

# Workbook Lesson Support Notes

by Allen Watson

Lesson 276 • October 3

**“The Word of God is given me to speak.”**

## Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

**Practice suggestion:** The following is a visualization inspired by this lesson.

Imagine that you have traveled to the Middle East, far out into the desert.

You have come all this way to visit an ancient temple, which contains a holy relic.

See yourself standing before it. Perhaps it is one of those temples carved from the rock of a cliff.

You walk through the entrance and into a massive room, with lofty ceilings and shafts of sunlight shining through high apertures.

You walk down the central aisle and reach a flight of stairs on the other side of this room.

As you walk up the stairs you are filled with anticipation for what you are about to see, the artifact you have journeyed all this way to look upon.

At the top of the stairs is a corridor. You walk down this and reach a heavy, ancient curtain, on the other side of which is the inner sanctum of this temple, the holy of holies.

You pause, thinking about what lies on the other side of the curtain, in this room.

For in this room is the very stone tablet on which God wrote His Word in the time of Moses.

What artifact could be holier?

You walk through the curtain and there, in the middle of a room filled with candles, is the stone tablet.

Hardly breathing, you walk up to it and read the words carved into it so long ago by the Hand of God. It says, “My Son, known as...” and here, to your astonishment, you see your own name, “is pure and holy as Myself.”

Your eyes are rooted. You can scarce believe what you read. What can it mean that this was God’s Word to humanity, that this was God’s message for the ages?

While you are looking at the tablet and seeing its words—“My Son, known as [name], is pure and holy as Myself”—try to take it in. Try to let the magnitude of this truth sink all the way in. Let it wash over you like a wave of realization.

Now look around and see that the perimeter of the room is lined with other stone tablets.

As you walk over to these you see that they have the same line carved on them, only with a different name on each one. Each one has the name of someone you know.

Spend a minute or two now, going around the room, looking at each tablet and seeing there the name of a different person in your life: “My Son, known as [name], is pure and holy as Myself.”

After you have spent time looking at each tablet, and have had one last sacred look at the one in the middle with your name on it, you are ready to leave the room.

Being here and seeing what you’ve seen has been a holy experience, one that will leave you forever

changed.

You realize now, as you stand before the curtain, ready to exit, that your life has changed. Your job now is to bring this message to the world, not just by talking about the truth you've discovered, but mainly by conveying this stupendous truth with the way you behave towards people.

Say, "*The Word of God is given me to speak, with my lips, my hands, my eyes, my deeds, my life, my love.*"

## Commentary

The phrase "the Word of God" in *A Course in Miracles* is defined here as "My Son is pure and holy as Myself" (1:2). In another place it is said to be "I am as God created me" (W-pI.110.11:4-6). We were created by this Word; as in the Bible, He spoke, and it was so. "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gn 1:3). Even so, God spoke, "My Son is pure and holy as Myself," and the Son, pure and holy as God, came into being. God's Thought of us was His creative act of Fatherhood; it stands unaltered and unalterable. I cannot make my Self other than God created me.

Let us accept His Fatherhood, and all is given us. (1:5)

Hearing His Word is accepting His Fatherhood, accepting that we were created in His Love and can be no other than what He created us to be. It is to accept the Atonement (see M-22.1:6), the unassailable fact that I—that is, my true Self and not my ego image of myself—am as pure and as holy as God Himself.

*And it is this that I would speak to all my brothers, who are given me to cherish as my own.*  
(2:2)

What I want to communicate to my brothers and sisters is that they all share this innocence with me. My grievances, my judgments, or my criticisms communicate guilt. My forgiveness communicates their innocence. Father, show me how to communicate the Atonement today; show me how, in word and deed, to speak the Word of God: "You are as pure and holy as God."

This clearly relates to the lead-in page on the Christ:

Christ is God's Son as He created him. He is the Self we share. (W-pII.6.1:1-2)

This is the only part of you that has reality in truth. The rest is dreams. (W-pII.6.3:2-3)

## What Is the Christ?

### Part 6: W-pII.6.3:4

The rest is dreams. Yet will these dreams be given unto Christ, to fade before His glory and reveal your holy Self, the Christ, to you at last. (3:3-4)

I may think, "Okay. Christ is the only real part of me. All the rest, the stuff I think is really me most of the time, is just dreams. But these dreams seem very, very real to me. What the heck do I do about all these dreams?" The answer is in three words: the dreams are "given unto Christ." The Course often asks us to do this in varying forms; it speaks of bringing our darkness to the light, of bringing our fantasies to reality, our illusions to the truth. We, in our confusion, cannot see the truth about ourselves or others, because we are blinded by our illusions. The Holy Spirit was created for us to see the truth on our behalf until we can see it for ourselves (see T-17.II.1:6-8). He represents Christ for us, in us. We bring our dreams to Him, and He translates them into truth (4:1).

In practical terms this means that when I become aware that I am seeing from the ego's standpoint of

separation and attack, I need to become quiet, and gently expose these beliefs to the Holy Spirit within my mind. I need to tell Him, “This is how I am seeing things. Show me how You see them. I am willing to see them differently.”

Our natural (read “egoic”) response when we discover dark thoughts in our minds, thoughts like anger, jealousy, self-pity, and despair, is to hide them, unless we are so blind as to totally identify with them and justify them. Embarrassed at our misthoughts, we attempt to sweep them under the rug and pretend they are not there. This does not dispel them, it merely causes them to go underground. For instance, in speaking of the ego’s hatred, the Course teaches that we seek special love relationships to offset our hatred. It says:

You cannot limit hate. The special love relationship will not offset it, but will merely drive it underground and out of sight. It is essential to bring it [the hate] into sight, and to make no attempt to hide it. (T-16.IV.1:5–7)

Hiding our unpleasant thoughts is denial. It leads straight to projection—we see our hidden thoughts played out by others. We think we gain ego points by condemning the other people. When we are upset by the mistakes of others, this is what is happening (see T-17.I.6:5).

When, instead, we make no attempt to hide our own ego, but willingly bring it to the light within us to be dispelled, it *is* dispelled. We don’t have to understand how this happens, because we do not do it; the Holy Spirit does (see T-17.I.6:3–4). All we need be concerned about is being willing to have it happen. When the illusions which are hiding the truth are dispelled, our holy Self, the Christ, is revealed to us at last (3:4).

## Lesson 277 • October 4

“Let me not bind Your Son with laws I made.”

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

### Commentary

When the Course uses the term “Son” in this context, with me addressing God concerning His Son, the term usually refers to the whole Sonship, which includes all of my sisters and brothers as well as myself. “Your Son,” in other words, can be anybody on whom my mind focuses. So when I pray, “Let me not bind Your Son,” I am referring to my boss, my spouse, my friends, my family, or whomever I might encounter today. It’s a good prayer to repeat often as we interact with people today.

In our local study group the other night, one woman shared an insight she had. She said that she had realized that whenever she placed a limit on anyone else within her mind, if that person already was accepting such a limit within their own mind, she was reinforcing it. And as well, she was placing the same limit on herself. We can see this dynamic very strikingly in a situation involving parents or teachers and young children. It manifests quite vividly. The child will often manifest the limits that the adult “sees” in them, whether those limits are real or not. The fact that we do not see it so plainly with adults, however, does not mean that it is not happening all the time. When we limit someone in our minds, we can be literally binding them with laws that we made up.

“Your Son is free, my Father” (1:1). And each person we encounter today is that Son, equally free. We have all read stories of how the refusal of a parent, partner, or friend to accept the “normal” limits on someone else has enabled them to transcend those limits—stories of “impossible” healings, and so on. These are but elementary demonstrations of the power of today’s idea. The limits the Course has in mind are not so much physical ones, or even intellectual ones, but limits such as guilt and sin. When we believe a person is beyond help or beyond hope, we bind them with laws we have made. We imagine an order of difficulty in miracles and impose it on those around us. “There is no order of difficulty in miracles” (T1.I.1:1) is the first principle of miracles.

*He [whoever he or she may be] is not changed by what is changeable. (1:4)*

He is still the perfect Son of God, as God created him. He has not been marred or scarred by anything in this world because everything in this world is changeable. The Son of God has not been changed by anything that has happened to his body, which is changeable. A feather cannot scratch a diamond, not even a pile of feathers, not even an ostrich plume. We are being asked to remember this about all our brothers; they have not been changed by what appears to be their sins or mistakes. Nor are they slaves “to any laws of time” (1:5); this covers our persistent belief that a healing may take a very long time, for instance. They are subject only to one law: the law of love (1:6).

Our brothers are not bound by anything except their own beliefs (2:2). And what they really are is “far beyond [their] faith in slavery or freedom” (2:3). Their bound appearance is a flimsy thing, barely covering the solid reality of holiness and love that lies beneath it. They cannot be bound “unless God’s

truth can lie, and God can will that He deceive Himself” (2:5). What kind of God would that be?

What if, today, I looked upon everyone around me from this frame of reference? What miracles might happen? What chains might fall away? What blind person might see again? What long-standing wound of the heart might be healed? Exactly that is our function here as workers of miracles.

## What Is the Christ?

### **Part 7: W-pII.6.4:1**

From within our innermost being, from the Christ in us, the Holy Spirit reaches forth “to all your dreams, and bids them come to Him, to be translated into truth” (4:1). Let me not, therefore, hide any of my dreams from Him today. Let me not let a sense of shame keep me from bringing them to Him. He will not condemn me. He is not shocked by anything He sees in us; He is unshockable. On the contrary, “He loves what He sees within you” (T-13.V.9:6), for He sees past the illusion of sin to the reality of love it has been hiding.

In every thought of attack He sees our call for love. In every shudder of fear He hears a call for help. In all our lust for the things of this world He beholds our longing for completion. Whatever we bring to Him, He translates into truth. Nothing is beyond redemption, nothing is outside the reach of the Atonement. The task of the Holy Spirit is to “reinterpret [us] on behalf of God” (T-5.III.7:7). All that we bring to Him, he will translate into truth. But only if we bring it. If we hide it He cannot help us.

Bring, therefore, all your dark and secret thoughts to Him, and look upon them with Him.  
(T-14.VII.6:8)

Open every door to Him, and bid Him enter the darkness and lighten it away.  
(T-14.VII.6:2; the whole paragraph should be read)

## Lesson 278 • October 5

“If I am bound, my Father is not free.”

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

### Commentary

The Course often sets forth a set of what, for us, seem to be rather confusing interrelationships. It says that how I treat my brother is a reflection of how I treat myself. It says how I treat myself is a reflection of how I treat God. It says how I treat my brother is a reflection of how I treat God. For all three you could substitute the phrase “how I see” for “how I treat.”

This set of connections seems confusing to us only because we persist in conceiving of our Self, our brother, and God as separate beings. We are not separate. It is not simply that how I see myself *reflects* how I see God; it *is* how I see God, because I am part of God, an extension of Him, an extrusion of His nature. God is all that is. There is no other.

Therefore:

If I accept that I am prisoner within a body, in a world in which all things that seem to live appear to die, then is my Father prisoner with me. And this do I believe. (1:1–2)

The Course is constantly telling me that I believe things I don’t think I believe. It says I believe I have crucified God’s Son (T-13.II.5:1). And here it tells me that I believe God is a prisoner.

I certainly don’t go around *saying* that God is a prisoner. The idea that God is a prisoner seems shocking to me; my mental concept of God is that He is omnipotent. How can I believe something without being aware I believe it? Actually it is quite easy; I do it all the time. And sometimes I’ve even caught myself doing it.

For instance, sometimes I have noticed that when another person approaches me in a very open and loving way, my first reaction is not welcome but suspicion. I think that behind the appearance of love there is probably some ulterior motive, something that I need to be on guard against. “What does this person want from me?” might be my thought. Or perhaps I suspect them of trying to manipulate me in some way. What that kind of response is indicating is that I believe love itself is suspect. I don’t trust love. I don’t trust my own, I don’t trust the love of others, and above all, I don’t trust God’s Love.

Another way I see that same suspicion of love in myself is when I feel loving feelings for another person. I *suspect my own motives*, particularly if the person is an attractive female. Again, there is the underlying belief, a belief I have not consciously admitted to myself, that *love cannot be trusted*.

What this lesson is saying is that when I accept *myself* as a prisoner, I am betraying a hidden belief that *God* is a prisoner, too. This is so because the facts of reality are that God and I are one, part of the same Being, or rather, I am part of His Being. Since reality is one, what I believe about any part I am believing about the whole, whether or not I realize it.

If I am bound in any way, I do not know my Father nor my Self. And I am lost to all reality.  
(1:3–4)

We could easily use this line to condemn ourselves and get into a guilt trip. There isn't one of us who doesn't see himself or herself as bound in some way. We *all* feel we are limited by the laws of the world—laws of nutrition, laws of finance, laws of health, laws of marriage. We *all* believe that we will die. We all believe that certain of our weaknesses are real and can't be overcome; if we did not believe that we would have already overcome them! We all believe that we are limited by time and space; for instance, that if a friend moves a thousand miles away we can no longer relate to them as closely as we have before. So am I then "lost to reality"? Is my situation hopeless?

No, it isn't hopeless. All we need to do is recognize these beliefs in ourselves and admit that we *do* hold them. We need to see that every belief in our own limits is a belief that God is limited; every belief that I am imprisoned or trapped in some way is a belief that God is imprisoned and trapped. Notice what we are doing. Acknowledge we are doing it. And simply tell God, for instance, "I'm seeing You as limited and blocked, and You are not limited and blocked. Help me to see that." And that is all.

*Father, I ask for nothing but the truth. I have had many foolish thoughts about myself and my creation, and have brought a dream of fear into my mind. Today, I would not dream. I choose the way to You instead of madness and instead of fear. For truth is safe, and only love is sure. (2:1-5)*

That is all. Acknowledge that you have had "foolish thoughts" (not "sinful thoughts"), and ask for the truth. That's all.

## What Is the Christ?

### Part 8: W-pII.6.4:2-3

What does the Holy Spirit do with our dreams of sin and guilt when we bring them to Him, and He translates them into truth? "He will exchange them for the final dream which God appointed as the end of dreams" (4:2). This is speaking of what the Course calls "the happy dream," otherwise known as "the real world" or "true perception." He takes our nightmares from us and translates them into the happy dream. In the happy dream, we are still dreaming; we are still here in the world, still operating in the realm of perception. But what we see is something completely different from the nightmares of a mind made mad with guilt. "The real world is attained simply by complete forgiveness of the old, the world you see without forgiveness" (T-17.II.5:1).

This happy dream is appointed by God to be "the end of dreams." "Forgiveness is illusion that is answer to the rest" (W-pI.198.2:10). The world ends, the Course says, through the illusion of forgiveness: "The illusion of forgiveness, complete, excluding no one, limitless in gentleness, will cover it, hiding all evil, concealing all sin and ending guilt forever" (M-14.1:4). Our dark, guilty thoughts, brought to the Holy Spirit, are met and dispelled with forgiveness, and replaced with the vision of a world of total innocence.

The "illusion of forgiveness" will end all dreams because it will end separation:

For when forgiveness rests upon the world and peace has come to every Son of God, what could there be to keep things separate, for what remains to see except Christ's face?  
(4:3)

The "face of Christ" does not mean (of course) that we will see a bearded Semitic man everywhere we look; the phrase is a symbol of the innocence of God's Son. If forgiveness rests upon the entire world, and every mind has come to peace, free from guilt, what is there to see except innocence? The Course has said that the world is a symbol of guilt. When guilt is gone, its symbol will also vanish. The dream, made by guilt, will end when its cause has disappeared.

Clearly this is speaking of a final end, “when peace has come to *every* Son of God.” It is the goal toward which the Holy Spirit is leading us, the final consummation, when guilt has been removed from every mind. Each of us plays our part in this, for as long as there is guilt within *my* mind, the end of guilt has not occurred. The whole cannot be complete without all its parts. Being the Christ is not something we have to attain; we already are the Christ. But we do need to learn to remove all the blocks of guilt that are hiding our true Self from us.

The state of guiltlessness is only the condition in which what is not there has been removed from the disordered mind that thought it was. This state, and only this, must you attain, with God beside you.(T-14.IV.2:2-3)

Once we have removed “what is not there,” and have attained the state of guiltlessness, what we are—the Christ—will be revealed.

## Lesson 279 • October 6

### “Creation’s freedom promises my own.”

#### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

#### Commentary

Because creation is free, I am free. Because no one is bound, I am not bound. “Now is freedom his already” (1:4). It is here and now. Freedom is not future.

As I recognize the freedom that belongs to everyone, I find my own. In giving, I receive. In loving, I am loved. In healing, I am healed. In recognizing the existence of absolute perfection I experience my participation in that perfection, and I am most aware of it when I am recognizing Christ in my brothers.

Yesterday’s lesson was the inverse of this: “If I am bound, my Father is not free.” When we accept the apparent prison we are in we are saying God is imprisoned. If I see no way out, then God must be stymied too. Here again it becomes plain that:

As I see my brother, so I see myself.  
As I see myself, so I see God.

The simplicity of this lesson is staggering. Everything keeps coming back to this.

Why do some people fear God? Why does the concept, the very word, scare them away? It is because they see God in their own image; we always do. If I see myself as threatening, I see God that way. If I see myself as weak and ineffective, I see God that way. I am running from my own idols, not from the truth.

Only in dreams is there a time when he appears to be in prison, and awaits a future freedom, if it be at all. (1:2)

We can understand how we can be perfectly free, safe at home in bed, and in our sleep, dream of imprisonment. That exactly describes our experience in this world. We are already free, but dreaming we are imprisoned. Salvation, to the Course, is simply becoming aware that we are dreaming, and that the freedom we think we lack is already ours. We become aware of it through recognizing it in others.

What are we seemingly imprisoned by? Of what do our chains consist? Are they not chains of guilt? “The Holy Spirit knows that all salvation is escape from guilt” (T-14.III.13:4). To see my brother as free is to see him without guilt; in other words, forgiveness. That is how escape from guilt happens: when I realize that creation itself is free from guilt, that everyone is guiltless, I recognize that I must be included. It works this way because what I perceive as the world is a projection of my own self-judgment: “The world you see is but a judgment on yourself” (T-20.III.5:2). In lifting judgment and guilt from the world I am lifting it from myself because what I see is only a reflection of how I see myself.

Creation’s freedom promises my own.

## What Is the Christ?

### Part 9: W-pII.6.5:1-2

When we see “this holy face” (5:1), the face of Christ, in everyone and everywhere, we are seeing all creation as completely innocent, free from guilt. This “true perception” will not last long, according to the Course, because it is merely “the symbol that the time for learning now is over, and the goal of the Atonement has been reached at last” (5:1). The face of Christ symbolizes the end of the time for learning because what we are learning is that we are without guilt, and that God’s creation, His Son, is without guilt. So when we see only the face of Christ, learning has achieved its objective. It’s graduation time!

If we believe we have a purpose in this world at all, we tend to think of it as some great thing within time. We think, as a Southern Baptist friend of mine used to say, that we are here to “do great wonders and eat cucumbers.” (I never did figure out exactly what he meant by the last part, but it makes the silliness of our other goals apparent.) But our only function here, the Course tells us, is to learn forgiveness. We are not here to fix the world but to forgive it. We are not here to become a great, world-renowned healer. We are not here to establish a great spiritual teaching center. Our goal and our function is not defined in terms of this world at all. “Your only calling here is to devote yourself, with active willingness, to the denial of guilt in all its forms” (T-14.V.3:5). That is the sole objective of our learning. In the symbolism given here, it is to see the face of Christ.

So therefore let us seek to find Christ’s face and look on nothing else. (5:2)

In all our seeking, seek only this. If I am starting a new job, what is my purpose? To seek Christ’s face, to deny guilt in all its forms. If I am entering a new relationship, what is my purpose? To seek Christ’s face; to escape from guilt by seeing no guilt in my brother. If I am beginning some new project under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what is it for? To seek Christ’s face, to remove guilt from every mind I encounter. This is my sole purpose in *anything* that I do. And only in accepting this as “the one function that I would fulfill” (T-20.IV.8:4) will I find my happiness.

## Lesson 280 • October 7

### “What limits can I lay upon God’s Son?”

#### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

**Practice suggestion:** Think of someone in your life, and apply these lines to that person:

*Being a Thought of God, [name] has not left his Father’s Mind.*

*Being a Thought of God, [name] is not limited at all.*

*Being a Thought of God, [name] is forever pure.*

*Being God’s Son, what limits can I lay upon him?*

#### Commentary

The Course is calling on me to not deny to anyone—my brothers or myself—the limitless freedom in which God created us. I find in myself what seems like a natural tendency to compare myself to others, and to find myself, in some way, superior to them. I am more intelligent. My opinions are more correct. Or my relationships are superior. Or I am more ethical, more compassionate, more understanding, more honest with myself. I have greater integrity. All of these are ways in which I have, at times, felt superior to others. Others have other standards of comparison. But in general, I think, we all have this tendency to feel somehow superior to most of the rest of the human race.

This is what the Course calls specialness. It is a way of seeing others with limits that, we believe, do not exist for ourselves. The Course’s call to see our brothers as equally free as ourselves contradicts this pattern of thinking we have taught ourselves. The lesson says, “I can invent imprisonment for him [he whom God created free], but only in illusions, not in truth” (1:2). We are all equal Thoughts of God; none of us has left the Father’s Mind; none of us is limited at all—except in illusions.

As students of *A Course in Miracles* we are called to “give honor” (2:1) to the Son of God wherever we meet Him. We are called to recognize the Christ in every one who is sent to meet us. Let me recognize today that the limits I see are my own illusions; they are, in fact, my own belief in my own limits, dressed up, disguised, perhaps, in another form, and projected onto my brother. I find my own freedom by honoring it in others. Let me remind myself today, “This is the holy Son of God, my brother, a part of my Self.” Only in so doing will I find my Self, and recognize the Christ as God created Him.

At one point the Course makes a very strong statement. It says that if I really recognized who my brother or sister is, I could “scarce refrain from kneeling at his feet” (W-pl.161.9:3). Yet, it goes on to say that I will take his hand instead, because in the kind of sight that sees my brother or sister in this way, I am equally glorious. We are the Christ. Who we are is magnificent, so far beyond our normal conception of ourselves that on seeing it our inclination would be to worship, except that in that same instant we recognize that same magnificence in ourselves. May God grant us all such vision!

### What Is the Christ?

**Part 10: W-pII.6.5:3**

This sentence speaks of the vision of God's Son, the awareness of the "glory" of what we truly are. In seeking and seeing Christ's face in one another, we find that same glory in ourselves. In the recognition of our true nature as God's creation, all need of "learning or perception or of time" ceases. The removal of the veils of guilt, accomplished by forgiveness, reveals the Christ to us, and there is no longer need of anything "except the holy Self, the Christ Who God created as His Son."

We already are what we are looking for. Only our dreams of guilt have hidden it from our sight. What is the Christ? You are. I am. Learning to undo the blocks to this sight is our only purpose in time. When that has been accomplished, there is nothing left to do except to *be* what we always have been.

## Lesson 281 • October 8

**“I can be hurt by nothing but my thoughts.”**

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

**Practice suggestion:** Think of something that seems to be hurting you, and say:

*This outer thing cannot hurt me.*

*Only my thoughts about it hurt me.*

*Let me see it through God’s Thoughts, for they can only bring me happiness.*

### Commentary

If I am perfect I cannot be hurt; it would make me less than perfect. Our reasoning tells us our life would be perfect if it were free from pain, but we are not free from pain, and therefore we must not be perfect. The Course’s reason works in the opposite direction: we are perfect; pain would mean imperfection; therefore the pain must be some kind of illusion. “When I think that I am hurt in any way, it is because I have forgotten who I am, and that I am as You created me” (1:2). In other words, we only *think* we are hurt. If we remembered who we really are, we could not be hurt.

Another way of thinking about this is to say that my true Self cannot be hurt; only my illusory self can be hurt, and that, only by my own thoughts. Granted, we make some pretty darn good illusions! But that is all they are: illusions.

Pain comes when we put our own thoughts in place of the Thought of God (1:4). The cause is always in my thinking and nowhere else; nothing outside my mind can hurt me. When I feel attacked, it is always me attacking me. Not even the unloving thoughts of my brothers can hurt me if my mind is thinking God’s Thoughts with Him. Early in the Text we are told:

In reality you are perfectly unaffected by all expressions of lack of love. These can be from yourself and others, from yourself to others, or from others to you. Peace is an attribute *in* you. You cannot find it outside. (T-2.I.5:6–9)

What I am in truth is “far beyond all pain” (2:2). The Holy Spirit is our Teacher to help us remember that this is who we are. As Lesson 248 tells us:

Whatever suffers is not part of me. What grieves is not myself. What is in pain is but illusion in my mind. (W-pII.248.1:3–5)

Not only is pain an illusion; the illusion of pain is experienced by an illusion of myself. It is my thoughts, specifically my thoughts about myself, that cause this illusion. When I think I am what God created not, I experience pain.

Let the words “I will not hurt myself today” be much in my mind today, my Father.

## What Is the Holy Spirit?

### **Part 1: W-pII.7.1:1-2**

“The Holy Spirit mediates between illusions and the truth” (1:1). He bridges “the gap between reality and dreams” (1:2). Illusions and truth are mutually exclusive; reality and dreams can never meet. Our minds are caught in illusions, and in order to restore them to truth, something or Someone is needed who can act as a bridge, somehow connecting the unconnectable. This is the purpose served by the Holy Spirit. He bridges the gap because He is able to operate in both arenas; He touches on illusion without losing contact with the truth. He is the One Who “mediates,” bringing illusion back to truth.

Because He is what He is, “those who turn to Him for truth” (1:2) can be led to truth by means of the very perception which is part of their illusion. Without Him, perception would lead only to more perception, the illusion continually reinforcing itself. Because the Holy Spirit, Who is within us and part of our minds (as well as part of God’s), is linked eternally to truth, He can guide our perception in such a way as to undo our illusions and restore us to knowledge. This ability is “the grace that God has given Him” (1:2).

Our part in the equation, then, is simply to “turn to Him for truth.” We bring our perceptions to Him, and He translates them into true perception, which leads straight to knowledge. He plays a very clear and crucial role in the Course’s prescription for healing our minds. If He were not there, within us, there would be no bridge between reality and illusion. The more actively we cooperate with Him, consciously and willingly bringing our perceptions to Him, asking for the truth instead of our illusions, the more He can help us.

The word “turn” is an interesting one. It is a mental turning, a mental change of direction that can be almost physically felt when it occurs. Sometimes it feels as though we must literally tear our minds away from their focus on fear, and impel our thoughts towards the light like a flower turning to the sun. When I am distraught, I have found great power in simply closing my eyes and saying, “I turn to You.” Almost at once, if these words are heartfelt, there comes a great sense of peace, a great widening of the horizons of my mind. I sense the Presence of infinite Help and Wisdom, waiting to assist. I feel the nearness of the Great Mediator, filled with the grace God has given Him, ready to purify my perception and lead me towards the truth. May we learn, more and more often, to turn to Him for truth.

## Lesson 282 • October 9

**“I will not be afraid of love today.”**

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

**Practice suggestion:** Lesson 282 says, in essence, that our true Name is love, as is God’s. We have given ourselves the name of fear, but this is simply a mistake—we have not *become* fear. We are still love.

First, sign your name as you usually do, on the line below (or grab an extra piece of paper for this), and date it:

Signed, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Dated: \_\_\_\_\_)

Look at your signature, and try to get in touch with your sense of whose name that is. What concept of that person are you holding as you sign the signature? Is it not a separate person? A person with a particular history? And a special station or place in the world? With special attributes?

Isn’t this self trying to make its way through a perilous world? Isn’t that why you sign your name to things? To protect yourself from something? Or to procure some needed thing for this endangered self? If, for instance, you sign a legal document, are you not often afraid of what it may bring into your life, even while you are hoping it will protect you in other ways? In short, isn’t the identity signified by your name filled with fear? What else would a separate self trying to make its way through a perilous world be filled with?

Therefore, sign your name again, and this time sign it simply as “Fear.”

Signed, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Dated: \_\_\_\_\_)

Once you sign it, try to see this signature and the first one as the same. Look back and forth between the first and second signatures and try to let them blend into one. Try to realize that when you sign your name in everyday life, you *are* signing “Fear.” You are saying, “This self who is separate, vulnerable, and beset by the dangers of a perilous world.” Regardless of the specific words you write, the content of what you are writing is fear.

Now sign your name one more time. This time sign it as “Love.”

Signed, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Dated: \_\_\_\_\_)

As you sign it, try to really mean it. Don’t think of it as a given name like “Joy,” which doesn’t mean much. Think of it as a statement that you really are love. Love is your nature. You are not a being who *can* love, who can love at times and hate at other times, whose love is partial, selective, and intermittent. You *are* love. Love is your nature. You are a segment of Love Itself. In your true nature, you are incapable of any anger, any hatred, even any neutrality. Being love, all you can do is love.

Realize that this is not an aspiration of what you want to be. This is who you are now, beneath all appearances. You are love, a segment of God's Love, merely dreaming that you are a separate being filled with fear. You are love masquerading as something else.

Look at this final signature and try to identify with it. Think to yourself, "That's me. That's who I am." Does that make you see yourself differently? What feelings does it evoke?

## Commentary

Here is another of the dozens of statements which the Course says, if accepted without reservation, can constitute the entirety of salvation. "If I could realize but this today, salvation would be reached for all the world" (1:1). A few of the others that fall into this category are "I am as God created me" (W-pI.94.1), "Ideas leave not their source" (W-pI.167.3:6-11), "There is no world" (W-pI.132.6:2-3), "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists" (T-In.2:2-3), and "Forgive the world, and you will understand that everything that God created cannot have an end, and nothing He did not create is real" (M-20.5:7-10).

How often do I realize that I am afraid of love? We are afraid of love far more frequently than we realize. Ken Wapnick has used a variation of this thought as a suggested mental response whenever we notice our egos acting up: "I must be afraid of love again." There is a sense in which we could say that the ego *is* the fear of love. It is a mental stance that rejects Love as our Source, that rejects Love as our Self, and that refuses to recognize Love in everyone and everything around us. When we look at it in this way, it begins to be more understandable that if we could simply realize this one thing—not to be afraid of love—the salvation of the world would be accomplished.

Fear of love is insane on the face of it. Of all the things we might be reasonably afraid of, love is not one of them. A famous old-time Christian evangelist, Charles Grandison Finney (famous in the 1800s), once wrote that "Love is the eternal will to all goodness." To be afraid of that which eternally wills only our good is truly insane. So to accept today's idea is "the decision not to be insane" (1:2).

Fear of love is a fear of our own Self, which is Love. Therefore, to realize today's idea is "to accept myself as God Himself, my Father and my Source, created me" (1:2). We are indeed afraid to recognize ourselves as Love; it seems a very dangerous thing to do, to our egos.

Fear of love is to fall asleep and dream of death, because in rejecting love we are rejecting that which guards us, protects us, and brings us joy. In fearing love we are imagining ourselves to be something other than loving, or in other words, evil and sinful. In such a picture of ourselves we imagine we deserve death. To forget what we are and to believe we are something else, the mind *must* fall asleep. Therefore, to realize today's idea is a determination not to be asleep in dreams of death (1:3).

To will not to be afraid of love is a choice to recognize my Self because my Self is Love.

No matter what names we may have called ourselves in our madness, names cannot change what we are in truth (2:1-3). To choose not to fear love is to remember this. What we have done in calling ourselves unloving is not a sin:

The name of fear is simply a mistake. Let me not be afraid of truth today. (2:4-5)

## What Is the Holy Spirit?

### Part 2: W-pII.7.1:3-5

The Holy Spirit is the Mediator or bridge between illusion and truth, dreams and reality, perception and knowledge. He becomes the means by which we can carry all of our dreams to the truth "to be dispelled before the light of knowledge" (1:3). His purpose within our minds is to effect this transformation of our mistaken perception into true perception. Our only task is to bring Him everything

we do not want, so that He can dispel it. The Course refers to its curriculum as

an organized, well-structured and carefully planned program aimed at learning how to offer the Holy Spirit everything you do not want. He knows what to do with it. You do not understand how to use what He knows. Whatever is given Him that is not of God is gone. (T-12:II.10:1-4)

Across the bridge, in the light of knowledge, “sights and sounds” are “forever laid aside” (1:4). “Sights and sounds” represent the whole realm of perception. We bring our perceptions to the Holy Spirit to be “cleansed and purified, and finally removed forever” (T-18:IX.14:2). The Holy Spirit’s purpose is to perform this task; He is the Mediator between perception and knowledge (see W-pI.43.1:3):

Without this link with God, perception would have replaced knowledge forever in your mind. With this link with God, perception will become so changed and purified that it will lead to knowledge. (W-pI.43.1:4-5)

This transformation of perception is identical to forgiveness; it is forgiveness that “has made possible perception’s tranquil end” (1:5). “Forgiveness, salvation, Atonement, true perception, all are one” (C4.3:6). Perception as managed by the ego always sees sin, and manifests in judgment and attack. Perception as managed by the Holy Spirit always sees the face of Christ, and manifests in love and joining. The ego’s perception sees differences; the Holy Spirit’s perception sees sameness and identity.

This is the shift that true perception brings: What was projected out is seen within, and there forgiveness lets it disappear. (C-4.6:1)

The Holy Spirit is, therefore, central to the process of forgiveness. He is the means by which the transformation of perception from false to true is possible, and without Him, we would forever be lost in our dream of judgment. With Him, we can learn to forgive.

## Lesson 283 • October 10

### “My true Identity abides in You.”

#### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

#### Commentary

“Abides” means “lives or dwells,” but it also means “remains unchanged.” I think that is the sense it has in this lesson: “My true Identity remains unchanged in You.” (At least that is how I’m hearing it today.) “I made an image of myself” (1:1). I made a false picture of what I am, an idol, and I have imagined that this image is what I am: “it is this I call the Son of God” (1:1). This is the Course’s understanding of what has, traditionally, been called “the Fall.” In traditional Judeo-Christian understanding, man was created innocent and sinless, but he fell into sin, and thus corrupted his nature forever (“original sin”). In the Course’s understanding, all that really happened is that we *imagined* we had changed; we made a false picture of ourselves and thought, “This is me.” But what we really are never changed at all! Our true Identity remains unchanged, despite our making of idols. Creation is still, now, as it always was, because God’s creation cannot be changed (1:2).

There is a vast difference between having actually corrupted our nature and only *thinking* that we did. In the old view, we had a real problem, resolvable only by the supernatural intervention of God. Real sin had been done, and had to be met with real punishment. Sin against an infinite God required a payment equally infinite, and so God’s infinite Son had to die in our place, and then a “new nature” had to be created by God and somehow injected into humanity (being “born again”). Those who did not receive this new life were doomed to hell.

In the view presented by the Course, no real sin has been done, and the original perfection of God’s creation remains unchanged. All that is necessary is for us to recognize our mistaken self-identification and to change our minds about it. When we let go of the idols or false images (“Let me not worship idols” [1:3]), the nature of Christ within us is uncovered and revealed as untouched by our insanity.

I am still the one my Father loves; that has not changed (1:4). My holiness still “remains the light of Heaven and the Love of God” (1:5). How could what God created as the light of Heaven be destroyed and become darkness? (1:6–7). If God created everything that is, how could I possibly be something else? (1:8). There is nothing else for me to be.

Each time today I find myself judging something about myself, disliking myself, berating myself, or feeling guilty about what and who I am, let me remind myself that none of what I am seeing is my true Identity. My true Identity remains in God and part of Him. The seeming other identity is an idol; let me not worship it, bow down to it and attribute some great power to it or fear it. This is not who I am. Let me be still an instant and go home.

As I recognize this true Identity, I must realize that by the nature of what It is, It must be shared with all creation. Everything is part of me, and I of it, all coming from the same Source (2:1). When I recognize everything as part of this shared Identity, other aspects of my one Self, I will naturally “offer blessing to all things, uniting lovingly with all the world” (2:2).

## What Is the Holy Spirit?

### Part 3: W-pII.7.2:1–2

The ending of our dreams is the goal of the Holy Spirit’s teaching (2:1). The dreams (our current perception), as we have seen, are brought to an end by translating our false perception of fear into the perception of love. The learning process we are engaged in here, and the subject of the Course’s curriculum, is this very transformation of perception that will lead, in its final outcome, to the end of all perception—the end of dreams. Sometimes we get over-anxious, and we want the dream to end *now*. We want a direct infusion of knowledge. But that is not possible; we can’t skip the process of transforming our perceptions.

We have been emphasizing perception, and have said very little about knowledge as yet. This is because perception must be straightened out before you can know anything.  
(T-3.III.1.1–2)

Before we can “know” anything, our perceptions must be transformed by our interaction with the Holy Spirit, by our bringing our darkness to Him so that He can dispel it with the light. “For sights and sounds [perception] must be translated from the witnesses of fear to those of love” (2:2). There are so many things in our lives that seem to be witnesses to fear. They “testify” to the reality of fear; they seem to justify fear and even to demand fear. The translation that the Holy Spirit is seeking to effect within our minds is to so change our perception of things that everything (literally everything) that now seems to justify and demand fear becomes instead, in our transformed perception, something that justifies and demands love.

That is what “forgiveness” means in the Course; it is far more than merely seeing someone’s actions differently. It means seeing everything differently. It means looking at every horror in this world, every atrocity, every betrayal, every bit of sickness and death, and somehow seeing all of it as something that justifies love and demands love. Something that, instead of proving the reality of fear, proves the reality of love. And that, folks, takes a miracle! But this is “a course in miracles.” That is exactly what it is all about.

How can our perception of things be changed so radically? We do not know. We do not *need* to know. That is the job of the Holy Spirit within our minds. He knows how to do it. All we need to do is bring our fearful perceptions to Him with willingness to have them replaced by His perception. If we will bring them, and if we are thus willing to have them taken from us and replaced, He knows exactly how to do that, and He will do it. He *already* sees everything we see as a justification for love. He already sees everything in you and me as justifying His love. He sees it that way *for* us until we learn to share His perception with Him. “He was created to see this for you, until you learned to see it for yourself” (T-17.II.1:8). This is what the Holy Spirit is; this is what He does.

## Lesson 284 • October 11

**“I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt.”**

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

**Practice suggestion:** When you repeat today’s lesson, you may want to make it more specific: *“I can elect to change this thought about \_\_\_\_\_.”*

### Commentary

This is one of the very good capsule statements of the practical teaching of the Course. What is seen as outside must be seen, first, as originating inside, in my thoughts. Then this lesson applies. If the origin of the problem is my thoughts, I can affect the problem. I can change all thoughts that hurt. Nothing outside me can affect me. The cause of problems, and therefore the solution to them, is entirely within my mind and entirely within my control.

“Loss is not loss when properly perceived” (1:1). Wham! Zap! That really hits a lot of buttons. Perhaps recently there was something I wanted to do, or someplace I wanted to go, and I could not do it. I could perceive that as a loss, and be upset. Yet, properly perceived, that loss can be seen as not a loss at all. The perception of an event, any event, as a loss is purely within my mind; the “hurt” comes not from the external event but from my thoughts about it, and “I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt.”

But we have a mental scale of lesser and greater losses, and as we go up our scale this gets harder and harder to accept. Not getting to a meeting or a concert is one thing. But a few years ago I lost my computer hard disk, totally. I lost several years of personal journals and a mailing list with hundreds of names on it, no backups, no way to retrieve them. Gone. It took me a long time to work through to not seeing that as a loss. But the principle is the same. The perception of loss was purely in my mind, and all perception of loss and pain is always there and nowhere else. And it is always possible for me to change those thoughts if I really want to.

Up the scale still further: What about when someone we love dies, especially unexpectedly, “tragically,” from sickness or violence or accident? How is it possible to apply “Loss is not loss when properly perceived” to such an event? It is evident the lesson means for us to do just that, because it continues:

Pain is impossible. There is no grief with any cause at all. And suffering of any kind is nothing but a dream. (1:2–4)

The lesson is saying that, properly perceived, even death is not a cause for grief. All of it is just a more extreme form of the same case; the cause for our hurt, our pain, and our grief is not external to us. It is in the way we are thinking about things. And we can change the way we think about them and eliminate the pain. The major issue of life is not in the externals; it is in our thinking.

You would not go up to someone who had just lost a loved one and say, bluntly, “There is no cause for grief here.” It very likely would be perceived as cruel and cold, as if you were saying, “He’s no loss. Look at the bright side; now you won’t have to put up with his/her faults any more, and you can find another

who will make you really happy.” People who try to tell a grieving person, “There is no cause for grief” are often choosing to be “spiritually correct” at the expense of kindness.

I think, however, that the lesson is asking us to say something like that—that there is no cause for grief—to *ourselves*, even in cases of what seems like extreme loss. It is suggesting, in the lines that follow, a process we can follow to change our thoughts even in such seemingly impossible cases [see the essay after this commentary for more on the process]. It is not an instant process, and it may take considerable time to turn the tide of our thoughts. But it is possible, it is within our power to change all thoughts that hurt. Our aim should be, eventually, to see that “grief and pain must be impossible” (2:1). Why? Because our Father would not give us anything that hurts us, and there is no other Source. He gives only the joyous, so only the joyous is the truth (2:2).

## What Is the Holy Spirit?

### Part 4: W-pII.7.2:3–4

The process of translating our perceptions being discussed here is exactly the same as the process of changing our thoughts described in Lesson 284: “I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt.” “Sights and sounds must be translated from the witnesses of fear to those of love” (2:2). This process of “changing thoughts that hurt” is all that learning is for, and when it has been accomplished, the game is over (2:3). This is the goal, the end of all spiritual process.

Lesson 193 put it well:

How can you tell when you are seeing wrong, or someone else is failing to perceive the lesson he should learn? Does pain seem real in the perception? If it does, be sure the lesson is not learned. (W-pI.193.7:1–3)

A perception of pain is an unforgiveness. It indicates a need for a shift in perception. It is not sinful or bad to feel pain or grief; it is simply a mistaken perception that needs to be corrected. Nor is there shame if we find it hard to make such a shift. This is what the Holy Spirit is for, to help us through this process of translating our thoughts and changing our perceptions. This is what life is all about; this is the only lesson in the classroom. We do it through frequent repetition of the truth, and through persistently bringing our perceptions of pain to Him for healing. The complete absence of such perceptions comes only at the end of the entire process. The Manual puts it well: “It is your function to escape from them [perceptions of pain, for example], but not to be without them” (M-26.4:2). It is our own personal experience with pain and grief, and our experience of escape from them, that enables us to be of help to others who are caught in their grasp.

Learning from the Holy Spirit, then, involves openly acknowledging our false perceptions and not being guilty about them, but simply bringing them to Him for healing. This kind of learning “becomes the means to go beyond itself, to be replaced by the eternal truth” (2:4). If we gripe and complain about the learning process we will only delay the desired outcome. We are not expected to be without experiences of pain and grief, nor should we expect to be without them. But we should engage ourselves in the work of escaping from them when they occur, bringing them to the gentle kindness of the Holy Spirit’s presence, asking Him to translate our perceptions so that what we see as witnesses to fear become, instead, witnesses to love.

## **The Process of Changing Thoughts**

### **Extra Comments on Lesson 284**

Frequent repetition of an idea is necessary to our learning that idea, particularly if the idea is directly contrary to something we have previously accepted as true. From the Course's perspective, all of us have accepted the ego's thought system, which is demonstrated by our very presence in this world of separation. Since the thought system of the Holy Spirit is diametrically opposite to the ego's thought system, frequent repetition of the ideas of the Course is basic to our learning the Course.

All through the Text and Workbook, the same ideas are repeated and restated, over and over. In the lessons of the Workbook we are urged to repeat the idea for the day every hour, and in Part I each idea is reviewed so that we spend two days with it, at the least. Jesus recognizes that replacing the ego's thoughts with God's thoughts is a slow, gradual process, and there is no guilt in recognizing that while I may conceptually understand some idea from the Course (such as "Loss is not loss when properly perceived"—W-pII.284.1:1) I am still far from total acceptance of it. If I recognize my imperfect acceptance of the ideas of the Course, continued repetition of the idea and continued application of it in varied situations is the prescribed remedy.

### **Five Stages in the Process of Thought Change**

Lesson 284 in the Workbook speaks directly of this process by which our thoughts are changed. Its title is "I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt." This is how it describes the process of thought change (W-pII.284.1:5-6):

This is the truth:

1. at first to be but said
2. and then repeated many times;
3. and next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations.
4. Then to be considered seriously more and more,
5. and finally accepted as the truth.

There are clearly five stages in the process of thought change. Preceding all these stages is a state in which we believe the exact opposite, or have no opinion on the subject. For most of us, this Zero State is our condition when we first begin to read the Course.

Take, for instance, the simple statement given in this lesson: "Loss is not loss when properly perceived." Most of us open the Course firmly convinced that loss is loss, and it is very real; our belief in the reality of loss is unquestioned. In the Course we encounter very clear statements that tell us we are wrong, that loss does not really exist except as a mistaken belief in our minds. In working with that idea, we will slowly move through these five stages of thought change.

#### **1. Verbal Belief - "at first to be but said"**

Change of thought begins with what is really no more than lip service to an idea. At this beginning stage we are really saying no more than, "I think this idea is true and I would like to believe it." With many ideas in the Course, the Verbal Belief stage is even less than that: it is coming to the place of saying, "This *may* be true and I am willing to believe it." If we are honest with ourselves we will realize that with many of the Course's ideas, we have progressed no further than this. With some of the ideas of the Course, such as the teaching that God did not create the world, it took me nearly three years to even reach this stage of being willing to consider the idea as true.

## **2. Mental Belief - “and then repeated many times”**

Having decided to admit the new idea into our thought system (Stage 1) does not do much; it isn't any more than cracking open the door to let it in. The next stage is where frequent repetition comes in. We repeat the idea over and over, perhaps aloud, perhaps silently. We buy cassette tapes of readings from the Course and listen to them over and over. We actually do the Workbook lessons. (I am convinced that the reason most of us “fail” in our practice of the Workbook lessons, “forgetting” to do the frequent repetitions, is that in truth we have not even reached Stage 1 with the idea in question; we are not willing to let it in.) We read the Text over and over. During this stage we still don't actually believe the idea; we are trying to convince our minds it is true. With most of the ideas of the Course, most students are still working in this second stage. I am sure that is true of myself.

## **3. Partial Belief - “next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations”**

The frequent repetition of the idea brings us into situations where we find specific experiences that validate the truth of the idea for us. We have a holy instant, or a moment of forgiveness in one relationship, and we recognize the truth of something the Course has been telling us. This is the “Aha!” experience, the realization of “Now I know what the Course means by this!” Perhaps we experience a shift in perception with one person and see their innocence, see that there was no sin and therefore nothing to forgive. We now can see the truth of the Course in this situation. But we still have difficulty applying it to someone who deeply abused us, or to someone like Hitler, or to other mass murderers. We are still perceiving orders of difficulty in miracles. We accept the idea but “with many reservations.” Some of us, with some of the ideas of the Course, have reached Stage 3.

## **4. Increasing Belief - “Then to be considered seriously more and more”**

Stage 4 is what the Course refers to as generalization. Once we have seen the truth of one of the Course's ideas in one situation, we begin to experience it more and more, in situation after situation. Here, in this stage, is where serious Course students will spend most of their lives. If Stage 1 was mental acceptance and Stage 2 was mental repetition of the idea, then Stage 3 is experiential acceptance and Stage 4 is experiential repetition of the idea. We realize that if the idea was proved to be true in this situation, then perhaps we can apply it to that situation, and another, and another. Over and over, again and again, we must validate the idea in one experience after another.

Even in this late stage, we have not arrived at total acceptance of what the Course is saying. I believe that is what Helen Schucman meant in her frequently quoted statement to the effect that she knew the Course was true, but she didn't believe it. She was perfectly aware that she still had many reservations, and was in the process of considering the ideas seriously, more and more, but she had not yet arrived at final acceptance. We find her statement a little shocking or disturbing only because Helen was more honest than the rest of us. Very few have moved beyond this stage.

## **5. Total Belief - “finally accepted as the truth”**

This final stage is our goal in this world; it is the end of the journey. Here, the idea which started out as a mental concept, won a fuller place in our minds through frequent repetition, began to be applied in experience and gradually grew to encompass more and more of our lives, has finally been completely generalized. We now see the idea as completely true, applying to everything equally. There is no more order of difficulty in miracles, and there are no more reservations and no more exceptions. As I said above, few, if any, have reached this stage with more than a few of the Course's concepts.

It is like learning a foreign language. At the start the sounds of the foreign language are incomprehensible (we all have probably had that experience with the Course!). You choose to take in the language. You apply yourself through frequent repetition. You begin to be comfortable with the language

in limited situations, gradually extending your experience with the new language to more and more aspects of your life until one day, if you are diligent, what you take, takes you. The language becomes your own; it becomes part of you and you part of it. It now seems to come naturally to you, without effort. But it took a great deal of effort to reach the state of effortlessness.

Learning to play a musical instrument proceeds through exactly the same stages: struggling with the strings of a guitar, feeling unnatural and uncomfortable; learning chord after chord, song after song; playing scales, repeating things over and over and over. Then, one day, you find that you don't even have to think about it; it just happens. What you take, takes you.

This stage is the final goal, the end result. If you expect simply to leap into effortlessness without any effort, you will never get there. With the ideas of the Course, we are in the learning process, somewhere in those first four stages. That is the purpose of our being in the world—learning, healing, changing our thoughts.

### **Being a Happy Learner**

The Course advises us, “Be you content with healing” (T-13.VIII.7.1). While we are in the world, we are healing, learning, going through these stages with one aspect of truth after another. When learning is over there will be no more need to be here, so we should expect no more than this learning process as long as we stay here. We need not be guilty because we have not yet arrived at the goal.

In “The Happy Learner” (T-14.II) and the section that follows, Jesus offers us some advice about the process we are in:

#### *1. Learn to be a happy learner.*

“The happy learner cannot feel guilty about learning. This is so essential to learning that it should never be forgotten” (T-14.III.1:1–2).

#### *2. “Learning is living here” (T-14.III.3:2).*

And living here is learning. That is all that living here is: being in the process and not being guilty about it. “Be you content with healing” (T-13.VIII.7:1).

In other words, the world's purpose, for us, is to be a school. What we do here is to learn. That's what we are here for. So settle down, don't be stressed out that you haven't learned it all yet. Learning will get you where you are going, so be content with it, be happy to be in the learning process, and be patient with yourself for not yet being complete.

If you are confronted with a hard truth, something difficult to accept, and you realize that you are still in the first stage of thought change, mere verbal belief, don't be upset that you can't immediately make your mind accept the truth completely. Just get on with the learning process. Repeat the idea as often as possible to yourself. Use every situation to teach it to yourself. Be at peace with the apparent slowness of your progress. Learning is what you are here for, and you have all the time in the world.

## Lesson 285 • October 12

**“My holiness shines bright and clear today.”**

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

**Practice suggestion:** In the spirit of the teaching in this lesson’s opening paragraph, try repeating the following:

*I normally wake expecting painful things to come to me.  
They seem to fit me because I think I am unholy.  
Today I wake expecting only happy things.  
They are what really fit me, because I am holy.*

### Commentary

Today I ask only for joyful things to come my way. “I will ask for only joyous things the instant I accept my holiness” (1:3). The only reason I experience pain and grief and suffering and loss is because somewhere in my mind I think I deserve it. In some way I think suffering is good for me. I judge myself unholy, in conflict with God and His love, and so I need to be taught a lesson. I need to be rehabilitated. I think suffering and hardship will teach me a lesson. So I send forth an invitation to those kind of thoughts, and by golly they come!

When I accept my holiness, “what would be the use of pain to me?” (1:4). The idea that suffering is necessary is poppycock. We think we learn through our trials. And we do. But what we are learning is not how to become holy; we are learning that we *are* holy. Once we get ahold of that fact, we don’t need suffering any more. Once we get rid of the idea that we are sinful and guilty, that somehow we need to be whipped into line, we understand that we deserve joy because we are already holy.

We think that if we were to become totally happy too quickly we’d miss something. We are absolutely convinced that our past actions prove that we don’t deserve happiness and are not ready for it. We think some critical element is missing from our personality that only suffering and pain can teach us. Nothing is missing. Nothing is lacking. If the pain, grief, and loss all ended this instant, you would be just fine; you’d be perfect, in fact, because you already are!

It’s as if we have a transmitter in our heads. We have a picture of ourselves as guilty and incomplete. We think suffering is needed to correct that condition. So we broadcast an invitation to pain, suffering, grief, and loss: “Come to me! Help me out. I need to suffer some more.” Because our mind has all the creative power of God, we succeed in our attempt. We make all the suffering happen, at least in appearance.

When we learn to see ourselves as innocent and complete, the perfect creation of the Father, we have no further reason to broadcast such thoughts. Instead we sing, “Send joy only! Send happy things of God. Today I am accepting only the joyous; no suffering allowed.” I am the ruler of the universe (Lesson 253). My mind has complete power to create the experience of life I want. Today, I choose to create joy.

## What Is the Holy Spirit?

### Part 5: W-pII.7.3:1

If you but knew how much your Father yearns to have you recognize your sinlessness, you would not let His Voice appeal in vain, nor turn away from His replacement for the fearful images and dreams you made.

This sentence is here because we *are* letting His Voice appeal in vain, not listening to it, and we *are* turning away from His Thoughts with which He would replace our terrifying dreams and images. Our own egos, in their scramble for self-survival, have convinced us that God is doing *anything but* yearning for us to recognize our sinlessness. We're more likely to think (if we think about it at all) that God is sitting up in Heaven with his big book of records carefully tracking all our mistakes and tallying them up against us. We are afraid that we have really screwed it up and are too far gone to be recovered. We are more afraid of God than we are believers in His Love. We cannot imagine that He still sees us as sinless. But He does.

When something bad seems to happen to us, we still think along the lines of "Now what did I do to deserve this?" We still think of the world as some kind of system in which the universe makes us pay dearly for every slip-up. The Course says over and over that God is not in the vengeance game. We are the only players in that game, and we bring on our own punishments. God, on the other hand, is yearning for us to stop thinking we are guilty and to recognize our sinlessness.

We turn away from the transformation of our thoughts being offered to us because, somehow, we've convinced ourselves that if we bring any of this dark and dirty stuff into God's Light, a lightning bolt will come out of heaven and zap us. We think that hiding it is safer than exposing it. We don't want to admit that we have gone off searching for idols, for things to replace God in our lives, because we think that has forever marred us and made us unacceptable to God. It has not. All God wants is for us to stop this silly game and come home to Him. He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us do exactly that, but we avoid turning within to Him because we think we will lose, or even die, in the process.

Read the Text section on "Justice Returned to Love" (T-25.VIII). It describes our fear of the Holy Spirit quite clearly. It says that we fear Him and think He represents God's wrath, rather than God's Love. We become suspicious when His Voice tries to tell us we have never sinned (T-25.VIII.6:8). It says we "flee the Holy Spirit as if He were a messenger from hell, sent from above, in treachery and guile, to work God's vengeance on [us] in the guise of a deliverer and friend" (T-25.VIII.7:2).

If I look honestly at how often I actually turn to the Holy Spirit for the healing of my thoughts, as opposed to how often I *do not* do so, it seems to bear out what is being said here. Something in me is keeping me from doing this very simple action; something is motivating me to stay away from the Holy Spirit. If I really knew how much my Father yearns for me to recognize my sinlessness, I would not behave like this.

So what can I do? I can start where I am. When I realize that I've been shunning the Holy Spirit again, I can begin by bringing that realization to Him: "Well, Holy Spirit, it looks as if I've been afraid of You again. Sorry about that." And that simple turning is exactly what He asks of us; to bring our darkness to Him for healing. In opening up about my fear, I've neatly sidestepped it. I'm in communication again.

## Lesson 286 • October 13

**“The hush of Heaven holds my heart today.”**

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

**Practice suggestion:** The prayer for this lesson is without doubt one of the most beautiful prayers in the Course. I call it the “I Need Do Nothing Prayer.” It induces a wonderful state of rest and peace. I recommend taking a chunk of time today—fifteen to thirty minutes—and praying this prayer over and over again, slowly and meaningfully, sinking more deeply into it each time. Don’t close your eyes and zone out after the first time; you’ll be grateful for the experience if you stay with it. To aid in this process, I’ve broken the prayer into three parts and have put some extra lines after each line of the prayer, to draw out its meaning.

### A Day of Doing Nothing

#### 1. *Father, how still today!*

*Let me imagine a day of perfect stillness,  
in which everything is resting, everything is at peace, glowing with a soft radiance.*

#### 2. *How quietly do all things fall in place!*

*Normally, life seems to be a chaotic jumble of conflicting elements.  
But today, all things have quietly fallen into their proper place.  
As I look out on the world, everything is exactly where it belongs.*

#### 3. *This is the day*

*that has been chosen as the time  
in which I come to understand the lesson*

*that there is no need that I do anything.*

*This is the day You have appointed for me to finally realize, “I need do nothing.”*

### Rest from Doing

**4. In You is every choice already made.**

*This is why I need do nothing.  
In You all those hard choices that face me have already been made.  
Let me feel myself resting in You, no more difficult decisions to make.*

**5. In You has every conflict been resolved.**

*I feel constantly surrounded by conflict,  
trying to resolve one while hoping that the others will not spring out of control.  
But in You, all my conflicts are forever behind me.*

**6. In You is everything I hope to find already given me.**

*I am always seeking, striving to find the happiness and safety that I lack.  
But in You, I can rest from seeking, for I have found. In You I have everything.*

## **The Peace that Is Mine**

**7. Your peace is mine.**

*You are totally free from choice, conflict, and seeking.  
Your peace must be limitless, unfathomable!  
Yet because I am in You, Your peace is mine.*

**8. My heart is quiet, and my mind at rest.**

*In Your peace, with no need to do anything, I am totally at rest, completely filled.*

**9. Your Love is Heaven, and Your Love is mine.**

*What could be more heavenly than being loved by You?  
And I am loved by You; You love me with all that You are.  
I need only accept Your Love, and Heaven is mine.*

### **Commentary**

“How quietly do all things fall in place!” (1:2). I love that line! That is what realization is like; things just quietly fall into place, and there is nothing to do.

“This is the day that has been chosen as the time in which I come to understand the lesson that there is no need that I do anything” (1:3).

Several years ago in a study group, we read a section that described the state of *knowledge*. Someone asked if it is possible for an individual to attain this, or do we all have to do it together? “Is everybody waiting for me? Am I waiting for everybody else?” The leader (I’ll call him Ted) began to discuss Jesus and how we are all in this together.

“Then Jesus isn’t in this state of knowledge yet either, is he?” said the questioner.

I injected myself into the discussion: “Yes, he is. Jesus has passed from perception to knowledge. *And so have you.*”

We are “at home in God, dreaming of exile” (T-10.I.2:1). We are all already in Heaven. (Actually we never left.) The story is already over! We’re at the end, looking back and remembering. “We’re living a rerun,” someone said. “The fact that Jesus has already done it is the guarantee that we all will do it, we all will experience what he has experienced because we are really all one mind,” Ted said.

This is the reason that “I need do nothing.” We all continue to make the error that we have to accomplish something. We think that there is this great mountain to climb, the mountain of enlightenment or perfection. We may believe Jesus has climbed it, along with others like Buddha, but we think we’re still at the bottom looking up. We are intimidated by how hard it is going to be, awed by all the work that has to be done, discouraged by the thought of how far we have to go to get there.

These thoughts are simply the way the ego tries to handle the situation when you finally get a glimpse of the promised land, of the realm of knowledge that God intends for you to live in.

The ego can accept the idea that return is necessary because it can so easily make the idea seem difficult. Yet the Holy Spirit tells you that even return is unnecessary, because what never happened cannot be difficult. However, you can *make* the idea of return both necessary and difficult. Yet it is surely clear that the perfect need nothing, and you cannot experience perfection as a difficult accomplishment, because that is what you are. (T-6.II.11:1–4)

The ego tries to convince you that what you have seen is something you *lack* instead of something you *already have*. “In You is everything I hope to find already given me” (1:6). *You are what you have been looking for.*

The Christ-nature is not something you have to develop. You don’t have to slave over the ego trying to change it into a Christ! That simply isn’t possible. If you think you have to *become* the Christ, you have put yourself in a situation where “You can’t get there from here.” And that is exactly where the ego wants you to be.

The Christ-nature is Who you really are! You just don’t remember. It is already inside you. It is you. You think you are something else, but you aren’t. That is the illusion the ego has cast. You think the ego is you! You think that all this awful stuff, all this miserable little worm nature, this weakling, this sniveling coward, is what you are. That is not you. The ego is not you. The ego is not anything, and not anywhere; it is just a thought you have about yourself, a thought that is wholly false. Christ “is the only part of you that has reality in truth” (W-pII.6.3:2).

When you feel as if you have to struggle, when you feel as if you have to make all kinds of difficult choices, then you are seeing yourself as an ego, at the bottom of the mountain looking up. When you see yourself as the Christ, there is nothing to do.

Our only problem is thinking we have a problem. The thought that “I don’t have it yet” *is the problem*. We need to be enlightened from thinking we need to be enlightened. All that has to change is that thought, and the thought changes nothing, does nothing, because we are always already enlightened, always already happy, always already perfect. God created us that way and we can’t change it; all we can do is forget it and pretend we are something else.

In today’s moment of quiet we can taste the flavor of that stillness in which there is nothing to do and nowhere to go. “The stillness of today will give us hope that we have found the way, and travelled far along it to a wholly certain goal” (2:1). We can taste the reality of the end, even in the midst of our traveling; we can know the goal is “wholly certain,” and even inevitable.

Today we will not doubt the end which God Himself has promised us. We trust in Him, and in our Self, Who still is one with Him. (2:2–3)

## What Is the Holy Spirit?

### Part 6: W-pII.7.3:2–3

What are “the means you made, by which you would attain what is forever unattainable” (3:2)? The unattainable is, of course, separation, or life that is separate from God. The means we made to attain this goal include our bodies, the illusions of choices (alternatives to God and to love), fear, attack, conflict,

denial, special relationships, sights and sounds, and the whole phenomenal world of perception. The Holy Spirit understands all of these things perfectly. He knows exactly what they are, how they work, and why we made them.

“And if you offer them to Him, He will employ the means you made for exile to restore your mind to where it truly is at home” (3:3).

This is the miracle. Everything we made to exile ourselves from God can be used to restore our minds to their real home. But for that to happen we must “offer them to Him.” He is the bridge between what we made and what we are. He is “the Great Transformer of perception” (T-17.II.5:2). He can completely reverse the purpose of everything we made in madness, and use it to restore us to sanity. If we give those things to Him.

And so we need to bring all these things to Him, asking Him to use them for His purposes, rather than the purpose for which we made them. Give Him our bodies. Give Him our special relationships. Give Him our power of decision. Give Him our attack thoughts, our defenses, our very denial. (He can use even denial to “deny the denial of truth” [T-12.II.1:5].) Give Him our perceptions, our eyes and ears. Give Him our whole world and everything in it. He will not take them *away* from us. He will take them and use them to restore us to Heaven.

## Lesson 287 • October 14

**“You are my goal, my Father. Only you.”**

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

### Commentary

This lesson comes from a very high place. It is something that would be spoken by a person ready to live in the real world, a prayer from the heart of Christ within me. It *is* the heartfelt thoughts of Christ, expressed in words; it is the mindset that I seek to listen to all the time. And so it is true of me; I can speak these words with honesty, even though I know that often I listen to the ego, which has every other goal *but* God.

If I feel today that I cannot say with simple honesty, “You are my goal, my Father. Only You,” then let me look with honesty, and without fear, on what other goals I still cherish. Let me ask myself, “What could be a substitute for happiness? What gift could I prefer before the peace of God?” (1:2–3). Any such other goal is obviously a foolish one. Any goal that distracts me from the peace of God is unworthy of me.

If I have another goal, if I cannot say “Only You,” then I am desiring to go someplace other than Heaven; I am looking for a substitute for happiness; I am seeking something which I think is preferable to the peace of God; I am looking to find and keep something which I think is better than my own Identity; I am choosing to live with fear rather than with love.

It really is that simple.

In the Course, Jesus assures me that it is not shameful to recognize these things about myself. Recognizing my false goals is the beginning of wisdom. All that is needful is for me to recognize what I am doing, what other goals I am choosing, and the power of those things will simply fall away. *Pretending* to love only God while secretly holding on to other goals is a sure guarantee of failure and unhappiness. Honest recognition of those other goals, and of my responsibility in choosing them, is the sure way of release.

## What Is the Holy Spirit?

### Part 7: W-pII.7.4:1

From knowledge, where He has been placed by God, the Holy Spirit calls to you, to let forgiveness rest upon your dreams, and be restored to sanity and peace of mind.

The Holy Spirit has been placed in knowledge, by God. Knowledge is not a place but a condition, a state of knowingness. The Holy Spirit knows the truth; He knows reality. He knows our real being, what and who we really are. On the one side He is firmly linked with God, knowledge, and reality. From that

place of knowingness, He calls to us within our dreams. On the other side He is linked firmly with us. He is aware of our dreams, aware of what and who we think we are, as well as knowing what and who we really are. He is perfectly equipped to lead us out from those dreams and into the truth of full sanity.

If we listen, we can hear Him calling. We can become aware of something within ourselves moving us to “let forgiveness rest upon [our] dreams.” The discipline of Workbook practice is teaching us, if we are doing the exercises, to listen to that Voice, to respond to that inner urging. Gradually we are becoming more and more aware of the times we are dreaming; gradually we become aware we are dreaming most of the time. We can let forgiveness rest on our dreams by bringing them to the Holy Spirit and asking for His perception to replace our dreams. This is the way to sanity; this is the way to peace of mind.

In Chapter 5, the first chapter in the Text which strongly presents the Holy Spirit and His place in our return to God, He is often referred to as “the Call.” He is called “the Call to Atonement” (T-5.I.5:4), “the Call to return” (T-5.I.5:5), “the Call to joy” (T-5.II.3:2), “the Call to awaken and be glad” (T-5.II.10:5), and “the Call for God” (T-5.II.10:7). This Call is something within our own minds. Something is drawing us home; if you are reading this Course, you have felt that Call and responded to It. We can dissociate that Call and block it from our awareness, or we can deliberately turn our attention to It, and listen. He always calls us to forgiveness, both to forgive and to be forgiven. His goal is the end of guilt. He speaks to us, always, of innocence. He seeks to turn us from the way of fear to the way of love. If we give Him our full attention, He will safely guide us home. He knows the way.

## Lesson 288 • October 15

“Let me forget my brother’s past today.”

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

**Practice suggestion:** For a longer version of today’s idea, try thinking of a particular person you are carrying a grievance toward, and then repeating the following:

*Let me forget my brother [name’s] past today.*

*Because if I see that his sins are in the past, I will see that mine are, too.*

*Because if I believe that he bears God’s Name, I will believe that I do, too.*

*Because if I see that he is God’s creation, I will see that I am, too.*

### Commentary

“I cannot come to You without my brother” (1:2). The decision for God *is* the decision to share. What we recognize, in recognizing our Identity, is an Identity that is *shared* with all living things. Because my salvation lies in awaking to this shared Identity, it is impossible to come to God *alone*. The problem is separation; therefore the solution is unity.

“[My brother’s] sins are in the past along with mine, and I am saved because the past is gone” (1:5). If the past is gone for me, it is gone for everyone. If I hold on to the past in regard to my brother, therefore, and hold grievances against him in any way, I am denying my own salvation. “Let me not cherish [the past] within my heart, or I will lose the way to walk to You” (1:6).

The lesson teaches that “to know my Source, I first must recognize what You created one with me” (1:3). In other words, to fully appreciate my own origins in God, to know my own holiness and perfection, I need to see that “that awful person” and everyone else was created by God in just the same way. “I cannot come to You without my brother” (1:2).

We all have certain people we just can’t see as being in Heaven. Let’s say one of mine is named George. I can’t see George as being worthy of Heaven. Maybe, for me, if George were there it wouldn’t *be* Heaven. Do you know the kind of person I mean?

Well, “I cannot come to You without my brother” does not mean that I can’t get to Heaven until George does. It means that I can’t get to Heaven until I see George as already there. It is still something in my control; I’m not made dependent on the other person’s seeing. In my mind George must be seen as the same as myself. In my mind, I must see his holiness, I must forget his past. When I can forget his past, I can forget my own.

If I hold the past against my brother I am holding it against myself. We cannot see ourselves as any higher than we see our brother. I can’t be any holier than he is. Yet I cannot be any less holy than Jesus.

The bottom line is, I can’t see myself as having any gift of God that I am not willing for everyone to have.

When I honor my brother as my savior, I am recognizing Who he really is, and thereby I recognize my own Identity, shared with him. My brothers and sisters are my saviors, not in the sense that they provide me with something I do not have or do something for me I cannot do, but in the sense that by forgiving

them, by forgetting their past, I remind myself of the truth about myself which I share with them. They show me my own judgment on myself, and give me opportunities to let it go. When I see my brother, I *am* seeing myself, and my gentleness and kindness toward them, in forgiveness, is the way I can give these gifts to myself.

In the closing paragraph, Jesus speaks to us. It is important to recognize him as the speaker:

Forgive me, then, today. And you will know you have forgiven me if you behold your brother in the light of holiness. He cannot be less holy than can I, and you can not be holier than he. (2:1-3)

I have said that how I see my brother is how I see myself. In this paragraph, Jesus makes it plain that how I see my brother is also a reflection of how I see him, and how I see God. And thus my forgiveness of a brother is identical to forgiving Jesus, and to forgiving God.

“You can not be holier than he [your brother]” (2:3). The limit I mentally place on my brother, by how I perceive him, is a limit I am placing on myself. If I hold *him* to the past, then *I* am held to the past. If I see him as incapable of understanding, incapable of learning, incapable of perfection, then I am seeing myself that way. No one is beyond redemption. If I see a brother as if I believe “he will never find God in this lifetime,” I am placing that limit on myself. And in every case, the limit is false. “There is no order of difficulty in miracles” (T-1.I.1:1).

## What Is the Holy Spirit?

### Part 8: W-pII.7.4:2-3

Without forgiveness will your dreams remain to terrify you. (4:2)

Our dreams disappear when we forgive them, which means that we see that what we *think* was done *to us* never occurred (see W-pII.1.1:1). Not that the events did not happen, but that our interpretation of them (what we thought was being done to us, the perception of attack) was incorrect. If we do not forgive, the dreams will remain terrifying to us. Forgiveness means seeing that there is nothing to forgive. It means reinterpreting the past and remembering only the love that was there, or the call for love, and denying any reality to our perception of attack.

We may resist doing this. We may think that, for some reason, it is important to hold on to our perception of injury. But if we do, we will continue to experience terror. The past will continue to perpetuate itself in our present and in our future. Eventually all of us will come to realize that this isn't what we want, and we will let the past go. “Let me forget my brother's past today” (W-pII.288.Heading).

Until we forgive the past and let it go, “the memory of all your Father's Love will not return to signify the end of dreams has come” (4:3). How can we remember God's Love when we continue to see ourselves as injured? “Would a loving God have allowed this?” we ask ourselves. Do I want to believe in the reality of sin, or in the Love of God? The Holy Spirit is calling to us, from within ourselves, to let forgiveness rest on *all* of our dreams. That is the only way we can be restored to sanity and peace of mind.

## Lesson 289 • October 16

**“The past is over. It can touch me not.”**

### Practice instructions

A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

### Commentary

We are learning in the Course that mind is the cause of the world we see. Say I find myself angry at someone. Instead of assuming, as I have done all my life, that what I have seen is real, I recognize that it is an illusion of some kind. I don't try to figure it out, I just give it to the Holy Spirit. I recognize that my angry thoughts are not caused by what I see, but rather, my thoughts of anger caused my perception of what I see.

My thoughts are prior to any sight and sound. Many people see this in what to me is a partial way. They see that our present feelings are not caused by what is presently happening, but they assume that there must be something in the past that caused these feelings. “Can you recall another time you felt like this?” is their key question. The idea is that you can remember some past event that aroused this feeling, and by realizing that the feeling is an unresolved feeling from the earlier event, you can detach the feeling from the present one. “I'm not really angry at you; I am angry because you represent my mother to me.” That sort of thing. The Course does talk about this kind of “shadow figure” from the past, but it points out that such shadow figures “are not real, and have no hold over you unless you bring them with you” (T-13.IV.6:2). (Sections IV through VI in Chapter 13 all deal with releasing the past.) In other words, our present distress or anger is not caused by the past, but by a present decision to bring its pain into the present. A decision being made in the present can be undone in the present.

The past “can touch me not.” Past events are not the cause of my feelings, either. The mistake in that kind of connecting of present emotions to past events, which certainly can be useful to a limited degree, is that it still makes the false connection of some event or person as the cause of my feeling, with my feeling as the effect. The key the Course gives is that “the past is over.” If I am seeing the past I am “seeing but what is not there” (1:2). The one true thought that can be had about the past, says the Course, is that it is not here (W-pI.8.2:1). It does not (any longer) exist. All that exists is a thought in my mind which I call a memory, and that memory is imperfect, slanted to my perceptions and with no awareness of the inner reality of other people who were also present. All I remember is what I saw, what I heard, what I thought, what I felt. So my picture of the past is totally inadequate and cannot be the basis for any kind of rational judgment.

When I do recognize that my present feeling is caused by viewing present events through the filter of a memory of the past, that is good because it can serve to help me detach my feelings from the things happening in the now. But I need to go one step further. I need to see that my feelings are not caused by the past, either. The past has no power over me. The past doesn't exist. The past I remember is my own thoughts about the past.

If my feelings are not caused by the present and not caused by the past, then what are they caused by? Certainly not by the future, which has not happened yet. Then what?

“I am affected only by my thoughts” (W-pII.338.Heading). Only by my thoughts. That is the bottom

line. The Course says that eventually we must learn that there is nothing outside of our mind to affect us; thought is all there is. Everything else is the effect of thought, not the cause of anything (T-26.VII.4:9; T-10.In.1:1).

There is nothing outside you. That is what you must ultimately learn. (T-18.VI.1:1–2)

Why do we have thoughts that cause bad feelings? It all goes back to the original thought of separation. We think we have stolen our being from God, we think we succeeded in creating a separate self, and we think that God must be angry. We believe in the wrath of God. In less theological terms, we are guilty because we see ourselves existing in a world that demands selfishness for survival. We are guilty because (we think that) we are separate and it is our own fault.

We have this profound sense of guilt, so profound it terrifies us. We cannot even bear to look at it. We are afraid of oblivion, afraid of death, more afraid of hell. Fear transmutes into many forms: anger, depression, jealousy, apathy. We open our eyes and immediately we are looking for a scapegoat, something we can blame as the cause of these terrible feelings. Inevitably we find a culprit. “You! You are the one who has stolen away my peace!” We made the world to serve this purpose.

The Holy Spirit comes into our lives to “employ the means you made for exile to restore your mind to where it truly is at home” (W-pII.7.3:3). *We* look on each event as a possible scapegoat for our awful feelings. The *Holy Spirit* looks on each event as a possible means of showing us love. We learn to see everything as either love or a call for love. To the ego, everything witnesses to separation and guilt. To the Spirit, everything witnesses to the reality of love.

To perceive the world forgiveness offers we must be willing to let the past go, to see that it cannot touch us *now*. The forgiven world can only be seen *now*. We have to choose to stop looking at “a past that is not there” (2:1).

## What Is the Holy Spirit?

### Part 9: W-pII.7.5:1–2

The Holy Spirit is the “Father’s gift...a call from Love to Love, that It be but Itself” (5:1–2). That is what the calling within us is all about. It is Love calling to Itself to *be* Itself. Whenever I start feeling as though God is calling me to some kind of “surrender” that makes it appear as though I am submitting my will to another, superior will, I recall that what is happening is simply that I am surrendering to Love. I am surrendering *to myself*, to what I am in truth. God is not calling me to give up myself and become something I do not want to be; God is calling me to *be my Self*. To be what I was created to be and still am.

I have confused myself and convinced myself that I am something else, and now, in hearing the call to return to myself, to “return to love,” as Marianne Williamson puts it, I feel fear. It seems as though I am being asked to give up myself, to “surrender” to God at the expense of my own being. Exactly the opposite is true. I am being called to surrender only to what I am in truth. I am called to be Love, because Love is what I am.