. It’s a *sad* turn for such an interesting word. ■

**in a
word**
By Melissa Mohr

The power of prayer to heal

Years ago, as I was listening to an inspirational talk, I marveled at an account the speaker shared of his complete recovery from a serious accident through relying entirely on prayer. The seemingly miraculous account reminded me of Christ Jesus’ healings in the Bible, which I had learned about as a child in Protestant Sunday School but frankly had not thought about since.

I wanted to know more about how this healing was possible. The speaker was a Christian Scientist, so I began attending the Wednesday testimony meetings at the local Christian Science Society. Here I heard the members joyously share how they had been healed of a range of difficulties by relying solely on the spiritual laws of God.

Inspired by this, I began to study Christian Science. Gradually I learned that spiritual healing is the natural outcome of understanding that God, Spirit, is the source of our existence and that each of us, as God’s child, reflects and expresses the infinite goodness that constitutes God’s being.

One analogy that helped me understand this radical line of spiritual reasoning is that of the inseparability of the sun from its rays. I saw that just as the sun pours forth light as rays, God expresses His attributes – beauty, harmony, holiness, etc. – in His offspring, man (a term that includes woman, too).

This statement in “Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures,” by Monitor founder Mary Baker Eddy, further clarified this idea: “As a drop of water is one with the ocean, a ray of light one with the sun, even so God and man, Father and son, are one in being” (p. 361). I loved this so much that I put it to music and sang it as a prayer throughout my day.

The more I acknowledged the spiritual fact of my oneness with God, the more harmony I experienced in my daily affairs. For instance, up to this point I’d had extreme breathing difficulties because of an allergy. Medical tests had identified pollen from the geranium flower as the cause. I wasn’t specifically seeking healing for this difficulty, nor had I even entirely grasped that healing of this particular condition could truly be possible. But my yearning to know

more fully the presence and power of God, good, resulted in experiencing more of that goodness in my daily life, and over time my breathing became normal.

In fact, I actually forgot about the problem until some time later, after I’d moved to Canada and met and married a dear man who loved growing geraniums. He wintered them and then nurtured them into bloom the following summer. One summer,

my mother came for a visit, and with great surprise she asked me, “What are you doing with geraniums in the house?” I burst into laughter, realizing what a complete healing I had experienced.

Reflecting on all this, I now know that my prayer to feel God’s goodness governing my life was answered as I accepted that my true identity was, and is, the God-derived expression of God’s spiritual qualities rather than just a mortal, material being. Humble prayer opens the door for our thought to become more spiritual – that is, to express our oneness with God – and in the process our human experience improves, including our health!

– Joan Bernard Bradley

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE
PERSPECTIVE



Story map

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