

A Healed Mind Does Not Plan

By Allen A. Watson



Booklet #8 in a Series Based on
A COURSE IN MIRACLES

A *Course in Miracles* is extremely practical. It brings high metaphysical truths to bear on the day-to-day running of our lives. It helps us to see how our habitual approach to life is one that brings us conflict, mental distress, and even physical sickness.

One such source of daily stress is our firm belief that we must make plans for our lives to work. By re-examining our approach to planning and decision-making, the Course promises that we can find a way to live in present confidence in the Holy Spirit, free from the stress of believing that the direction of our lives is up to us. By practicing the path it recommends we can come to a state of mind that is at perfect peace, without a trace of sorrow, and in joy that constantly increases.

Topics include:

- Why making plans is a defense against our true nature, and one which increases our fear.
- The important place of the body in our planning.
- The relationship of sickness to plan-making.
- How we can live without making plans.
- The Course's gradual, gentle program to free our minds from the stress of planning.
- Making decisions.
- Specific steps we can practice for stress-free living.



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Introduction

A Course in Miracles talks a great deal about giving all our decisions to the Holy Spirit. It says that our only responsibility is to “decide that you do not have to decide anything” (Text, p. 125; T-7.X.6:8). In Lesson 135 in the Workbook, it states that “The healed mind does not plan.”

I have been wondering why there is such a strong emphasis on this in the Course, and how the instructions are to be followed. First of all, what is the theory behind this advice? What is the purpose it serves? And secondly, in a practical sense, how can we live in this world without making plans and decisions? How can I make the transition from making all my own plans and decisions to a state in which all my plans and decisions are made *for me* by the Holy Spirit?

I decided, for my own benefit, to do a detailed study of Lesson 135, in which these concepts are discussed in some detail. I also studied some related paragraphs in the Text, in Chapter 14 and Chapter 30. In this booklet, I share what I have found.

The lessons presented here are what I am currently *learning*. I have only limited experience in actually applying them, although enough experience to know that the lessons can be trusted, and that what they say is true.

A Healed Mind Does Not Plan

Like most students of the Course or any spiritual path, I listen to the Voice for God sometimes, and sometimes I don't. Writing this has been a big help to me in moving closer to the day I learn, finally, to listen to that Voice and no other. I hope it will help you to do the same.

A Healed Mind Does Not Plan

Thoughts on Workbook Lesson 135
“If I defend myself I am attacked.”

A General Overview of the Lesson

The Course continually teaches us that “all attack is self-attack” (T-10.II.5.1; line not in 1st ed.). It says we are constantly attacking ourselves, but that we are blind to the fact. We think the attack is coming from somewhere outside ourselves, and never realize that it stems from our own thoughts of guilt. It advises us, over and over, to look carefully at what we are doing and thinking, to recognize the self-attack in what we do, and to choose to let go of it.

Lesson 135 in the Workbook applies this general principle to a particular area of our lives that we have probably never thought of as a form of self-attack: planning.

First, it points out that all defenses are a form of self-attack because they make the illusion of threat real, and then attempt to handle them as if they were real. It asks us to look closely at what we think we are defending, how we defend it, and against what.

Second, it identifies our plans as a form of defense. Plans, Jesus says, are a form of defense against anticipated future threats. If plans are a form of defense, the reverse is true: All “Defenses are the plans you undertake to make against the truth” (Workbook, p. 247; W-135.17:1). In other words, defenses and plans are the same thing. When you set up a defense against something, you are making plans of what to do if “X” happens. All defenses are plans; and all self-initiated plans are defenses.

In sum, making plans is a form of defense, and all defenses are attacks on myself. Therefore, making plans is just another form of self-attack, to be noticed and abandoned.

Finally, the lesson discusses how “the healed mind” approaches life: not making plans, but receiving plans from the Holy Spirit, with full present trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with confidence in His plan. Only this approach allows for change, healing and miracles to take place in the present moment.

In the paragraph-by-paragraph commentary on Lesson 135 that follows, I will be commenting on every line of the lesson. I urge you to read these notes with the Workbook open and to read each paragraph of the lesson before reading the notes, as I do not quote every word of the lesson here, although I refer to all of it.

The paragraph from the lesson being discussed is clearly identified by the large numerals at the start of the first paragraph of commentary related to that lesson paragraph. Quotations from within the paragraph, therefore, are identified only by the sentence number within the paragraph. For example, “(4)” refers to sentence four within the lesson paragraph currently under discussion.

Title “If I defend myself I am attacked.”
The general thought that heads this lesson states that all forms of defense are actually witnesses to attack, or to your belief in attack. If you see a need for a defense, you must be perceiving an attack.

This lesson will go on to show that when you make plans whose purpose is to defend your small “self” (the image you have made of yourself, comprised of your ego and its expression, the body, which I will henceforth refer to as the “ego-body”) which is something so weak it needs defense—you are indirectly attacking your true Self, which is mind or spirit (which needs no defense) because you perceive that Self as attacking “you.”

The first paragraph of the lesson presents many thought-provoking ideas, so I will spend several pages discussing just this one paragraph.

1 Why else would you defend yourself, unless you thought you were being attacked? There are, in fact, three hidden beliefs that are revealed by the presence of a defense:

- You believe you are being attacked.
- You believe the attack is *real*.
- You believe your own defense can save you from the attack (1).

All three are logically necessary if you have seen fit to erect a defense of some kind. First, if you didn't think you were being attacked, you would not need a defense.

Second, if you thought the attack you perceived was meaningless or unreal, you would not bother with a defense. For instance, if you were a lion being attacked by a mouse, you would not bother defending yourself because the mouse is not a real threat. Or if a witch doctor was attacking you by burning your photograph, you would not defend yourself (unless you believed in witch-doctoring).

And finally, if you thought that any defense you erected was useless, you would not bother defending yourself either. A man in front of a tidal wave does not

bother trying to build a wall in the sand; he knows it is hopeless.

So therefore, if you are defending yourself in some way, any way, you must believe these three things: you are being attacked; it is a very real attack; and your defense can be strong enough to be effective against the threat you perceive.

Jesus says that realizing this is enough to realize that defense is “folly.” He says that our defense “gives illusions full reality, and then attempts to handle them as real” (2). There is an enormous presupposition here that is difficult to accept unless you have studied the Text, and that is that *all attack is illusion*. If all attack is illusion, then truly it is folly to make the attack real and then to respond to it as if it were real. “Folly” would be a good word to describe a lion being terrified by a mouse and erecting defenses against the dangerous mouse. But Jesus is saying that when you defend yourself against your brother you are being just as silly because you can’t be attacked, and your brother cannot really attack you.¹

Defense just “adds illusions to illusions” (3). There is an illusion of attack and you counteract it with an illusion of defense. In other words, your ability to defend yourself

¹ The Text discusses the idea that you cannot be attacked in many places. See, for instance, Chapter 6, the Introduction and Section I, and Chapter 13, the first section, paragraphs 8–11.

is just as illusory as the threat you think you are defending against. Your brother can't really hurt you, and you can't really hurt him. It's all a childish game, like toy soldiers attacking one another.

But it does have a nasty side-effect: It makes correcting your mental errors doubly difficult, because there is not just a single illusion involved; there are layers of illusions, and illusions within illusions. Correcting your thought to the point where you truly understand the Workbook lesson that says, "In my defenselessness my safety lies" (Workbook, p. 277; W-153) is no easy proposition.

But "it is this you do" (4). What is it you do? You add illusions to illusions, you make imaginary threats seem real and then respond to them with imaginary defenses. When do you do this? Whenever you try "to plan the future, activate the past, or organize the present as you wish" (4). In other words, you do it in the whole way you deal with time — future, past and present. Let's look briefly at each to see what Jesus is saying here.

1. Planning the future is a defense

Planning the future is a form of defense. It foresees some threat and then tries to produce a defense against the threat. Even a simple plan to go grocery shopping tomorrow is a defense, if you think about it. What usually

motivates you to go shopping? Simple: you notice you are running out of something you need, like milk or bananas, or even (my most frequent reminder in this area) cat food. What is the threat? If you don't buy food you won't have anything to eat (and ultimately you'll die). Or my cat will hound me to be fed and I will feel guilty if it gets sick or dies. Thus there is a perceived threat, and a plan to counteract it, even in grocery shopping.

Now, let's deal with a common misunderstanding of what the Course is saying. The Course is not saying you should not keep grocery lists and shop for food. It is pointing out what is going on, all unbeknownst to you, in nearly all our minds. There is a perception of threat, a deep-rooted fear you are almost never aware of, and a belief that you can do something about it. It isn't talking about what you *do*; it is talking about what you are *thinking* while you do it. It is talking about what you are afraid of, what you are protecting, and the way you are protecting it. As we shall see shortly, defenses always have something to do with your body. You believe you must deal with and defend your body, when the real problem is in your mind.

...all mistakes must be corrected at the level on which they occur. Only the mind is capable of error. The body

can act wrongly only when it is responding to misthought (Text, p. 19; T-2.IV.2:3–4).

It is essential to remember that only the mind can create, and that correction belongs at the thought level...The body does not exist except as a learning device for the mind (Text, p. 21; T-2.V.1:7,9).

This entire lesson, and the subject of guidance it discusses, deals primarily with correcting your *mind*, not your behavior. Correct the mind and the behavior will follow. “You do not need guidance except at the mind level” (Text, p. 25; T-2.VI.3:5).

2. Activating the past is a defense

What does it mean to “activate” the past? The word “activate” means “to make active.” You activate the past when you make the past active in the present, that is, when you think of the past as something which has real effects *now*. When you dredge up an old grievance and tell someone that what she did last year is hurting you now, you are activating the past. You are giving it a power it does not have. You are taking something that is dead and making it alive. It lives only in your own imagination, of course.

When you do that, Jesus says, you are making imaginary threats seem real and responding with imaginary defenses. Somehow you believe the past can

hurt you, in fact *is* hurting you, and so you respond to this “shadowy figure from the past” (Text, p. 229; T-13.IV.6.1) as if it were a real, present threat. ²

3. Organizing the present is a defense

This is referring to all your attempts to get the world to be the way you want it to be: putting things away ever so neatly and in order; putting all your finances into your computer; keeping the house neat and clean; getting the family to sit down to dinner on time; labelling your tools and having a proper tool rack. You have closet organizers and shoe organizers and drawer organizers. You somehow have this feeling that if you could just organize everything *perfectly*, you would be happier and safer.

Again, this is not to say you should live like a slob. What is being pointed out is the quiet desperation that underlies nearly all of these efforts. What is being hinted at, at least, is the reason why you sometimes feel like crying when confronted with a messy drawer or a smudge on the tablecloth. There is more going on here than you realize! Somewhere down inside you there is this terror that if you lose control, if you stop organizing the world, keeping it neat and clean and orderly, the

² Read Text, pp. 228–236 (T-13.IV, V and VI) for a complete discussion of how we create entire private worlds peopled by shadow figures from the past.

world will simply crush you. There is a threat you perceive, subconsciously for the most part, and your frantic attempts to get organized are your defenses against that threat.

2 The thought underlying all these plans for the future, concerns for the past, and attempts to organize the present is simply this:

You operate from the belief you must protect yourself from what is happening because it must contain what threatens you (1).

This fundamental attitude underlies nearly everything you do in this world. You see yourself as a very small biological unit in a very big world, and the world is either completely or mostly hostile. You adopt a defensive posture in everything. You are convinced that “what is happening” (1) always contains a threat to your well-being, and you have to constantly guard against that threat. You believe the danger is real, and justifies your defensiveness. You see yourself, in respect to the world, as having “an inherent weakness” (2). People who live out this posture to the extreme we call “paranoid,” but all of us are paranoid. All of us are run by fear.

This describes the entire world, not just a certain percentage of the population. “The world is based on this insane belief” (3). Your perception of threat and your

defensiveness is evident everywhere, if you look at it. Our buildings are defenses against the elements and against others who would steal our stuff. Most of the thinking in the world is about defense. We spend billions on defenses against diseases, for instance. We support consumer groups who serve to protect us against dishonest businesses and dangerous products. The entire legal system and its penalties are an attempted defense against the tendency we perceive in everyone else to rip us off. The largest item in the budget of nearly every nation is DEFENSE. We rally to the leader who seems most likely to defend us. If we are afraid of other nations we support a leader who favors strong defense. If we are afraid of other races, we support a racist leader. If we see ourselves as part of a repressed minority, we support a leader who will stand up for our rights. Even our ethics and our gods are chosen out of fear, seeking the one who offers the best defense from the terror of hell (4).

Everything about this world serves to preserve the sense of *threat* you feel (4). Every defense—and you have thousands of them—testifies to the reality of the threat being defended against.

Now, if the threat is real, the defenses make sense. The underlying assumption here is that none of the threats you see are real threats. Although the self you think you are *can* seemingly be attacked, the Self you really are

cannot be attacked. It may be difficult for you to believe that. But you cannot deny that the magnitude and multitude of our defense systems, national, group, and personal, demonstrate very clearly that we all walk the world with terror striking at our hearts (5). We repress our conscious awareness of this terror because it is too enormous to contemplate. People who allow themselves to contemplate it go insane or commit suicide; looking at it seems to be the worst danger of all!³

3 We think that defenses can make us safe (3) and give us a feeling of peace and security. Actually, “Defense is frightening” (1). If we put five locks on our front door to keep out thieves, every time we open and close those locks we are reminding ourselves of the malevolent degenerates lurking outside our dwelling just waiting to attack us. Every lock we add *increases* our fear instead of lessening it (2)! A defense, says the Course, is nothing more than “fear made real and terror justified” (4). We think defense offers safety. It does not, and unconsciously we know it.

³ Existentialism is a philosophy which is famous for attempting to confront this primal fear. Sartre wrote a book called *No Exit*. Kierkegaard titled a book *Fear and Trembling*. And Paul Tillich spoke of the basic human condition as one of angst, or anxiety.

Why is it, Jesus asks (5), that in all this effort spent reinforcing our defenses, we do not stop to ask ourselves three simple questions?

- *What are you defending?* That is, what are you trying to preserve?
- *How are you defending it?* That is, what methods of defense do you use?
- *Against what are you defending it?* That is, what is the threat you think is there?

The lesson then proceeds to look into these questions and to answer them. In so doing, it demonstrates that the entire system of defense is useless and insane; it serves only to preserve the terror it seeks to eliminate. Remember these three questions; we will refer to them as we go through the rest of the lesson.

4 Let's look first at "what you defend" (1). Considering the multitude of defenses you deem necessary, what you are defending must be very weak and very vulnerable. It must be easy to attack—"easily assaulted" (2) and "easy prey" (3). It must be something that cannot defend itself and so needs your vigilant effort on its behalf (3). What fits this picture?

“What but the body?” (4) Every one of your defenses is designed in one way or another to protect your body. Houses and clothes protect bodies. Consumer groups protect you against poisons in your food, exploding gas tanks and toys with sharp edges. Locks on your doors protect you from physical assault in your home, and your protection of things you own is based on the need of your body for those things. *The body* is what you are protecting.

The body is the only thing so weak that it needs so much protection. It is very frail; our seat belts remind us of that all the time. Bodies are easily squashed. Germs so easily invade them. They are so complex, and so many things can go wrong with them. You spend your life in “watchful, deep concern” (4) protecting your little body. And despite all that, eventually every body falters and fails (5) and dies. What you are defending will be lost no matter what you do. Defending the body is a hopeless task.

Now, if I believe that my body is me, such concern is justified. Most of us starting on our spiritual path may try to pretend that we know better—that we know we are not our body or we are more than our body—but look at the way we still expend all our energy in protecting it! The multitude of our defenses proves we don’t believe what

we say we do. Our panic over missing *one meal* shows that we are identified with that body and think it is us.

Once again I feel the need to add that the Course is not saying we are bad because we do this. There is no need to feel guilty about it. But the Course wants us to *admit it*, to be honest about it. It does insist that all the attention we place on the body is misplaced concern. It does insist we are making a mistake, and that we are burdening ourselves unnecessarily with intense, deep-seated fear—more than just fear: *terror* striking at our hearts. The approach the Course will suggest is not to stop caring for the body, but to realize that there are higher priorities, and that—in the end—what happens to the body does not really matter, since it is only a temporary learning device.

5 You are protecting your body out of fear. But the body cannot fear (1). Where does fear originate? Not in the body, but in the mind. Your body isn't afraid of anything, but your mind is. It thinks it lives in the body and is trapped in it, so it is your *mind* that fears.

Your body “has no needs but those which you assign to it”(2). This is a startling statement if you consider all its implications. Taken to the extreme it means that your body does not need food, nor water, nor sleep, nor even air. It doesn't need anything unless *you think it does*. Your mind assigns needs to the body.

Indian yogis have demonstrated the truth of much of this. They have gone for weeks without food and water. They have been buried alive without air. And they have survived. A Roman Catholic nun, St. Theresa Newman, survived for years on nothing but water and the communion wafer. There is evidence that this idea is true. Scanty evidence, yes, but evidence. Our minds reject it and tend to think it must be a trick, because to believe it threatens our entire belief system of defenses. I'm not suggesting we immediately try giving up food and water or that becoming a Yoga Master is an essential part of our path. I *am* suggesting that we need to question our basic assumptions about the body's needs.

If you think I am exaggerating the message of the Course here, listen to the next sentence:

It needs no complicated structures of defense, no health-inducing medicine, no care and no concern at all (3).

“No care and no concern at all.” That's pretty clear, isn't it? In the next lesson in the Workbook, 136, this thought is repeated in a slightly different way:

The body's health is fully guaranteed, because it is not limited by time, by weather or fatigue, by food and drink, or any laws you made it serve before (Workbook, p. 252–253; W-136.18:3).

Jesus was saying the same things 2000 years ago when he said,

Do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the air...your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:25–26, 32, NASV).

If you waste your time defending your body, trying to make it beautiful, and building walls to make it safe, all you are doing is declaring that it is your home, a home that is "open to the thief of time, corruptible and crumbling, so unsafe it must be guarded with your very life" (4).

6 That picture of your body and of yourself is definitely *fearful* (1). If you identify with your body, if you think your body is your home, *you cannot be at peace* (2). Not ever! How could you be peaceful when you are constantly threatened by everything that happens?

Yet what endowed the body with the right to serve you thus except your own belief? It is your mind which gave the body all the functions that you see in it, and

set its value far beyond a little pile of dust and water (3-4).

What gave the body its function? *Your mind*. Clearly, you don't believe this. You think the body and your relationship to it is a *fait accompli*, a given, something you have no choice about. It comes with the territory. One day you became conscious, and here you were, in this body, with no choice about it. You believe you *have to eat, have to breathe, have to brush your teeth, have to keep the body warm, clothe it, and so on*. Everybody told you that, and it took you years, as children, learning to do it right. You *still* don't do it right, all the time.

The Course is very clearly saying that your mind gave the body its functions (4), and your belief in it makes it seem real. The body is valuable to you only because you think it is. Apart from your belief, it is nothing but a pile of dust and water (4).

If we recognized that the body has no more value than a pile of dust and water we wouldn't be so caught up in defending it (5).

And yet again, I need to point out that the Course isn't telling us to stop taking care of our bodies. As we'll see, the Course expects us to go on taking care of it. It expects us to continue for some time to acknowledge the body as part of our experience in this world, even though it is not real, as we gradually shift into a realization that we are

not body, but spirit⁴. It doesn't ask us to instantly recognize that the body is as valueless as dust and water, but it does ask us to realize that whatever value the body seems to have to us is something that we are giving to it, not something it has inherently.

The Course often presents truth in this general pattern. It says, "Here you are now, Position A. This is the way you look at things, and it is wholly off base, a completely illusory or delusional point of view. And here is the truth, Position Z, at the opposite pole. This is what you will come to realize one day. For now, however, I am asking you, not to take Position Z, but to be willing to move in that direction. Don't worry about Z, just be willing to move from A to B. I am suggesting a compromise approach, a middle-of-the-road position that will get you moving in the right direction."⁵

The Course will ask you, in regard to the body, to stop making the body the center of your attention, to realize that you give the body all its purpose, and on that basis,

⁴ See, for instance, Text, p. 20; T-2.IV.3:8-11: "The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world. Its abilities can be and frequently are overevaluated. However, it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial."

⁵ "He need merely learn how to approach it; to be willing to go in its direction. He need merely trust that, if God's Voice tells him it is a lesson he can learn, he can learn it" (Manual, p. 36; M-14.4:5-6).

you can give it a different purpose. If you listen and begin to use the body for this different purpose, eventually you will be free from the body. The Course isn't asking you to suddenly become free of the body; it is asking you to move in that direction.

7 The change of direction can start by realizing that “the body is in need of no defense” (1). This isn't a minor point, it is the major point, because Jesus adds: “This cannot be too often emphasized” (2). We have to recognize this runs counter to our every instinct. And yet if we think about it, this is obviously one of the primary lessons of the Crucifixion: Jesus did not bother, not in the slightest, to defend his body.

Jesus knew that he was not his body. He wasn't identified with it. What happened to it did not matter to him. It was far, far more important to care for his mind, to be “vigilant for God and His kingdom,” as Chapter 6 teaches us. The most important thing, to him, was to preserve his peace of mind, to maintain the constant, unbroken flow of God's Love through his heart. That flow of love is what makes you what you are, not your body.

If we get caught up defending our bodies, we are focusing on the wrong thing. The body has no problems unless the mind gives them to it.

The body, we are told, “will be strong and healthy” without any defense at all (3). It will be strong and healthy “if the mind does not abuse it by assigning it to roles it cannot fill, to purposes beyond its scope, and to exalted aims which it cannot accomplish” (3). Our weakness and sickness of body come about because we abuse the body. This doesn’t mean that we fail to exercise or eat the wrong food, although those things are symptoms of our abuse. To abuse the body means that we are trying to use the body for things it cannot provide. “Abuse” means “use incorrectly” or “use contrary to its natural function.”

For instance, what is going on when someone overeats, or indulges in too-rich foods, or gets drunk or takes drugs, or gets addicted to sexual pleasure? It starts with an inner discontent: some kind of boredom, a feeling of lack of peace, or lack of joy. Ultimately all of this traces back to the discord the soul felt in believing itself separate from God. That is your problem, and you are trying to use the body to resolve that problem. You are asking the body to make you happy through pleasure, or by chemically drowning out your call for help. The body simply can’t do it! You are “ab-using” it, misusing it, and that is why it gets sick.

Obsession with diet, exercise, or fasting for spiritual reasons is simply the reverse side of the coin. These

things may seem positive but may be motivated by our egos trying to fill that same inner discontent through physical means. Thus they can be another form of abuse, assigning to the body a role it cannot fill. You cannot use the body to solve problems that originate in the mind. And, all problems originate in the mind!

When someone engages in physical violence, the same thing is going on. A person feels some deep inner emptiness or lack, and is trying to *physically* fill that lack by attacking another person. That is abuse of the body. Using the body for anything other than an expression of love is an abuse of the body.

The Course is telling us that if we stop doing that, if we stop trying to force the body to make us happy, it will be strong and healthy.

Illness is some form of external searching. Health is inner peace (Text, p. 15; T-2.I.5:10–11).

It is ridiculous, Jesus says, to expect the body to fill a purpose beyond its scope, to make the mind happy (4). The body can't affect the mind at all; it is the mind that affects the body. Yet you *deeply cherish* these attempts (4). Your defenses are precious to you, and the thought of letting go of them is met with panic. You struggle to care for the body, to preserve it, to keep it flexible and resilient and free from wrinkles, yet it keeps getting older and weaker.

These insane attempts to misuse the body are the reason you wind up attacking it! You ask the body to do something it cannot do. Naturally, it fails. It doesn't meet your needs. Eating everything in sight fails to make you happy; sleeping with everyone who appeals to you fails to make you happy; beating up on people fails to make you happy. Despite your best efforts the body continues to age. So you get angry at the body and you literally attack it (4,5). That is what sickness is, self-attack turned against the body.

To sum up these last thoughts, what happens is this:

- We seek happiness through the body, in some way.
- We cannot find happiness that way and are bitterly disappointed when the body seems to let us down.
- We therefore attack the body to punish its failure.
- The body gets sick as a result of our mind's attack.

Therefore, the body does not need to be defended to be strong and healthy. All that is required for strength and health is for our minds to stop abusing the body, to stop trying to use it to achieve happiness.

8 In defending the body you think you are defending your "self." But, Jesus says, this "self" that needs protection is not real" (1). The body is not your self, and your real Self needs no protection.

Jesus is trying to drive a wedge into your identification with the body. He is trying to get you to dissociate your “self” from the body. Your concept of the self, which is “me in a body,” is an incorrect concept. He tells us:

The body...need merely be perceived as quite apart from you...(2).

Your body is not you. It is a tool you use, and that is all. It is the clothing you wear in this world, nothing more than that. And like a piece of clothing, you keep it clean, you keep it serviceable, but when it is worn out, you can discard it with no further thought (2).

Instead of thinking of yourself as “me in a body” you need to begin thinking of yourself as *quite apart from the body*. You existed before the body began and you will continue to exist when the body, that little pile of dust, is a pile no longer, dispersed in the wind.

If you can do that, he says, the body will be taken care of automatically. Your mind will take all the care of it that is necessary to make it “a healthy, serviceable instrument through which the mind can operate until its usefulness is over” (2). Without your insane attempts to misuse it, and your anger turned against it when it fails to meet your purposes, there will be no sickness. And when you no longer need it, when it is no longer useful to you, when your purpose for being here in the world (which is

simply healing) is over, why would you want to keep it any longer? (3)

9 When you defend your body you are attacking your mind (1). That is what the title of the lesson means in saying, “If I defend myself I am attacked.” By identifying yourself with the body and defending it, you have identified your “self” with all the weakness and frailty of the body.

For you have seen in it [the mind] the faults, the weaknesses, the limits and the lacks from which you think the body must be saved (2).

When you do that, you cannot “see the mind as separate from bodily conditions” (3). In other words, you cannot conceive of the idea that when your body is in some distress, your mind could be at peace. You cannot imagine being hungry and happy at the same time. If your mind is identified with your body, there is absolutely no way you can be at peace and filled with joy and love all the time. The only way for that to be possible is if you come to understand that your mind is “separate from bodily conditions.”

And having “made” the mind as limited and fragile (4) as the body, you will feel intense psychic pain. You will feel a horror of death and dissolution—the fear of non-being. And you will impose that pain on the body (4) in

the form of illness. You will feel the gut-wrenching aloneness of being a separated body, cut off from God and from your brothers, cut off from your Source.

10 These are the thoughts in need of healing...(1).

It is not the body that needs to be defended. It is not the body that needs to be healed. The body is the idea of separation given form. When you identify your self with your body in any way, you have placed the mind at the mercy of the body, sharing the body's vulnerability. It is these *thoughts of separation* that need healing. Heal these thoughts, "and the body will respond with health when they have been corrected and replaced with truth" (1). The only real way to "defend" the body is to correct the thoughts of separation, replacing them with truth (2).

Yet is this where you look for its defense? (3)

Remember the little outline Jesus gave before? "...*what* you defend, and *how*, and *against what*?" (3:5) He's been discussing the "what you defend" part, and, as we've seen, it is the body. Now he addresses the question of "how" you defend it. The only real way to defend the body, he says, is to heal the thoughts of separation. Is that how you normally try to do it? Hardly.

What you do, he says, is to offer the body “protection of a kind from which it gains no benefit at all, but merely adds to your distress of mind” (4). In other words, you try to use physical means of defense, means that are as flimsy as the body itself. This includes medicines, better diets, health care, safer and more comfortable homes, locks on your doors, and, of course, making plans. And as we’ve seen, every such defense just reminds you of your fear and makes the fear real, so that instead of protecting the body the defenses actually add to the real problem, “your distress of mind.” This is not healing but its opposite. Rather than healing, external defenses take away all hope of healing because they direct all your attention away from the mind, “where hope must lie if it be meaningful” (5).

1 1 The focus of the lesson now turns to a particular form of defense. We have already been told that when we attempt to plan for the future, we are defending our bodies. We are seeing a threat, believing it is real, and imagining that a physical defense, a “plan for the future,” can be effective against the threat we perceive. Now Jesus tells us that:

A healed mind does not plan (1).

This does not mean that a healed mind does not *follow* a plan. It follows a plan; it just doesn’t *make* the plan.

A Healed Mind Does Not Plan

It [a healed mind] carries out the plans it receives through listening to Wisdom that is not its own (2).

In simple language, the healed mind listens to the Holy Spirit and does what He directs, instead of listening to the ego's plans, which are always based on fear and take a defensive posture. The ego's plans are always trying to protect and preserve the body; often, the plans of the Holy Spirit seem to be unconcerned about the body at all. The Holy Spirit has very different priorities.

When the Course is talking about "a healed mind" it is talking about the goal of the Course—the state your mind will be in after you graduate from the Course. This isn't something you simply step into after reading a few lessons; this is what you will be like after working with the Course and completely integrating it into your life.

We are urged over and over in the Course to listen to the Holy Spirit and to accept His plan in place of all our plans, but it is equally plain that this is not a simple thing to do. We can expect to spend most of our lives learning to listen "to Wisdom that is not [our] own" and carrying out the plans we receive. At the beginning, it is very hard to tell the difference between our own plans and those of the Holy Spirit. Learning the difference is exactly what we are *learning*. And mostly, we learn by making a lot of mistakes. Mistakes are nothing to be guilty about. If we make mistakes in listening to the Holy Spirit, we are still

moving in the right direction. Guilt over mistakes and fear of making them are just more ways we use to avoid learning to listen.

So let's listen a bit to what "a healed mind" looks like and how it behaves in this world. This is our goal. If, in reading this, you have thoughts like, "But I don't know how to do this!" or "I don't understand how to distinguish the Voice of the Holy Spirit from my own ideas," that's good. You are recognizing that you need to learn, and that should make you willing to be taught.

The healed mind does not rush into things. "It waits until it has been taught what should be done, and then proceeds to do it" (3). Some old-time Christian saints used to talk about "waiting on God." It means recognizing that you can do nothing on your own, that you are not in charge; like a soldier waits for orders, a healed mind *waits* for direction. In the Gospels Jesus said, "The Son can do nothing of himself" (John 5:19, NASV). He knew what waiting on God was. He didn't act on his own initiative; he waited until he heard a Wisdom not his own, and once he heard it, he proceeded to act on it.

The healed mind does not depend on itself for its plans (4); it depends on its Guide. The healed mind *does* depend on itself, but not for anything "except its adequacy to fulfill the plans assigned to it" (4). Our mind

is not capable of formulating reliable plans, but it is capable of carrying out the plans received from the Holy Spirit. If He guides us to do something, it is something we are capable of doing.

In following guidance you must always be aware, especially at the beginning, that you are unskilled in discerning the Holy Spirit's voice. You are going to make mistakes. You are going to think you hear Him when you are really hearing yourself. You are going to hear Him, but hear Him imperfectly or incompletely. You have to constantly remain open to "course correction." Listening, then acting, then being corrected and listening some more, changing direction...that is how we learn guidance, like a guided missile.

A missile does not fly straight as an arrow at its target. It starts off, turns left, turns right, goes up a little, down a little, over-steering most of the time. Perhaps 99% of the time the missile is *not* pointed at the target, but a little off course. It keeps listening and correcting, listening and correcting, until finally, "Boom!" It hits the target. That is the way you must listen for guidance, constantly listening for course corrections.

The healed mind is unconcerned about obstacles. How can obstacles stand in the way of the master plan, the Will of God? (5) The plan of the Holy Spirit is never for

your good alone, but always “for the good of everyone” (5).

12 The healed mind is at peace because it is not burdened with the thought that it must plan (1). When I am faced with a problem and think that it is up to me to figure out how to solve it, I can feel *overwhelmed* even before I get a chance to feel “whelmed!” This world is far too complex for any one individual to be able to figure out how to get through it alive; in fact, none of us do! You can’t know what the optimal outcome is. Even if you knew the best outcome, you can’t know the best way to achieve that outcome. You can’t even define the problem you’re trying to solve! (1) Trying to run your life under these circumstances literally wears you down to nothing; letting go of that burden is an incredible relief.

Until you recognize that you *can’t* plan, that you are simply not capable of it, you will inevitably misuse the body in the plans you make (2). This is one reason we all get tired and sick so often; we’re trying to do too much. We’re trying to do the impossible. More than this, as paragraph 7 has pointed out, when the body fails to keep us safe and happy, we turn on it in anger and attack it psychically. That is the real source of sickness.

One of the things that makes a healed mind “healed” is that it has stopped doing this (3). It has recognized its limits and has accepted that it simply *cannot* make adequate plans. It has given up trying to make its own plans, and has accepted the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It has stopped misusing the body, has let the body go (3), and has relaxed.

13 When the unhealed mind is the planner, the body is in slavery to it. The ego’s plans all revolve around protecting the body, as we’ve seen. This enslavement makes the body sick (1). The body is not free to be of service to God; it is too busy trying to take care of itself (2). But the plan of the Holy Spirit is a larger plan, “a plan that far exceeds its [the body’s] own protection” (2). The plan of the Holy Spirit is not all that concerned with preserving the body; it has much greater goals in mind. Yet the Holy Spirit’s plan “needs its [the body’s] service for a little while” (2).

The Love of God, for a little while, must still be expressed through one body to another, because vision is still so dim. (Text, p. 12; T-1.VII.2:3)

We are trapped in our illusion of physical bodies; the eyes of the body cannot see reality because the body was made to validate the reality of separateness. We cannot see the Love of God with our eyes, so that Love must be

expressed through bodies for a little while, until our vision has been restored.

In this capacity [in service of His plan] is health assured. For everything the mind employs for this will function flawlessly, and with the strength that has been given it and cannot fail (3,4).

Because the plan of the Holy Spirit needs your body “for a little while,” when your mind completely accepts that plan as its own, your mind will keep your body healthy. Not because the body itself is important, but because the purpose for which He can use it is important. When the mind uses the body for attack and defense, it becomes sick; when the mind uses the body to fulfill the Holy Spirit’s plan of healing, it becomes healthy.

Yet bodies have no goal. Purpose is of the mind. And minds can change as they desire. What they are, and all their attributes, they cannot change. But what they hold as purpose can be changed, and body states must shift accordingly. Of itself the body can do nothing. See it as means to hurt, and it is hurt. See it as means to heal, and it is healed (Text, p. 472; T-24.IV.2:5–11).

We can infer, then, that a part of His plan will involve things like caring for the body, feeding it, and keeping it healthy. Not for the sake of the body itself, not out of any fear that if the body is destroyed we are destroyed, but because He needs it, in this world, to carry out His plan of redemption. Like a blackboard in a school, the body is

a learning device, a communication device, and a teaching device—nothing more. For the school, the blackboard is essential; for this world, which is also a school, the body is essential. Therefore you care for it; you keep it serviceable. But you don't try to take the blackboard with you when you leave the school! When you have learned what is to be learned, communicated what is to be communicated, and taught what is to be taught, you leave it behind.

The reason your body does not function flawlessly (4) is that you are trying to use it for your own purposes, to fulfill your own plans. You are using it lovelessly and selfishly. When you stop trying to plan your own life and let Him plan for you, and use your body for His plan, *health is assured*. When the body is used for the ego's goals of attack and defense, the attack inevitably turns against the body. When we free our minds from attack thoughts, and see the body only as a means to heal, the body is healed.

14 Jesus now turns again to the topic of “making plans.” He acknowledges that it is not easy to see that making plans is a form of defense (1,4) and that, furthermore, the *purpose* behind our making of plans is the same purpose shared by all defenses (1): to make illusions seem real. So He

spends a little time now helping us to see those two things: Making plans is a form of defense, and the purpose of our plans is to make illusions seem real.

I think the use of the phrase “self-initiated plans” is of interest here, first of all. It isn’t plans in general He is calling a form of defense; it is your *self-initiated* plans. You are not being asked to give up plans. You are being asked to give up being the *plan maker*. This is exactly paralleled in the section we’ll look at toward the end of the booklet about decision making. There, it is very clear that you are not told to abandon all decision-making; you are told to *make no decisions alone*. The purpose of the Course in this emphasis is to get us back into communication with the Holy Spirit, and through Him as our communication link, into communication with God our Creator. The problem isn’t plans or decisions. The problem is our *independent* plans and decisions.

All defenses, including our plans, says Jesus, are the tools of our frightened minds to protect themselves at the cost of truth (2). A frightened mind is a mind that has identified with the weakness of the body. The mind that knows its union with God has no fear. So we are talking here about an attempt to preserve our illusion of separation at the expense of the knowledge of our reality. It is the body-mind, the ego-body identity, which we are protecting.

We can easily see that many of our defenses fit that pattern (3). If we are in a panic because we are fearing nuclear attack, we are obviously denying that we have a Self that survives physical death. But it isn't always easy to see that just making our own plans, independently of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, follows that same pattern of denial of our reality (3). So the next paragraphs will explain in more detail why that is so.

15 “The mind engaged in planning for itself is occupied in setting up control of future happenings” (1).

That is what *our* plans are all about: control. We are convinced that unless we make the arrangements, we won't be provided for (2). As Jesus said earlier, we operate from the belief that we have to protect ourselves from what is happening. We think the world is inimical, and it is up to us to protect ourselves. We plan in order to be in control. We are operating from the basis of seeing ourselves as alone against the world. That image of ourselves is an attack on the truth about our Self. This shows how planning is an attempt to preserve the illusion of separation at the expense of the truth of our reality.

When we first start thinking about getting plans from the Holy Spirit, we may just think in terms of better

plans; we may be asking for His plans because we see a threat in the future and think maybe now we can use Him to control it for us. We have defined the problem and now want Him to answer, to meet our needs as we see them. That doesn't work.

When we think we are on our own and responsible for our own protection, our whole emphasis starts leaning on the future (3). We figure that since the future hasn't happened yet we still have a shot at decently controlling it. We apply our learning and experience, obtained from the past, hoping that *this time* we will be able to control things. So we drag along the past and plan for the future, overlooking the present, overlooking the state of our minds right now while we are doing all this worrying and planning (4).

16 When you make your own plans you are “refusing to allow for change” (1). Why? Because change always happens in the *present*. When you try to plan for yourself you are, in the present, maintaining and reinforcing the very state of mind that constitutes your real problem: the thought that you are on your own. That state of mind *is* the ego: “The ego is the mind’s belief that it is completely on its own” (Text, p. 53; T-4.II.8:4). Your state of mind is what needs healing, your mental distress, your sense of separation.

And engaging in making plans to try to control the future is just perpetuating that mental distress, not healing it.

Making your own plans causes you to draw on experience from the past, and on that basis, attempt to choose your future (2,3). The past determines the future, and you entirely overlook the present moment. In doing that you fail to notice that “here and now is everything it [the mind] needs to guarantee a future quite unlike the past, without a continuity of any old ideas and sick beliefs” (4).

Here and now, in the present, is the only time you can exercise choice. Here and now is the only time you can alter your state of mind and let go of the fear that has been running you all your life. If you were to focus on the present state of your mind, and on the healing of that present state of mind, you would not be trying to anticipate the future and basing your actions on your interpretation of past experiences. You would be filled with a “present confidence” and that state of mind, that *peace* of mind, would direct your path (5).

I am learning, when I am confronted with what seems to me to be the need to make plans or decisions, to take care of the present before I try to take care of the future. If my mind is dominated by fear, how can I expect my plans or decisions to be good ones? The first priority as I now see it is *peace of mind*.

Instead of thinking “I must plan this carefully so that I can be at peace and not worry about it,” I have begun to realize that the exact opposite is true. “I must be at peace so I can know what to do.” Panic does not lead to intelligent choices! Instead of believing that I have to be in control of the external situation in order to be at peace, I realize that I have to be at peace in order to respond appropriately to the external situation. First, take care of the peace. First, let your mind be healed. When you are at peace, you will know what to do.

To have your mind healed and to be at peace, you need to remind yourself that you have an infallible Guide. You need to link up with the Holy Spirit, or to “take Jesus’ hand,” as many of us picture it.

17 And now we have reached the third point of that three-point outline. The first two were: 1) *What* you are defending; and, 2) *how* you are defending it. The last point is: 3) What you are defending it *against*.

What are you defending? The body. How? By trying to defend it with your plans, your efforts to control the physical world. And what are you defending *against*? You are defending your little self *against the truth*. “Defenses are the plans you undertake to make against the truth” (1).

That certainly is not your conscious intent. You seem to be defending yourself against bodily harm (for the most part) or death. But Jesus wants to strip away that layer of self-deception and have you look at what the “real” threat is: the truth. What truth? The truth about yourself, the truth of who you really are.

For it is your reality that is the “threat” which your defenses would attack, obscure, and take apart and crucify (4).

The purpose of your plans for the future, and of all your defenses, is “to select what you approve, and disregard what you consider incompatible with your beliefs of your reality” (2). You are defending your ego-body, the idea of “me in a body.” You have a certain image of “self” and of what you are, and you are trying to preserve that image. Plans are made to accept what is compatible with that image, and to reject what is incompatible with it. Your image of “self” is tied in with the body, so your plans reject anything that is incompatible with the body. What is left after that rejection is meaningless (3). In rejecting anything incompatible with your beliefs about yourself, you are rejecting the truth of what you are. The ego has tricked you into defending its own picture of yourself, instead of your reality. Therefore, the truth—the reality of what you are—has become the ultimate threat (4).

For instance, most of us would agree that bodily death is “incompatible” with our reality. Therefore death seems to be the ultimate threat. And yet, if we are not really our body, physical death may not be incompatible with our reality at all! It may be no more meaningful than taking off your shoes at night. Because we have such a limited and false view of what we are, anything that hints at something different becomes a threat, and we reject it.

Your defenses, then, are the ego’s attempt to prevent you from remembering your Self. The ego has convinced you that defenses are for your own good; in fact, they are an attack on your reality, which the ego is trying to hide from you. Defenses, and making plans, do not simply reject the idea of your real Self; they “attack, obscure, and take apart and crucify” (4) your reality. Making plans is one of the forms of the ego’s vicious and unrelenting attack on the Christ in you.

18 There is no real threat to our reality; our reality cannot be threatened.

Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists (Text, Introduction; T-Int.2.2–3).

If that is the truth, then you are rejecting a lot of things in your life that are really meant for your good because you perceive them as threats to your false self-image, which is bound up in the body.

A Healed Mind Does Not Plan

What could you not accept, if you but knew that everything that happens, all events, past, present, and to come, are gently planned by One Whose only purpose is your good? (1)

Here is the remedy. Not to make plans, but to realize that Someone Else has been making plans for you all along, plans that are *only* for your good.

If you knew that *everything that has ever happened, everything that happens now, and everything that will ever happen* is for your good, would you continue to be fearful? Of course not! Would you need to plan so obsessively, trying to control what events you will allow in your life? Of course not!

Let yourself think about this statement for a while. What state would your mind be in if you believed this? What could possibly disturb your peace if you believed this? Your mind would be utterly at peace, wholly joyous, serene, free of fear, and totally secure.

The problem is that in our separated identity, while we may have some inkling that Someone is making plans for us, we perceive His plans as a threat! We are convinced that “doing God’s will” means sacrifice, suffering, and the loss of everything we hold dear. We are sure that His will is quite different from our own.

The only reason—the *only* reason—you are not utterly at peace, wholly joyous, serene, free of fear, and totally secure is that you are trying, with your defenses, to hold

on to your false image of your self. You are refusing to recognize your connection with God; you are refusing to recognize that “One Whose only purpose is your good.”

Jesus says that “perhaps” you have misunderstood the plan of the Holy Spirit, “Whose only purpose is your good” (2). As Ken Wapnick often says in regard to similar passages, Jesus is being kind. You have misunderstood His plan. You have thought He was offering you pain, calling on you to sacrifice something, but He would never do that (2). You have indeed misunderstood His plan. You have feared it, because it seems to threaten that image you have of yourself, and it *does* threaten that image; but it does not threaten your reality.

Because you’ve been defending that little self-image (the ego) you have not been able to see “His loving blessing...in every step you ever took” (3). The blessing is always there, but you have been blinded to it. You have “made plans for death,” He says (4). The body is going to die, so every plan you’ve made supporting the image of “me in a body” is a plan for death! You’ve actually been attacking your Self while thinking you were defending your “self.” The ego *wants* you to die because it would “prove” you are a body, and therefore that you are the ego. The Holy Spirit, in “everything that happens” (1), is leading you “gently to eternal life” (4).

Life that is eternal, as I think anyone can see, *must* lead you beyond the body; it must leave the body behind, eventually, because—whatever else the body may be—the body is not eternal.

Every time you try to plan for the future—with “you” being the planner, rather than accepting God’s plan—you are attacking your real Self, and you are seeing the truth about yourself as a threat. “When I defend myself I am attacked.” Paraphrasing that, it could read, “When my separated mind makes plans in defense of my ego-body, I am seeing myself as under attack by my True Self.”

19 The only reliable defense is your “present trust in Him” (1). The phrase “present trust” is used twice in this paragraph; in paragraph 21 the phrase “present confidence” appears, as it did at the end of paragraph 16. Trust and confidence are not things you do; they are a state of mind, and it is this state of mind the lesson is aimed at fostering in us. It is this state of mind that is your best defense, and your best guide for the future. Rather than fear and panic, induced by trying to care for yourself all by yourself, you can come to a state of trust and confidence if you remember Who is with you, Who is guiding your life.

You are being asked—gradually, gently—to stop defending your body and your separate identity. You are

being asked to lay down all defenses but your trust in the Holy Spirit. This is the only defense that

...promises a future undisturbed, without a trace of sorrow, and with joy that constantly increases, as this life becomes a holy instant, set in time, but heeding only immortality (1).

All you need do now is to begin to move in that direction. From a life consisting mostly of “hellish instants” you begin by allowing a holy instant here and there. You notice that feeling of terror striking at your heart, and you bring yourself into the presence of the Holy Spirit, giving the situation into His hands, and reaffirming your trust in Him. Gradually, more and more of life is filled with holy instants, until finally, “life becomes a holy instant” (1). When you are there, you will have attained what the Course calls “the real world.”

We pointed out above that trust and confidence represent a state of mind. The real world is that same state of mind: “The real world is the state of mind in which the only purpose of the world is seen to be forgiveness” (Text, p. 590; T-30.V.1:1). In this state of mind, we rest in trust and confidence because it promises

“A future undisturbed” — perfect peace;
“Without a trace of sorrow” — perfect

happiness;

“Joy that constantly increases” — perfect joy (1).

A life such as this heeds only immortality (1); concerns with *mortality*, the possibility of death, have no part in it. You exist “in time” but you are not part of time. You have come to identify with your eternal, immortal self. The temporary shell in which you exist in this world is of little concern, significant only for its usefulness in fulfilling God’s Plan.

Let no defenses but your present trust direct the future, and this life becomes a meaningful encounter with the truth that only your defenses would conceal (2).

Give up all your defenses. They are hiding the truth. All that they are doing is attacking the reality of what your Self really is. As you give up your defenses all of life will become “a meaningful encounter with the truth” (2). The truth is always present, but your defenses conceal it from you (2). When you stop generating the defenses, you won’t need to seek for truth. You will see the loving blessing in everything that happens. You will be without fear, because you have stopped generating and sustaining your fear with all those defenses.

20 When you abandon your defenses, you become Heaven’s light in the world (1). You

become a reflector or transmitter of the light of Heaven. Everyone has experienced this at one time or another. Just being around someone who is calm and peaceful in the midst of a crisis induces calm in everyone around them. Your peace of mind, your present trust and confidence, will remind others of the same light in their own minds.

The light of Heaven, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, will “lead you” into perfect happiness (2), which is God’s Will for you (Lesson 101); that is the primary goal of the Spirit’s guidance. His leading is primarily “in ways appointed for your happiness” (2), which is, again, a state of mind. External guidance, related to things of this world, is significant only as it relates to that primary goal, that state of mind.

The guidance you receive won’t be limited just to the span of your physical life. You will be led “according to the ancient plan, begun when time was born” (2). The phrase “when time was born” refers, of course, to the moment in which separation seemed to become real. The instant separation entered the mind of God’s Son, God answered with the Atonement. The ancient plan is the Atonement principle. It healed the rift before it had a chance to happen. That plan of forgiveness governs all your guidance. You literally become part of the

Atonement, and join with Jesus in the great crusade to undo the error of separation.

When you have been restored to the recognition of your original state, you naturally become part of the Atonement yourself. As you share my unwillingness to accept error in yourself and others, you must join the great crusade to correct it (Text, p. 6; T-1.III.1:5-6).

You will be led, therefore, in ways that fulfill God's plan to reconcile all things to Himself; you will be led in ways of healing and forgiveness. You will become part of God's plan for salvation. You will extend God's love and light to others, inviting them into the circle of Atonement with you (Text, p. 262; T-14.V).

This is why Jesus speaks of "your followers" (3). In other words, in accepting the Atonement for yourself, you have become a teacher of God, extending the light to others. The followers will join their light with yours, "and it will be increased until the world is lighted up with joy" (3). When you lay down your defensive armor, others around you will be inspired to do the same thing, gladly (4), because they realize that their defenses "availed them nothing and could only terrify" (4). The picture the Course paints here and in many other places is a gradual awakening of the world, a spreading of the light, a kind of holy infection. It all starts with *you* being willing to lay down your defenses, including your obsessive planning for the future. Paradoxically, if you

stop trying to plan for and control the future, the future will be “lighted up with joy” (3).

21 You can “anticipate that time today with present confidence” (1). That should be your attitude about the future; present confidence.

Not because you have carefully planned and controlled it as best you know how, but because you have *abandoned* your plans and given your life into God’s care. You are calm because of your present trust in Him. You are confident because you know that peace, happiness, and salvation are “part of what was planned for us” (1). If God is planning for a future lighted up with joy, He will certainly give you today everything you need to accomplish that goal (2).

If we contrast this phrase with the sentence at the end of paragraph 16 which contains the previous mention of “present confidence,” we will see something interesting. Before, Jesus said, “Anticipation plays no part at all, for present confidence directs the way.” Yet here he says we *can* anticipate that time when the world is lighted up with joy with present confidence. He rules out our kind of anticipation and yet urges us to anticipate God’s final salvation of the world.

When we make plans we always try to anticipate all that might go wrong, and erect defenses against it. That is

the kind of anticipation we do not need. Jesus asks us instead to anticipate the perfect outcome, which is guaranteed by God.⁶ We already know the ending of the story so, though things may look dark now, we can sit back, relax, and enjoy the show.

You don't have to make plans to accomplish it (3). You don't have to figure out how to make it happen. Instead, you realize that all that is required is your *defenselessness* (3), your present trust in God. If you let go of the illusions of threat and defense, you don't have to do anything for the "truth to dawn" upon you; the truth will dawn upon you of itself.

The idea is this: If you will take care of your mind by ignoring its panic, its cries of "You have to *do something!*", if you will bring your mind to the Holy Spirit and let yourself trust Him, if you will realize that you are here to fulfill God's plan of Atonement—to be healed and to heal—and not for any plans of your own, then the Holy Spirit will take care of everything else. Out of that state of peace the perfect plan will simply unfold.

In the process of editing this booklet, Robert Perry said at this point: "I also found it interesting that enlightenment and the perfect orchestration of our temporal affairs *both* come upon us in the same way—we

⁶ "The outcome is as certain as God" (Text, p. 18; T-2.III.3:10). "The goal is inevitable because it is eternal" (Text, p. 204; T-12.II.5:6).

just stop blocking them.” Indeed, that principle runs through everything the Course says. We are healed when we stop misusing our bodies. We don’t need to seek for love; we just need to seek for and remove all the barriers we have erected against it. We need do nothing to obtain the positive because it is already present; all that we need to do is to stop doing what blocks it from our awareness.

22 We now come to the specific practice of this lesson. Notice that the lesson does not ask us to immediately abandon all plans, to radically transform our lives. It begins with “fifteen minutes twice today” in which “we rest from senseless planning, and from every thought that blocks the truth from entering our minds” (1). We start, in other words, with short practice periods. We aren’t ready yet to pattern our entire lives on what has been said. Given the state of our minds, to attempt to do so would induce incredible panic and fear. So we take it in easy doses. We don’t try to jump from “A” to “Z” but we simply move from “A” to “B.” We practice not planning for fifteen minutes, twice a day. During those fifteen minutes we think about God and His plan for us, and we brush aside any thoughts of defensiveness. We “receive instead of plan” (2). We open ourselves to the Holy Spirit to receive His plan. We “receive instead of plan, that we may give instead of

organize” (2). Instead of trying to organize or control people around us, we extend our love to them, we give to them. During that fifteen minutes, we consciously remind ourselves:

*If I defend myself I am attacked. But in defenselessness
I will be strong, and I will learn what my defenses hide
(4,5).*

When you allow yourself to lift your defenses, then what the defenses are hiding (5)—your true Self—will become visible to you. You will know yourself as Love. You will know your Identity is not bound up in a body or in time, but is eternal and invulnerable. You will encounter the truth, the truth about your Self.

The more you do this, the more the experience of those 15-minute practice periods will extend into your days. As you experience a holy instant in those practice periods, that will extend until your entire life becomes a single holy instant (19:1).

23 And that’s it. “Nothing but that” (1). You don’t strive to find the truth; you just stop doing what has been hiding it. You just stop being so defensive. You stop trying to plan the future, activate the past, or organize the present. You settle back into an attitude of *trust*, and that is all. “Nothing but that.”

If there are plans to make, you will be told of them (2).

Jesus recognizes that, in this world, plans are necessary. You can't even meet someone for lunch without planning. You can't get to work on time without planning. But if plans are needed, "you will be told of them." You won't *make* the plans, you will *receive* them. To repeat: The main idea is that you stop planning *alone, by yourself for yourself*. You won't be preoccupied with serving your own individual interests and well-being; you will be serving the larger Plan of God.

You will still do many of the same things you've always done, but you won't be doing them thinking all the time that the world is a hostile place from which you have to protect yourself. You won't be constantly reinforcing your fears with defenses. You won't be constantly defending your ego-body self. Instead, you will do whatever you do as an ambassador of Heaven whose only function is healing. You will be filled with confidence and trust because you know you have the perfect Guide.

Because you are not following *your* plans any more, the plans you receive "may not be the plans you thought were needed, nor indeed the answers to the problems which you thought confronted you" (3). When you think you are in charge, when you are defining what your problems are and looking for answers to those problems,

you overlook the plans the Holy Spirit is trying to give you. He does not have the same concerns you have! Your little problems may be totally ignored because there are larger concerns. You may receive guidance from Him that seems to have nothing to do with “you” as you think of yourself. These plans are based on the Holy Spirit’s total and complete knowledge, not just your limited understanding. Sometimes you will be guided to do certain things and have no idea why.

These plans “are answers to another kind of question, which remains unanswered yet in need of answering until the Answer comes to you at last” (4). In other words, the Holy Spirit is answering your only real problem, which is the problem of separation (Workbook, p. 139; W-79.1.4). Your concern may be paying the rent; His concern is always teaching you the peace of God.

24 Your defenses, your plans, motivated by the ego, are all “aimed at not receiving what you will receive today” (1). They seem to be for your protection, but what they are really protecting against is the knowledge of your own reality as God’s creation, God’s eternal Son.

When you get in touch with the reality of what you are—when you realize that you *are* this, you *have always been* this, and you *will forever be* this—you will relax “in

the light and joy of simple trust” (2). There is a line in the Bible I have always liked that expresses this well: “...casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you” (I Peter 5:7, NASB). One translation puts it, “casting all your care upon Him, because you are His concern.” If you are God’s creation and God’s Son, engaged in carrying out His plan, taking care of you is His business, not yours.⁷

When you grasp this about yourself, “you will but wonder why you ever thought that you must be defended from release” (2). When you are in your right mind, you literally will not be able to understand what you were thinking before! “What on earth was I doing?” is all you will be able to ask yourself about it. “Why was I so defensive? What was I afraid of?”

From where we stand now, fear sometimes still seems reasonable. It seems like we are being asked to give up an awful lot when we are asked to stop making plans and to stop defending ourselves, to stop looking out for our individual interests, to stop all care and concern about our bodies. But “Heaven asks nothing” (3). Heaven isn’t

⁷ The Course quotes this Bible verse in the very context of planning, in Chapter 5: “Do you really believe you can plan for your safety and joy better than He can? You need be neither careful nor careless; you need merely cast your cares upon Him because He careth for you. You are His care because He loves you” (Text, p. 82; T-5.VII.1:3–5).

trying to take anything away from you. It is trying to give you everything!

There is a story that is told about how to catch a monkey. You get a heavy ceramic jar with a narrow neck, and you put some monkey food in it. The monkey smells it, reaches inside and grabs the food, and then discovers that he can't get his closed fist out of the neck of the pot. The monkey is so stupid and so concerned about that little piece of food that you can walk right up to it and capture it because it won't let go of the food. That is exactly the picture of us! We are holding on to our little piece of flesh, refusing to let it go, and because of our narrow focus we lose our entire life.

Heaven asks nothing. Hell, on the other hand, is what demands sacrifice (4). You are sacrificing your whole Self in trying to preserve your fleeting and illusory existence in this world. When you give yourself to God, when, undefended, you present yourself to Him as you really are, you give up nothing (5).

25 “He has remembered you. Today we will remember Him” (1,2). While you may have forgotten God and forgotten your origins in Him, He has not forgotten you. His gifts to you are still offered constantly. That “ancient plan” for your good has been in effect since “time was born” (20:2). While you scurried about making your little plans that led to your

own death, “He led you gently to eternal life” (18:4). His care and concern for you has never faltered. And despite your best efforts to the contrary, His plan is still working. He has remembered you. Take time, today and each day, to remember Him.

In a sense you could sum up this entire lesson in two words: “Remember God.” When confronted with what seems to need some planning on your part, remember God. Start to form a new habit of communicating with Him whenever “planning” comes up for you.

This is your Eastertime (3)—your time of resurrection, or of reawakening to the truth about yourself and about your Creator. The moment when you are willing to begin setting aside your plans in order to listen to His plan is the moment you begin to rise up out of the death you have manufactured for yourself and to rediscover the life that never ends. “You rise again from what was seeming death and hopelessness” (4).

It was only “seeming death,” not real death. Apart from God you produce nothing but illusions, and all death is illusion. And “hopelessness?” Yes. If you consider what you have been doing, it was hopeless. As the first paragraphs of the lesson said, if you consider what you were defending, and how, and against what, you will see the folly of what you have been doing. You will see how hopeless it was.

You were defending the body. The body cannot be defended. It is weak and frail and it will die. Hopeless.

You were defending it with your plans. But you can't know the best outcome, you can't know the best way to achieve your goals, and you can't even recognize the real problems (paragraph 12). On top of that, the very means you chose to use only reinforced the mental distress that was the cause of the problem. Hopeless.

And you were defending this shabby picture of your self, this ego-body separated from God and all creation, defending it *against* the truth about yourself! What are the odds of proving a lie, defending a falsehood, and establishing that the truth is not true? Hopeless.

You can choose, now, to put an end to this hopelessness. Begin just with a practice period. The light of hope can be reborn in you, if you are willing to "come without defense, to learn the part for you within the plan of God" (5). Instead of trying to figure out the best plan to preserve your miserable existence, you come asking, "What is my part in Your plan?" "What would You have me do? Where would You have me go? What would You have me say, and to whom?" (Workbook, p. 121; W-71.9:3-5) You "step back and let Him lead the way" (Lesson 155). You are still, and you listen to the truth (Lesson 106). You accept your part in God's plan (Lesson 98). You accept your function as healer and

savior of the world (Lessons 62, 99, 186 and others). You place the future in God's hands (Lesson 194). This is how hope is reborn.

How can your "little plans or magical beliefs" hold any attraction to you "when you have received your function from the Voice for God Himself?" (6)

The prayer at the end of Lesson 189 is appropriate here as well:

Father, we do not know the way to You. But we have called, and You have answered us. We will not interfere. Salvation's ways are not our own, for they belong to You. And it is unto You we look for them. Our hands are open to receive Your gifts. We have no thoughts we think apart from You, and cherish no beliefs of what we are, or Who created us. Yours is the way that we would find and follow. And we ask but that Your Will, which is our own as well, be done in us and in the world, that it become a part of Heaven now.
Amen (Workbook, p. 350; W-189.10).

26 The advice in this paragraph still seems so contrary to our typical way of thinking:

Try not to shape this day as you believe would benefit you most (1).

Imagine putting that saying on a wall plaque and hanging it in your office! People would think you were nuts.

Don't make plans and try to organize everything for your personal benefit, which is what we usually do. I'm so glad Jesus says "try!" It's as if he is saying, "I know you can't do this all at once, but try. Just try."

"For you cannot conceive of all the happiness that comes to you without your planning. Learn today" (2,3). All your planning has done nothing but block out the happiness which is God's Will for you. You can't even *conceive* of how happy you will be without plans! The Text says the same thing:

Once you accept His plan as the one function that you would fulfill, there will be nothing else the Holy Spirit will not arrange for you without your effort. He will go before you making straight your path, and leaving in the way no stones to trip on, and no obstacles to bar your way. Nothing you need will be denied you. Not one seeming difficulty but will melt away before you reach it. You need take thought for nothing, careless of everything except the only purpose you would fulfill. As that was given you, so will its fulfillment be. God's guarantee will hold against all obstacles, for it rests on certainty and not contingency. It rests on *you*. And what can be more certain than a Son of God?(Text, p. 404; T-20.IV.8.4-11)

You and I can begin today to learn this, by taking a few minutes to rest from all our planning, and to listen to His plan.

When you finally “take this giant stride” the whole world will move with you (4), or so it will seem. And it is a “giant stride,” a *big step*. The paragraph above from Chapter 20 is talking about what life is like when you have once and for all let go of all of your plans and taken His plan as *the one function you want to fulfill*. Every lesser goal has been abandoned. When that happens, the universe lines up to bless you. To the degree you give up your plans, your attempts to “shape this day as you believe would benefit you” (1), and take your part in His plan of extending peace in the world, you will have this experience today.

You’re not there yet. But you are in the learning process, and this is what you are learning. So as “foolish little things” pop up during the day and trigger your defense mechanisms, tempting you “to engage in weaving plans,” you can remind yourself of what you are learning (5). You can choose not to defend yourself—not to make plans—by saying:

This is my Eastertime. And I would keep it holy. I will not defend myself, because the Son of God needs no defense against the truth of his reality (6–8).

You have forgotten what it means to be in communication with your Creator. You have forgotten it almost completely. Your plans are one of the chief means of defense you have constructed against remembering

that communication. By letting go of the plans, you remind yourself that you are in communication with God. And once you learn that this is *all* you really want, everything else just falls into place.

So begin today. This day, and every day, set aside some time, fifteen minutes in the morning and again at night, to remember God. Forget your plans and remember Him. Ask Him what He wants you to do, not to meet what you think are your needs or to solve what you think are your problems, but what He wants you to do as your part in *His* plan.

And during the days, as things crop up that trigger your defenses and make you think you need to weave some plans, remember God. Realize that the fearful thoughts that motivate your planning are without meaning; there is nothing to fear. Remind yourself that “A happy outcome to all things is sure” (Workbook, p. 434; W-292, title). Trust Him. Remember how trustworthy He is, and allow yourself to fall back and relax in His hands. Give the situation to Him and trust Him to show you what to do, where to go, and what to say. Begin to remember your Self. You are the Son He loves.

Making Decisions

(The following comments are based on the Text of ACIM, Chapter 14, Section III, “The Decision for Guiltlessness”, pages 255–259 in the first edition, pages 274–278, second edition. All quotations are from this section unless otherwise noted.)

Let’s look now at some other passages from the Text that deal with something very similar to making plans: making decisions.

In regard to making decisions, the message of the Course seems to be this: You have developed a strongly ingrained habit of making decisions 1) by yourself and 2) with your own personal interests in mind. That habit is indicative of a mind that believes it is separate and on its own, i.e., the ego. To break this habit, you must make a concerted effort at consciously referring *every* decision to the Holy Spirit, beginning with conscious decisions, proceeding to decisions as yet unconscious, and continuing to do so until you have become so identified with the Voice of the Holy Spirit that His thoughts have become your own. Only then will listening to Him become effortless.

Learning to listen to the Holy Spirit in making your decisions is not a side issue. The Manual For Teachers calls it “the core of the curriculum” and “the essence of the Atonement” (Manual, p. 67; M-29.3:4–5). It is “the

way out of hell for you” (Manual, p. 67; M-29.3:11) because it undoes your separated consciousness.⁸

Guilt is a Signal You Need To Talk To the Holy Spirit

“All salvation is escape from guilt” (13:4). If anything you are considering doing brings up feelings of guilt, you need to talk with the Holy Spirit. His work is to undo everything that would obscure your innocence from your mind. Feeling guilty means by definition that you are looking at an illusion of some kind, because *you are innocent*. God created you innocent and you have not changed. So guilt must result from some sort of illusion, some incorrect thought about yourself. You are about to act as a separated being. When you choose without the Holy Spirit, choosing illusions rather than truth, the inevitable result is guilt, and whatever the illusion you choose, your choice will flow out of your unconscious attraction to guilt.

Because your mind is trained to think as a separated being, subject to guilt and fear, you need to listen to a different point of view, which is what the Holy Spirit represents. “Forget Him not and He will make every decision for you, for your salvation and the peace of God

⁸ Read Section 29 of the Manual, “As for the Rest...”, for a very useful discussion of this, especially the last half of paragraph 2 through the end of paragraph 5.

in you” (14:7). So the only way to avoid mixing in guilt with your decisions is to refer all your decisions to the Holy Spirit. “Your function here is only to decide against deciding what you want, in recognition that you do not know” (Text, p. 260; T-14.IV.5:2).

Get Into Communication With the Holy Spirit

The emphasis of the Course on following the Holy Spirit is very strong here. “You taught yourself the most unnatural habit of not communicating with your Creator” (18:1). Now you have to go through a long period of unlearning that lesson. You have to make a very deliberate effort to put yourself back in communication with God.

The reluctance to communicate is wholly on your part. The Course says “The Holy Spirit’s Voice is as loud as your willingness to listen” (Text, p. 145; T-8.VIII.8:7). The Holy Spirit is God’s communication, and that communication is right in your mind. It is within you, not outside you. In fact the Holy Spirit speaks for your true Mind, the only true part of you there is, which never forgot God, never forgot all the truth, and is in constant communication with the Father and with all of your

brothers (18:2). He is the voice of your true Self.⁹ His Voice speaks constantly; you just don't listen. But the fact of the matter is, you are already in perfect communication with God, whether or not you are hearing Him.

From the vantage point of your apparently separated mind, however, the Holy Spirit seems to be a Voice in your mind, a separate being. You have conceived of yourself as separate, and you have to start from that place because that is where you believe you are.

It is OK, therefore, to think of the Holy Spirit or Jesus as someone you talk to and confer with. More than OK; it is *necessary* at the beginning. You think of yourself in a very constricted way, as a separate mind. The illusion of yourself as a separate mind *is* the ego thought system; identified with that illusion of a separated self, you cannot hear the truth. The answer is within you, but not in you as you have defined yourself!¹⁰

9 "He speaks from nearer than your heart to you. His Voice is closer than your hand. His Love is everything you are and that He is; the same as you, and you the same as He.

"It is your voice to which you listen as He speaks to you. It is your Word He speaks" (Workbook, p. 221; W-125.7:2-8:2).

10 See also the Manual, p. 85; C-6.4, which says of the Holy Spirit that "He represents your Self and your Creator...He speaks for God and also for you...He seems to be a Voice, for in that form He speaks God's

The answer to your problems cannot come from within the ego thought system, so in the beginning it is helpful to think of the answer as coming from somewhere other than your “self,” which is really not your self but just a system of thought you have made up. Your experience at first, and perhaps for a long time, will be that the guidance of the Holy Spirit comes from a separate being. As you experience it more and more, you will gradually realize that His Voice is within you, in the Self you have forgotten; the Holy Spirit is in fact the Voice of your real Self, the Christ.

When you make decisions *by* yourself, you will always make them *for* yourself. Your personal interests will predominate. In linking up with the Holy Spirit you will automatically begin to decide in a way that considers the whole Sonship, not just yourself. “The Holy Spirit [is] the shared Inspiration of all the Sonship” (Text, p. 68; T-5.I.7:1). He is the Voice for the “you” that includes all your brothers and sisters, and decisions made with Him will touch everyone with Love (17:5,6).

Word to you. He seems to be a Guide through a far country, for you need that form of help.”

Never Make Decisions By Yourself

It will never happen that you must make decisions for yourself. You are not bereft of help, and Help that knows the answer (11:1–2).

If you think you must make decisions or plans by yourself, you are teaching yourself that you are separate from God.

To learn the Course, it is crucial to listen to the Holy Spirit in *every* decision you make. “Ask the Holy Spirit everything, and leave all decisions to His gentle counsel” (12:6). *Ask Him everything!* Asking Him everything is the only thing you really need to learn. This begins with obvious decisions and eventually encompasses the decisions you have hidden from yourself, the choices of mind which determine your entire perception of the world. “Perception is a choice and not a fact” (Text, p. 425; T-21.V.1:7). “Say to the Holy Spirit only, ‘Decide for me,’ and it is done” (16:1). Remind yourself constantly to consult with the Voice for God, and not to make decisions “on your own.”

It makes sense to refer decisions to Him. You normally “struggle so frantically to anticipate all you cannot know” (16:3). As a separate mind you cannot possibly anticipate all the consequences of your decisions. The Holy Spirit not only *can* anticipate, He

always does. “All knowledge lies behind every decision the Holy Spirit makes for you” (16:3).

He knows all there is to know. He knows who will be affected by your decisions, and how, and He will arrange it so that nobody loses and everybody wins.

What you are doing is *unlearning isolation through His loving guidance* (18:3). You think you are alone, and you need to work at remembering that you are not alone. You need to break that habit of non-communication. The practice of asking the Holy Spirit for guidance is meant to undo your sense of separation.

“In everything be led by Him...” (17:4). You need to trust Him to communicate to you all you need to know. When faced with a decision, consciously give it over to Him. Open yourself to His communication. *Ask* for it. Then, trust that it will come “quickly, surely, and with Love for everyone who will be touched in any way by the decision. And everyone will be” (17:5–6). Don’t make the mistake of anticipating the form the guidance will come in. It comes in thousands of different ways. If you consciously open yourself to it, you will not miss it.

“In everything be led by Him, and do not reconsider” (17:4). Having given the decision to the Holy Spirit and having opened yourself, then go ahead and decide. If you can wait until you are sure you hear His voice, do so. If the decision cannot be delayed, trust that what comes to

your attention is indeed His guidance, and decide securely and with confidence. You may make a “mistake,” but if you do, He will correct you if you remain open to correction.

If you watch yourself in your daily living you will find that the vast majority of your decisions are made with no conscious reference to God at all. You just blithely forge ahead on your own, assuming that you know enough to do this intelligently. You never know enough on your own! The Course says clearly, “Whenever you choose to make decisions for yourself, you are thinking destructively, and the decision will be wrong. It will hurt you...” (9:1–2). You are making the decision on the basis of an assumed separate identity, and that is simply not true! (9:3–5)

Watch for this tendency to decide on your own. If you notice it happening, immediately turn things over to the Holy Spirit. If you become aware after making a decision that you made it without consulting Him, go back in your mind and give it to Him. Reconsider your decision and choose again, with His assistance. But once you have given a decision to Him, and then decided, never reconsider. “In everything be led by Him, and do not reconsider” (17:4). Trust Him completely. Don’t doubt His guidance, and don’t take back your choice to decide with Him.

I've found this to be a safe procedure as long as I stay open to correction. Even when I make the "wrong" decision, it is still "right"; I needed to make that decision in order to learn it was wrong. Like a child learning to walk, I fall down a lot. That doesn't mean my guidance was wrong; it just means I haven't learned everything yet.

To "never reconsider" sounds like it contradicts what I said about remaining open to correction. I don't think it does. Guidance is always *present* guidance. If today I think the Holy Spirit guides me to go north, and tomorrow He says "west," that does not mean that going north yesterday was "wrong." It just means that *today* I am moving in a different direction.

Work At It Until It Becomes a Habit

This practice in regard to your decisions will gradually instruct you in the awareness that you are always in communication with God. The communication has never been broken; you have just not been listening. At first this has to be a deliberate exercise, like playing scales on a piano. Eventually it will become part of your very being, it will become the way you are, a new habit of making all decisions with reference to God, or in other words, of allowing your True Self to always take control. You will begin to do it automatically.

You can't skip over the non-automatic stage however. You've got to unlearn the lesson you've taught yourself, the life-long habit of not communicating with your Creator. This will take a lot of conscious effort on your part.

Don't do this only with important decisions. If you do you've already made a decision about what is important and what isn't, and you aren't equipped to do that. You may think the big decision for the day is whether or not to take some new job; the Holy Spirit may know that the most important thing is where you eat lunch. In fact, most of what we think of as decisions aren't real decisions at all. When we listen to the ego, our choices are merely between one illusion or another illusion, which is not a real choice. The real choice is between illusions and the truth.¹¹

As I have brought my decisions to the Holy Spirit more and more, I have come to see that He is teaching me to let go of thinking I have to decide before I can be at peace, to let go of thinking the choice between Illusion A and Illusion B really matters, and—instead of getting wrapped up in struggle and conflict with that illusory decision—to choose peace right now, before the “decision” is made at all. When I have done that, I return

¹¹ On the topic of choice between illusion and truth, see Text, p. 509; T-26.III.6–7, “There is no basis for a choice...”

from that holy instant into the world of illusion where a choice seems to matter. Out of the peace given me in the holy instant, I will be guided into choosing the path that will reinforce the peace of God, and that will witness to it in my life.

If you get in the habit of referring every decision to Him, no matter how small it seems to you, you will make great strides in learning that you live in constant communication. It is better to “go overboard” in doing this than to not do it at all. The section in the Manual I referred to earlier makes it clear that you should not go nuts with this, however. What it says is very much to the point:

Does this mean that you cannot say anything without consulting Him? No, indeed! That would hardly be practical, and it is the practical with which this course is most concerned. If you have made it a habit to ask for help when and where you can, you can be confident that all wisdom will be given you when you need it. Prepare for this each morning, remember God when you can throughout the day, ask the Holy Spirit’s help when it is feasible to do so, and thank Him for His guidance at night. And your confidence will be well founded indeed. (Manual, p. 68; M-29.5:5–10)

That’s pretty clear. Make it a habit to ask for help “when and where you can.” Prepare your mind in the morning, along the lines of the Workbook lesson, resting

from your senseless planning, listening to receive His plan instead. Whenever you can through the day, remember God and ask for help from the Holy Spirit. And when the day is done, at night pause again to thank Him for His guidance.

You are constantly in communication with God and with all minds in the universe, since all are in communication with Him. You want to get to the point where the instant your mind goes into Decision Mode you are talking to God, every time.

Living like this will seem unnatural at first. Playing scales on the piano when you are first learning feels very unnatural, too. It certainly isn't the music you want to hear! You need to "practice scales" with listening to the Holy Spirit. It will seem awkward and unsatisfying, just as playing scales on the piano does. But you are learning the basic techniques that will make the "music" of living spontaneously in constant communication with God a possibility for you.

In order to get to the point where you are led by God without thinking about it, you have to *think about it all the time* for a long time. What seems natural to you now—making decisions without God—has to be consciously unlearned. Learning a new habit always seems unnatural at first. Don't expect this to be easy. Don't expect it to come naturally to you. You can't get

away with just giving the entire day to God in the morning and then assuming that all your decisions through the day will be guided by the Holy Spirit. Doing that helps, of course, but it is only a start.

Getting to the point where listening naturally and without effort to the Voice for God, only that Voice and no other, is not easy. It begins by referring every conscious decision to Him, but it must grow until every unconscious decision behind your perception of the world has been taken over by Him. Jesus says that is the *final* lesson he learned (Text, p. 69; T-5.II.3:11), so don't expect it to come instantly to *you!* But it is indeed possible to get to that point; Jesus is the example of that. But "it takes effort and great willingness to learn" (Text, p. 69; T-5.II.3:10).

The Holy Spirit is in you in a very literal sense. His is the Voice That calls you back to where you were before and will be again. It is possible even in this world to hear only that Voice and no other. It takes effort and great willingness to learn. It is the final lesson that I learned, and God's Sons are as equal as learners as they are as sons (Text, p. 69; T-II.3:7-11).

You are asked, not to have arrived, but to be willing to move in that direction. You can do so every day, simply by consciously and deliberately reminding yourself as often as possible to make no decisions without His help,

and acknowledging that you trust Him to “communicate to me all that He knows for me” (19:4).

**RULES FOR DECISION
SOME NOTES ON PRACTICE**

In Chapter 30 of the Text, after twenty-nine chapters presenting the theory and vision of the Course, Jesus clearly turns to *practice*. Remember, the Text was written before the Workbook. So I believe, in a sense, that the opening section of this chapter is much like a precursor of the Workbook. The theory has been presented clearly. What is now needed, to integrate these ideas into our lives, is—in a word—practice.

The Introduction, and Section I, titled “Rules for Decision,” is worth careful study. We do not have space in the remainder of this booklet to do a detailed study of the entire section, so we will focus on the opening paragraphs and then summarize the rest of the section briefly. A chart of the rules for decision, in the form of a flow chart, may be helpful to give you an overall grasp of what is being said (see the last page of the booklet). Remember to read the actual paragraphs from the Text before you read the following notes.

Introduction

This chapter begins with a clear change of focus. Up until now the focus was on the overall theory of the Course. That has been fully presented, and now the focus changes to “the new beginning” (1:1). In other words, let’s start to apply all this to our lives; let’s have a new beginning. Let’s start our lives over and start doing it right.

“The goal is clear” (1:2). If you have studied the Text up to this point, which is assumed here, you are clear on the goal. In the narrow focus of this booklet that goal is, simply, to make no plans of your own but to receive plans from the Holy Spirit, and to make no decisions without Him. In the larger context of the entire Course, the goal is attaining the real world: to live in perfect serenity and inner peace; to see only love everywhere you look; to be, in experience, the extension of God’s Love in the world; to hear only God’s Voice and no other; to transcend your ego, living in a way that demonstrates you are not an ego.

The goal is a high goal. How do we get from here to there? How do we get from A to Z? “You need specific methods for attaining it [the goal]” (1:2). That is what the Introduction and Section I set out to provide.

The key factor that determines the rapidity of your progress is “one thing alone”: “your willingness to

practice every step” (1:3). *How willing are you to practice?* If you are really interested in spiritual progress in your life, the instructions given by the Course are very clear. They are hard to miss. The only thing that will hold you back is failure to *practice*, and to practice *every step*. As Ken Wapnick so often points out, you cannot get there by skipping steps.

I can't help thinking again about the piano lessons I referred to in the last section. “How can I learn to play that song?” There is only one answer, and it isn't one the ego likes to hear: practice, practice, practice. Just keep doing it over and over. As we've seen before, “it takes effort and great willingness to learn” (Text, p 69; T-5.II.3:10). The only way to get to the point where listening to the Holy Spirit has become second nature to you is to continually make the effort to learn it, to bring all your decisions to Him, consciously, willing to have Him decide for you.

Remember, just as in piano practice, the reason you are practicing is that you do not know how to do it right. The first time you attempt to play that song it sounds absolutely terrible. It sounds nothing like the music you hear when the teacher plays. You have to keep on playing it anyhow, trusting that after a while it will get better and better, until finally you play the song perfectly. In making your decisions with the Holy Spirit, you are

trying to learn, not a song on the piano, but the Song of Prayer. You are trying to learn to harmonize with Heaven. And the first few times you try, it will “sound” terrible. You won’t get it right. You cannot let that faze you; just keep practicing. Eventually you will get it right. This is why it takes “great willingness to learn.”

Each time you try, each time you choose to practice giving your decisions to the Holy Spirit, it will help a little. “Every time it is attempted” (1:4) will teach you something, although you may not be conscious of having learned anything. Obviously, then, the more often you attempt to do it, the more quickly you will learn. Note that word “attempt.” Jesus knows very well you will fail a lot; that is how you learn! Learning from failure is what practice is for. You have to trust in the process. You have to be a happy learner.

Added all together, each little attempt you make will combine with all the other attempts to “lead you from dreams of judgment to forgiving dreams and out of pain and fear” (1:5). Just one or two attempts won’t do it! It is all the little steps, all the little attempts *taken together* that will lead you out of pain and fear. You have to keep on practicing. Everyone has to go through this; you cannot skip steps. Keep the goal in mind: freedom from all pain, freedom from all fear. Don’t fret that you are not there yet. Just remind yourself that all these little steps,

each of which may seem insignificant, are what will get you there, and keep practicing.

The steps are not new to you (1:6). By that, I think Jesus means that what he is about to say in the next section is something he has already said earlier in the Text. He has been talking about listening to the Holy Spirit, for example, since the fourth paragraph of Chapter One! “His Voice will direct you very specifically. You will be told all you need to know” (Text, p. 1; T-1.I.4:2–3). The ideas are not new, but up to this point they have been little more than ideas. They have not become “rules of thought” to you as yet.

The principles of the Course are stated over and over in the Text. If you have read twenty-nine chapters, you can’t fail to have picked up on some of them: “To have, give all to all” (Text, p. 96; T-6.V(A)) “Teach only love, for that is what you are” (Text, p. 87; T-6.I.13:2). Forgiveness, listening to the Voice for God within, looking without fear at your ego and bringing your darkness to the Holy Spirit for healing, all have been clearly taught. You have the ideas; but they have not become integrated into your life, and that is the goal. We don’t want the laws of God engraved in stone tablets; we want them written on our hearts. We don’t want “Love” tattooed on our skin; we want Love to run through us like

a watermark through a bank note. We want what the Manual for Teachers terms *honesty*:

The term actually means consistency. There is nothing you say that contradicts what you think or do; no thought opposes any other thought; no act belies your word; and no word lacks agreement with another. Such are the truly honest” (Manual, p. 10; M-4.II.1:5–7).

Without question, we aren’t there yet; we have a long way to go to *consistency*. And that, without question, is the goal of the Course for you.

So how do we get there? “We need to practice them a while” (1:7). That’s all. Nothing mystical here. No transcendent experiences that miraculously change you overnight. (Well, maybe one or two, but these are not the rule.) Just dull, ordinary practice.

Notice the tone of voice here. “You’re not there yet, are you? Well, OK, we need to practice for a while; no big deal.” This isn’t the voice of a drill sergeant, this is the voice of a very gentle and loving teacher. He isn’t upset that you aren’t there yet, nor does he want you to be upset about it, to get frantic and drive yourself in wearying practice. He does want you to practice; he knows you have to practice to assimilate the thoughts of God into your life. He also knows that you will eventually do it, and you will eventually learn everything he is teaching. He isn’t in a rush.

How long will we need to practice? “...until they are the rules by which you live” (1:7). Until they have become assimilated into your life, until they govern everything you think and say and do. Until you are *consistent*, in other words. Until they have become a part of you. Until they are written on your heart. Until every opposing thought is gone.

I can't make that sound easy. I can't make that sound as if it won't take a *long time*. But I can tell you that it won't take as long as you think! I'm sure of that, because I'm sure you are probably thinking “I won't *ever* get there!” That is simply not true. You are already there. It helps to remember that what you are “learning” is really simply *remembering* your true nature, your true Self as God's Son. *You already know this stuff*. You have a built-in Teacher Who knows it perfectly, and knows how to remind you that you know it too. You aren't going against your nature to learn this, you are going *with it*.

All that you are doing is trying to form a *new habit*, to make, for instance, consulting with the Holy Spirit so habitual that whenever the need arises, you have that “tool” ready for use (1:8). Habits are formed in a very simple way: frequent repetition. Do something often enough and it becomes a habit. You have to make a conscious effort for a while—studies have shown it is usually for about three weeks—and then the habit-

formation mechanism in your mind takes over and says, “OK, this is a regular part of the program; I’ll write it into the startup file for my computer.” (You will not learn to refer everything to the Holy Spirit in just three weeks, but if you consistently take fifteen minutes in the morning to practice making no decisions by yourself, those practice periods can begin to become habitual in that period of time.)

Forming habits, of course, depends on your willingness. If you try to make a habit of something you really don’t want to do, it won’t work. The part of your mind that is rejecting the new habit will sabotage your efforts. You’ll forget, or “skip it this once,” or whatever, and the habit won’t take hold. That problem will be covered in the following discussion of “Rules for Decision.”

I. Rules for Decision

What is proposed here, in this first paragraph, is not new—as Jesus already pointed out. Putting it very simply it is this: Each morning when you wake, take the first part of the day, fifteen minutes or more, and use it to set your mind in order. Or rather, bring your mind to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to set it in order. Set the tone for the

day, and that mental tone will spill over into the rest of the day.

There are many forms this morning time can take. One form I've discussed in this booklet is to spend fifteen minutes in quiet, resting from your senseless planning and listening to receive His plan. The form given in this section is very similar: Deciding at the start of the day that "Today I will make no decisions by myself" (2:2). You could think of this as the time you remember God; as the time you rest in God; a time in which you decide to step back and let Him lead the way; a time in which you remember what your purpose is; a time in which you recall that light and joy and peace abide in you. Every Workbook lesson presents a different form.

The intent is all the same although the forms differ. The essence of them all is that you remember that you are not alone; that God is with you, and you are His child.

That's *it!* That is the "specific method" you start with. You begin with that simple practice. The idea is that it will spill over into your entire life. Elsewhere (Manual, p. 68; M-29.5:9, and Workbook, p. 279; W-153.15-18) it recommends we also take time in the evening to thank the Holy Spirit for the day He has given us. The Course recommends that we begin to do every hour what we do every day, so that no hour ends without thanksgiving, no wrong-minded thought extends beyond that hour, and

each new hour starts with a fresh beginning. “In time, with practice, you will never cease to think of Him” (Workbook, p. 279; W-153.18:1). But you *start* by practicing it once a day. You will never get to the once-an-hour practice if you don’t master doing it once a day, until it becomes a habit.

There is a line of thought, very helpful when we are first doing the Workbook, that says the proper way to do the Workbook is to fail at what it is telling us to do, and then forgive ourselves for failing. That is very true; I’ve said it myself. I think, however, we need to remember that while failing and forgiving ourselves is an essential part of the practice, the *purpose* of the practice is to get to where we “never cease to think of Him.” If we haven’t reached that point yet, then *keep practicing*. Jesus expects us to practice until these thoughts of God have become the rules by which we live.

(1:1–3) Decisions, as mentioned earlier, are continuous. “Every second” you are making a decision, and “you do not always know when you are making them.” You are aware of only a small sub-set of your decisions. So practice with the ones you are aware of; practice not deciding by yourself. Stating it positively, practice allowing the Holy Spirit to decide for you. This is already moving beyond the morning time to moments during the day when you become aware that “I am

choosing” or “I am about to make a decision.” In that moment, pause for a few seconds and remember your Partner; let Him decide. If you’re not sure how to do that, *attempt* it anyhow. As you practice in this way, “a set begins to form.” That is, a “mind set,” a mental habit. Each repetition adds to your habit of never deciding alone. And that mental set carries over even into your unconscious choices and “sees you through the rest.”

(1:4–5) Don’t overdo this and try to catch every one-second decision. If you stopped to pray for every single step you take you would never get anywhere. You could drive yourself nuts with this kind of thing. If you find that happening, it’s just your ego trying to trip you up and make learning the lessons seem impossible. Consciously *adopting the proper mental set* each time you wake up, and then applying it each time you become conscious of going into decision mode, is all that is necessary. Once you set your mind on the right path, it will stay set that way until you choose to change it.

(1:6–7) If I could go back in time and tell my teenage self one sentence of advice, it would be this: *Do not fight yourself*. I think that is the most overlooked piece of advice in this Course. If, when you try to form a habit of remembering God every morning, you find it very difficult, it will be in one of two ways. Either you will experience *strong resistance*, or you will find yourself

very *weak-willed* about it. On the one hand, you will find a very strong current in yourself saying “I do not want to do this!” or you will start trying to do it and find yourself constantly making excuses about why you didn’t do it.

If either of those things happens, do not fight yourself. You simply aren’t ready yet. Let it be. Let it go. Forgive yourself and go back to what you were doing. Maybe you can simply think about what kind of day you would like to have, and remind yourself that there is a way to have it; it is possible, although you aren’t ready for it yet. And then just go out and have the best day you can. Be gentle with yourself. There is no shame in not being ready. If you’re not ready—you’re *not ready!* Perhaps you should just ask the Holy Spirit to teach you what you need to learn to be ready, and let it go at that. What you need, simply, is to learn to *want* the goal that practice will give you.

Don’t fight yourself. Fighting yourself is guaranteed to produce a guilt trip. Any student of the Course must read the books; that is what constitutes being a student. But if reading the Text activates your fear or gets you depressed, stop reading it for a while! If trying to do the Workbook makes you feel guilty, give yourself a rest. You aren’t ready. Let it go awhile, and try again later.

There is a balance needed somewhere between discipline and self-abuse. Habits do not get formed

without any effort, so some self-discipline is required. But when the discipline gets transformed into self-abuse, beating yourself up and making yourself miserable, forcing yourself to do something you really do not want to do, it becomes *negative* conditioning. You are training yourself to *hate* what you are doing. At that point it is much more supportive of the desired goal to stop and take a rest. Don't give up entirely; just take a break.

The Rules

As I said earlier, the rest of this section will be left largely up to you. The general outline, shown in the chart, is that the first two rules are the entire positive practice: As the day starts, decide not to decide by yourself; then visualize the day you want (particularly in terms of peace, joy, and love) and remind yourself throughout the day that this is the day you will have if you refer all decisions to the Holy Spirit. That is the entire positive practice.

The remaining five “rules” are corrective action to be taken when you forget the first two. You forget to check with the Holy Spirit, and decide by yourself, making a judgment on your own. What can you do in that situation?

One thing you surely do not want to do is feel guilty about forgetting. Remember, this is practice, and you are

expected to make mistakes while you are learning. Forgetting is no big deal. It is just another opportunity to learn something, a mistake which calls for correction, not for self-punishment. Just start practicing again.

If you catch yourself early enough, it may be enough just to remember your purpose, let go of your independent choice, and go back to Square One. If you find you can't do that, if you are locked into your choice, locked into being right or staying angry, then go on to the remaining rules. Realize you don't like the way you feel (which is inevitable when you listen to the ego). On that basis, tell yourself "I hope I have been wrong. Since I don't like the way I feel, I want another way to look at this. What can I lose by asking?" And then go back to Square One, and ask to see things differently.

Choosing Your Friend

The purpose of focusing on guidance, making plans and making decisions, is to *end our sense of isolation*. It is to help us *unlearn* the unnatural habit of not communicating with our Creator. It is to bring us to the point where we never cease to think of God.

Towards the end of "Rules of Decision" Jesus brings this up again. He points out (paragraph 14) that you *never* make decisions by yourself: you choose only "with what

you choose to make them,” that is, with the ego as your “friend” or the Holy Spirit as your Friend. You decide “with idols or with God” or with the “help of anti-Christ or Christ.” The only choice you make is “which you choose will join with you and tell you what to do.”

Your experience, every day, is determined “by what you choose to live it with” (15:2). Do you want your life in the hands of an insane ego, or in the hands of God? That is what you are choosing each morning when you decide “I will make no decisions by myself.”

To me, this is the essence of it all. What begins as a practice of discipline turns into a love affair with God. It is not a difficult choice, giving the day to God, when I remember His Love, His care for me, His concern, His unchangeable determination that I will be perfectly happy. It becomes a delight, an inexpressible relief from an intolerable mental anguish, to simply fall back into His arms and to rest there awhile, surrounded by His Love. Truly, this *is* what I want. Truly, my will and His *are* the same. Truly, I am happiest only in doing His Will, and His Will is what I am. God is the Mind with which I think; God is the Love with which I bless. Here, in this infinite stillness with Him, I have found my home.

With that mind set established, each moment of my life becomes a meaningful encounter with the truth. Each decision and each plan becomes simply a matter of

asking, “Where shall I go to best further and express this peace? What shall I do to best cultivate the healing of my mind? What shall I say that best communicates God’s peace to other minds?” The Holy Spirit’s plan for me is simply this: that from a mind at peace within itself, I reach out to join with others so that peace and healing may be extended to the world. There is no other purpose for the world. There is no other plan that matters.

Rules For Decision

Basic Rules

Rules For Correction

