

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 8, Section IV

The Gift of Freedom

Legend:

blue text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)
bold blue text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext
red text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext
light blue text = editorial comments
~~striketrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

Paragraph 1

1. ¹If God's Will for you is complete peace and joy, unless you experience **only** this you **must** be refusing to acknowledge His Will. ²His Will does not vacillate, being changeless forever. ³When you are not at peace it can only be because you do not believe you are **in Him**. ⁴Yet He is All in all. ⁵His peace **is** complete, and you **must** be included in it. ⁶His laws govern you because they govern **everything**. ⁷You cannot exempt yourself from His laws, although you **can** disobey them. ⁸Yet if you do, and **only** if you do, you **will** feel lonely and helpless, because you are denying yourself everything.

• Study Question •

1. *When we experience loneliness and helplessness instead of complete peace and joy, what is the cause, according to this paragraph?*

God's laws are absolute and all-inclusive. Nothing is outside their jurisdiction; therefore, you cannot be outside their jurisdiction (1:6). If God is actually *God*, He originates, encompasses, sustains, governs, and determines the course of literally *everything*, including you and me. His Will is absolute, unhindered and uncontested. Nothing can be outside of, or apart from, God; God "is All in all" (1:4). Therefore, the whole idea that we *are* apart from Him is utterly absurd. As the Course puts it in a later chapter, this is "the strange idea there is a power past omnipotence, a place beyond the infinite, a time transcending the eternal" (T-29.VIII.6:2).

What God wills must be so. Therefore, if He wills "complete peace and joy" for me and yet that is not me experience, I must be resisting His Will and refusing to accept it (1:1). This is really another form of an idea already expressed back in Chapter 4, Section IV, and also in Chapter 5, Section VII. There, I was told that if I am anything other than completely joyous, I must have made a mistaken choice somewhere; I must have chosen something other than love in my response to people around me.

To respond to anyone with less than love is identical to perceiving myself as less than wholly loving. When I realize the truth of that it brings me up short. It means that how I respond to *you* is a function of how I perceive *myself*. The two things are inextricably tied together. In order to respond to you with anything less than perfect love I *must* see myself as less than perfectly loving! Since God *is* Love, when I respond to you with, for instance, anger, I have to see myself (in that moment) as apart from God! Perhaps I might ask myself: Is that something I really want to do? To embrace anger is a double-edged sword. I may think I am punishing you, but at the same time, I am killing myself. I am choosing to see myself as split off from God. I am making myself miserable. *You* are not the cause of my misery, *I* am.

When I am not at peace, I can remind myself of what not being at peace really means: I am seeing myself as separated from God, which is impossible (1:3–5). The whole point of the Course, it seems to me, is that nothing is really wrong with me: I just *think* something is wrong. Yet, because I think it, I experience it that way.

Paragraph 2

¹I am come as a light into a world that **does** deny itself everything. ²It does this simply by dissociating itself **from** everything. ³It is therefore an illusion of isolation, **maintained** by fear of the same loneliness that *is* its illusion. ⁴I said that I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. ⁵That is **why** I am the light of the world. ⁶If I am with you in the loneliness of the world, **the loneliness is gone**. ⁷You **cannot** maintain the illusion of loneliness if you are **not** alone. ⁸My purpose, then, **is still** to overcome the world. ⁹I do not attack it, but my light must dispel it because of **what it is**. ¹⁰Light does not **attack** darkness, but it **does** shine it away. ¹¹If my light goes with you everywhere, **you** shine it away **with me**. ¹²The light becomes **ours**, and you **cannot** abide in darkness any more than darkness can abide wherever you go. ¹³The remembrance of me **is** the remembrance of yourself, and of Him Who sent me to you.

• Study Question •

2. *Jesus says he is always with us (2:4). He also says that remembering him is the way to remember yourself and God (2:13). In the context of this paragraph, what do you think the phrase, “the remembrance of me” (2:13) might mean?*

What kind of light is needed by “a world that [denies] itself everything” (2:1)? It needs a light that refutes that particular form of darkness. Therefore, this light would affirm that nothing is lost, that we are not separated from God, and that we still have all things in God. It would be the antidote to dissociation. It would be a light that restores the oneness of all things to our awareness.

Jesus came into the world as just such a light (2:1). His light shows us that our seemingly real experience of separation is completely illusory. He shows us man and God as one. He is demonstrably *not* separate from God. On the contrary, he is unmistakably one with God. Thus, Jesus undoes the illusion of separation from God.

Likewise, he refutes our illusions about being alone by a very simple expedient: He is with us always! (2:4–7) He is always “there for us.” If he is with us we cannot be alone. (See Workbook lesson 41 for a similar thought.)

As we recognize Jesus’ presence with us, and what it means, his light transfers to us so that where we go, the light goes (2:11–12). Like Jesus, we “preach” to people of their oneness with God by showing them ours; we refute their belief in separation by being there for them through thick and thin. We become the living proof that the separation never occurred.

Although I have never been an alcoholic or a part of a Twelve-Step group, I think one of the most powerfully transformative aspects of such programs must be the “sponsor” each person acquires. This is, basically, a person who pledges to always be there for you, to be available whenever you call, whenever you need help in staying free of your addiction. To individuals who have felt isolated for years, perhaps practicing their vice secretly, but always cut off from people by it, what power there must be in the simple words, “I am here for you.” What great hope must arise, knowing that someone is always there for you!

This is what being the light of the world means. It means that we can carry the message of God to at least one other human being. We communicate the message by living it; we *represent God* to that person, we show them, by our actions and words, how God sees them, how He values them, and how He loves them. Through the Course, Jesus is with us in just that way. How consistently he reminds us of who we really are! How faithfully he hangs in there with us, patiently showing us the way home!

The light is a holy contagion. We join with Jesus in the light. His light enlightens us, showing us that we are not separate from God or from him. The light spills into us and shines through us to others; wherever we go, we dispel the darkness (2:12). In this way we remember who we are, and we remember God (2:13).

Paragraph 3

3. ¹You **were** in darkness until God's Will was done completely by **any** part of the Sonship. ²When this was done, it was perfectly accomplished by **all**. ³How else could it **be** perfectly accomplished? ⁴My mission was simply to **unite** the will of the Sonship **with** the Will of the Father by being aware of the Father's Will myself. ⁵This is the awareness I came to give **you**, and **your** problem in accepting it **is** the problem of this world. ⁶Dispelling it is salvation, and in this sense I *am* the salvation of the world. ⁷The world **must therefore** despise and reject me, because the world *is* the belief that love is impossible. [*Your reactions to me are the reactions of the world to God.*] ⁸If you will accept the fact that I am with you, you are **denying** the world and **accepting God**. ⁹My will **is** His, and **your** decision [*will*] to hear me **is** the decision to hear His Voice and abide in His Will. ¹⁰As God sent me to you so will I send you to others. ¹¹And [*But*] I will go to them **with** you, so we can teach them peace and union [*union and peace*].

• Study Question •

3. *Based on sentences 8-11, what will result from accepting that Jesus is with you?*

The “part of the Sonship” (3:1) that accomplished God’s Will is, of course, Jesus. The idea presented here is that what Jesus did was done for everyone, so that when he did it, we *all* did it. He resurrected and we resurrected with him. He tells us, “In my resurrection is your release” (T-12.II.7:3). The Course tells us that “you arose with him when he began to save the world” (C-6.5:5).

How can we understand the meaning of this? How can I resurrect, when I have not yet died? How can the Course say that I have also done everything Jesus did? How can it be true that everything is already done, and yet seems to me to be still future?

The simple answer to that is that what the Course says is true. The entire Sonship was enlightened when Jesus perfectly accomplished God’s Will; His accomplishment was immediately shared with all minds. (If you are interested in an extended answer to these questions, I suggest you read Greg Mackie’s article on the web site of The Circle of Atonement:

<http://www.circleofa.org/qanda/Resurrection.php>)

The Will of God concerns the entire Sonship. Therefore, it could not have been perfectly accomplished unless it was accomplished by the entire Sonship (3:2–3). We do not experience it that way *yet* because we, as fragments of the mind of the Sonship, have not yet *accepted* the truth of our awakening. The message Jesus came to give is that God’s Will for us is already, always accomplished, but we can refuse to acknowledge it. We can refuse to accept what is already so. Precisely that, says Jesus, “is the problem of this world” (3:5).

The Course redefines the term “salvation” to mean, “dispelling our refusal to accept God’s Will as forever unopposed and forever accomplished” (see 3:4–6; this is my paraphrase of these sentences and not a quotation). In traditional Christian teaching, salvation meant being rescued from eternal damnation through God’s forgiveness, based on the blood sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The Course’s view gives a very different picture of salvation. It is not the reversal of a terrible and very real penalty; it is the dissolution of an imaginary problem! Salvation does not redeem me from separation from God and graft me back into His life-tree, it simply blows away the confusion in my mind that, for a moment that seemed to last forever, allowed me to *think* that I was separate.

In this sense, and only in this sense, Jesus *is* the salvation of the world (3:6). By his awakening he has triggered awakening in our minds. He is making us aware that our will is one with God’s. Given the native resistance of the ego to this awareness, we should not be surprised at the disdainful rejection of Jesus that often arises in our minds (3:7). They are merely our individual manifestation of the world’s rejection of God (reference the sentence following 3:7 in the Urtext). We reject him *because* we resist his message and his meaning. Because our egos do not want us to realize that *we* are God’s Son, we refuse to acknowledge *Jesus* as God’s Son. “The world [the manifested thought system of the ego] *is* the belief that love is impossible” (3:7). So we refuse to recognize that love became incarnate in Jesus, because it would disprove the fundamental thesis of our entire ego existence.

This is why, among traditional Christian groups, to acknowledge Jesus, to recognize his divinity, and to accept his union with God has had such a powerful transformative effect. Whether or not our doctrine agreed, the Bible hinted, and our minds instinctively knew, that if these things were true of *him* they could be true of *us*:

...like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

We dimly understood that what Jesus accomplished in resurrection applied to us. If his death was important to us (as we thought), his *life* was *much more* important:

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Romans 5:10).

Even there, in traditional Christianity, welcoming Jesus into our lives transformed us, despite the punitive view of God. Here, in the Course, there is no question of a punitive view of God. As we have seen, Jesus flatly denies that he was punished for our sins (T-3.I.2:10). We are not asked to accept Jesus as our savior in the sense of his having died in our place, but we *are* asked to accept him as our savior in the sense that his joining of his will with God's opened the way for our own similar joining; his recognition of his sonship was our own. He wants us simply to accept the fact that he is with us now (3:8), helping us, and to decide to let him teach us. That is enough; to accept his companionship means that we deny the world and accept God (3:8). If we listen to Jesus, we *are* listening to God, because the two have a single will (3:9).

In the biblical story of Jesus, he came to Israel, ministered for about three and a half years, gathered a dozen main disciples and a few hundred others, and then, at the end of his ministry and after his resurrection, commissioned them to carry on his message. Strikingly significant to Course students, that commission directly targeted *forgiveness* as the main component of their message:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:19–23, NIV)

Our paragraph in the Text clearly echoes these words from John's Gospel. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." As he comes to us to dispel our guilt and to remind us of who we are, he goes with us to others, so that together we can teach them the same things.

This thought is continued in the next paragraph.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹Do you not think the world needs peace as much as you do? ²Do you not want to give it to the world as much as you want to receive it? ³For unless you do, you will **not** receive it. ⁴If you want to have it of me, you **must** give it. ⁵Healing [**Rehabilitation**] does not come from anyone **else**. ⁶You must accept

guidance from within. [You can have *guidance* from without, but you must *accept* it from within.] ⁷The guidance must be [become] what **you** want, or it will be meaningless to you. ⁸That is why healing [rehabilitation] is a collaborative venture. ⁹I can tell you what to **do**, but you must [but this will not really help unless you] collaborate by believing that I **know** what you should do [what to do]. ¹⁰Only then will your **mind** choose [will] to follow me. [Without your will, you cannot be rehabilitated. *Motivation to be healed* is the crucial factor in rehabilitation.] ¹¹Without this choice you could not be healed because you would have decided against healing [Without this, you are deciding *against* healing.], and this rejection [and your veto] of my decision [will] **for** you **makes** healing impossible.

• Study Question •

4. *What does sentence 8 mean? Be careful how you answer, since the meaning here is not exactly the same as the meaning in T-4.VI.8:2. Contrast the different meanings of the two passages.*

What a poignant question opens the paragraph! (4:1) Do we really believe what it states? Do we recognize that the deepest longing of our hearts for peace is echoed in *every heart*, even in the heart of the most ornery man or woman we know? Yes, I think we know that this is true if we pause to think about it. How could anyone *not* need peace? Yet it is also certainly true that we don't let ourselves become aware of this.

Stop for a moment the next time your mind begins to attack and blame and remind yourself, "He [or she] needs peace just as much as I do, and I can give it to him [or her]." You have it in your power to bless instead of curse; don't you want to do that? *Of course you do!* You want to give it because you want to receive it (4:3–4).

I admit that, at times, some people I know seem to want nothing but to stir up trouble. They come at me in a way that seems calculated to provoke and certain to generate emotional heat. They apparently *want* conflict. In those moments it takes some effort to remind myself that they need peace as much as I do, and that if I want peace, I have to give it. (Remember the lessons of the Holy Spirit in Chapter 6? What was the second lesson?)

There is a paradoxical twist here to the way Jesus talks about healing. First, he says that healing does not come from anyone except ourselves (4:5); if we want it we must give it, in order to have it. The guidance may seem to come from someone or something outside of us, but it must be *accepted* "within" (4:6). We must engage our own will (3:10–11, Urtext), our own choice.

Yet, paradoxically, healing is at the same time "a collaborative venture" (4:8). Jesus *directs* our healing activities. We heal in response to his guidance, and not whenever and however we feel like it. We can reconcile the two aspects (only I can heal; I have to collaborate with Jesus in healing) in this way, as shown in sentence 9: Jesus tells us what to do, but we must collaborate by trusting in his guidance. If we don't think Jesus knows what he is talking about, we won't follow his advice. Following his guidance from within is crucial; without it, we cannot be healed ourselves (4:11).

To me it is very clear that *A Course in Miracles* envisions its followers as having a very close, personal relationship with Jesus. Somehow, in Course circles, many of us

seem to have missed this aspect. A few years ago, The Circle of Atonement held a weekend workshop on our relationship with Jesus. I think a lot of people were surprised at the wealth of passages about the subject. As I have suggested, our resistance to the idea probably stems from our ego's resistance to the message of Jesus. The Manual for Teachers, in the Clarification of Terms part, speaks of him thus (I suggest you read the whole short section):

Walking with him is just as natural as walking with a brother whom you knew since you were born, for such indeed he is. Some bitter idols have been made of him who would be only brother to the world. Forgive him your illusions, and behold how dear a brother he would be to you. (C-5.5:3-5)

His presence with us should be so real that it banishes any sense of isolation or loneliness. When he is with us, "the loneliness is gone" (2:6). His inner guiding can be very clear and specific. Apparently it is clear enough to let us distinguish between when to offer healing and when not to offer it. This guidance can become extremely precise and detailed:

For Your Voice will tell me what to do and where to go; to whom to speak and what to say to him, what thoughts to think, what words to give the world. (W-pII.275.2:3).

If, like me, you don't *yet* have this kind of detailed guidance every time you interact with another person—if the Voice for God still seems faint to you—my best advice is simply to go on asking. Give every situation into His hands. When you meet someone for lunch, pray, "Father, I give this lunch to You for your purposes. Jesus, guide me in offering salvation to my brother and receiving it from him." Then, just trust that he is doing that. My experience has been that the more I ask for help, the more I begin to receive it.

Paragraph 5

5. [If healing *is* our joint will, unless our wills *are* joined you *cannot* be healed.]
⁴Healing reflects our joint will. ²This is obvious when you consider what healing is **for**. ³Healing is the way in which the separation is overcome. ⁴Separation is overcome by **union**. ⁵It **cannot** be overcome by separating. ⁶The decision [*will*] to unite must be unequivocal, or the mind [*the will*] **itself** is divided and [*itself is separated or*] **not whole**. ⁷Your mind [*Your will*] is the means by which you determine your own condition, because mind [*because will*] is the **mechanism of decision**. ⁸It is the power by which you separate or join, and experience pain or joy accordingly. ⁹My decision [*will*] cannot **overcome** yours, because **yours is as powerful as mine**. ¹⁰If it were not so the Sons of God would be unequal. ¹¹All things are [*become*] possible through our **joint** decision [*will*], but mine alone cannot [*will not*] help you. ¹²Your will is as free as mine, and God Himself would not go against it. ¹³I cannot will what God does **not** will. ¹⁴I **can** offer my strength [*will*] to make **yours** invincible [*by this sharing*], but I **cannot** oppose your decision [*oppose yours {your will}*] without competing with it and thereby violating God's Will for you.

• Study Question •

5. *If you decide not to join with Jesus, Jesus cannot override your decision. Why?*

Notice how *will* keeps coming up, and especially the *union* of your will with either God or with Jesus (which is pretty much the same thing, since his will *is* God's Will). It will be the main theme for the rest of this section. The "freedom" referred to in the section title is your freedom of choice, your free will, which in the Course means something different from what we normally mean by free will. To us, free will means the ability to do whatever we want, without any outside restriction. To the Course, free will means doing the Will of God, because we are letting our nature (which is one with God) have unrestricted expression. (I discussed this topic more completely in my commentary on Section II of this chapter, "The Difference Between Imprisonment and Freedom.")

That healing requires collaboration is self-evident, according to Jesus, when you realize "what healing is for" (5:2). What is the healing needed for separation? The answer is evident to common sense: *union* (5:4). It isn't rocket science, then, to see that I am not going to accomplish much healing if I insist on doing it *independently*! For healing to take place I have to be willing to unite with Jesus and with my brother, and I must be *totally* willing (5:6) because lack of total willingness indicates that my very *mind* is divided. My mind must be united in uniting. Its one will must be oneness. Healing *is* oneness, so healing requires the presence of oneness. This is like peace being the condition of the Kingdom where knowledge resides, so you must arrive at peace in order to gain access to knowledge. Oneness is the condition of healing, so you cannot have healing without it. To resist the oneness is to resist the healing.

All this has to do with "your mind" (5:7), or your will, as the Urtext had it. The mind or will is what makes decisions, so your mind is what determines whether you separate or join (5:8). If you choose separation you reap pain; if you choose union you reap joy (5:8). Even though Jesus has already accomplished union with God for us all, his decision can't override our own. This is why his decision to hear only God's Voice, although it was made for everyone, cannot help us (5:11) unless we join with it. Not even God Himself will not oppose your will! (5:12) Jesus cannot *force* us to accept the reality of union, because our will is just as powerful as his (5:9). Our equality to Jesus is basic to the whole message of the Course; nobody is special, not even Jesus! The equal power of our wills is the reason why our experience of God is less than perfect. We still resist. If we think we do not resist, then we are subtly blaming God for our discomfort (who else?), which is clear evidence that our minds are still unhealed.

True power lies in the *union* of wills, not (as the ego imagines) in haughty will power (5:11). Our need is to unite our will with God's, seemingly a kind of bondage to His Will. Nonetheless, our will is sovereign. *We* must make the choice to join; we must choose freely to love. Love is not love if not freely chosen.

This has an interesting application, however. It is quite liberating to realize that God is giving us completely free choice. Ultimately there is no other choice possible than to choose God, and yet we are given the freedom to delay the inevitable if we wish. God is not going to strong-arm us into doing His Will. Given the level of our fear, that is good news. But when we turn this around and apply it to the people around us, it means that we need to give *them* the same liberty God gives us. That is, we have to be patient with

people and let them choose love of their own accord. We cannot force it upon them. This becomes quite clear in paragraphs 6 through 8.

Paragraph 6

6. ¹Nothing God created can oppose your decision, as nothing God created can oppose His Will. ²God **gave** your will its power, which I can only acknowledge in honor of **His**. ³If you want to be **like** me I will help you, knowing that we **are** alike. ⁴If you want to be **different**, I will wait until you change your mind. ⁵I can **teach** you, but only you can choose to **listen** to my teaching. ⁶How else can it be, if God's Kingdom **is** freedom? ⁷Freedom cannot be learned by tyranny of **any** kind, and the perfect equality of **all** God's Sons cannot be recognized through the dominion of one mind [**one will**] over another. ⁸God's Sons are equal in will, all being the Will of their Father. ⁹This is the **only** lesson I came to teach [**only lesson I can teach, knowing that it is true**].

• Study Question •

6. *Give as many reasons as you can find in this paragraph why Jesus cannot contravene our will, that is, why he cannot "do it for us," but must wait for us to choose for God ourselves.*

Jesus seems to be intent on driving home the fact that we have absolute freedom of will. In one sense we have no choice at all, because what God creates is what is *so*. Reality is reality; we cannot change it, no matter how we may choose to do so. However, if we choose to *deny reality*, nothing God created (6:1), and not even Jesus or God Himself can or will oppose our will. God is the one who created your will and gave that will its power (6:2); therefore it is His Will that *your* will be free. How could He then oppose it? He would be contravening *His own Will* if He did that. Jesus, who honors God's Will, honors your will also, because God does (6:2). There is absolutely *nothing*, therefore, from the bottom of creation to the top (God Himself), that can affect your will or overcome it. What you decide is final. You are the one in charge of your own experience.

What this means for us is that we can continue in pain and misery just as long as we choose to. We can refuse to recognize the truth about ourselves as long as we want to. If we want to continue to blind ourselves, we can. As Jesus told us back in Chapter 4, "I will never forsake you any more than God will, but I must wait as long as you choose to forsake yourself" (T-4.III.7:8).

This is the Course's answer to all of our questions that begin with, "Why doesn't God...?" Why doesn't God just zap us? Why doesn't God *stop* me from destroying myself and bringing myself pain? Why doesn't God send me an overwhelming revelation so that I cannot refuse Him any longer? The answer to them all is that God wills that we have freedom of will, and therefore we do, and He won't act to oppose it. He wills that because it is necessary if we are to be like God. His Will cannot be opposed, and therefore neither can ours.

The sovereignty of our will sets the stage for how Jesus can and does interact with us. If we accept the goal of becoming like him, he will help us to do so because he knows

that, in reality, we are already alike (6:3). If, however, that is not our will, all he can do is wait until we change our minds (6:4). And he *will* wait; he is exceedingly patient with us. He does not try to force anything upon us.

Part of being in the Kingdom of God is freedom. If God, or Jesus, somehow forced anything on us or imposed their will on us, that would be the direct opposite of freedom. You cannot teach freedom by means of force! (6:6-7)

The most powerful impact of these lines, to me, is what they imply about how I should respond to my brothers and sisters. How often do we try to *impose* something good on people we love? How often do we try to manipulate and coerce people “for their own good”? We try to dominate their minds, which cannot possibly teach them about freedom (6:7). We argue with them. We mobilize our logical weapons and try to browbeat people into doing what, we are sure, is in their best interests. We find it very, very difficult to allow people the freedom to make their own mistakes. Yet, clearly, that is what Jesus does with us. If we want his help, he stands ever ready to offer it, yet if we are not yet prepared to accept it, he simply waits patiently until we change our minds (6:3–4). He knows we *will* change, eventually.

I think that may be the difference; it may be the reason he is able to wait so patiently. He is sure of the eventual outcome.

[Those who are certain of the outcome can afford to wait, and wait without anxiety \(M-4.VIII.1:1\).](#)

He knows that, in the end, we *will* change our minds. We need that same faith in our brothers and sisters. Perhaps we see someone drinking themselves into oblivion, or becoming trapped in a sexual addiction, or losing themselves in pursuit of money and power. Perhaps this is someone we love—a brother or sister, a son or daughter, a close friend.

Can we, like Jesus, allow such people the freedom to make mistaken choices, confident that in the end they will come to their senses? Can we do that even when it is clear that their mistakes are going to destroy their bodies and end their physical life? Can we rest assured that the end of the body is *not* the end of life, and that choice and decision continue to be possible after the body stops functioning? Can we say to our loved ones who are determined to make the wrong choices, “I will be here, waiting for you, when you change your mind”? Can we let them go without putting them out of our hearts?

It helps me to realize that in refusing to try to dominate my brothers and sisters I am teaching them a truth. I am teaching them that, “God’s Sons are equal in will” (6:8). I am teaching them the sovereignty of their own will, which is foundational to their taking responsibility for their own choices, and eventually, recognizing that they want to change their mind, and can change it. If I dominate them, they have not learned the power of their own mind; they have learned of its weakness. This hinders rather than helps. Jesus tells us that “the only lesson” He came to teach (6:9) is that as God’s Sons we are equal in will because we *are* God’s Will.

This is just another way of expressing the truth about what we are. We are what God created us to be. We are equals because He willed us to be equals. We are not guilty because nothing we have done has altered that reality. Over and over, from every angle, Jesus keeps attempting to awaken us to what is always, already so.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹If [**When**] your will were [**is**] **not** mine it would not be [**it is not**] our Father's. ²This would mean [**This means**] you have imprisoned **yours**, and have not **let** it be free. ³Of yourself you can do nothing, because of yourself you *are* nothing. ⁴I am nothing without the Father and **you** are nothing without me, because by **denying** the Father you deny **yourself**. ⁵I will **always** remember you, and in **my** remembrance **of** you lies your remembrance of **yourself**. ⁶In our remembrance of **each other** lies our remembrance of God. ⁷And in this remembrance lies your freedom because your freedom is in Him. ⁸Join, then, with me in praise of Him **and** you whom He created. ⁹This [**praise for His creation of us**] is our gift of gratitude to Him, which He will share with **all** His creations, to whom He gives equally whatever is acceptable to Him. **10****Because** it is acceptable to Him it is the gift of freedom, which **is** His Will for all His Sons. ¹¹By **offering** freedom you will be free [, **because freedom is the only gift which you can offer to God's Sons, being an acknowledgment of what they are and what He is**].

• Study Question •

1. 7. (a) *What do you think Jesus means by, "I will always remember you," and (b) what does that mean to you personally?*

When it seems to us as though we have a will different from that of Jesus, it only appears that way. We have trapped our own will in a self-manufactured prison, because when our will is free, it *is* God's and it *is* identical to the will of Jesus. The song writer Carole King once wrote, "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." She was wrong; that isn't freedom. Freedom is expressing the nature of your own being without restriction and without loss of any kind. For us, although we may seldom recognize it, that means the freedom to love, the freedom to extend ourselves, the freedom to give of ourselves. It is the joy of a limitless supply exuberantly donating itself to the universe.

The words Jesus uses in the third sentence are a close reflection of words he spoke about himself in the Gospel of John:

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.... By myself I can do nothing... (John 5:19, 30, NIV)

He applied similar words to his disciples, as well:

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 14:4-5, NIV)

It may seem distressing to affirm that without God, or of ourselves, we can do nothing. In reality, however, this is a powerful realization! We can understand it in two ways. In one sense it might mean that if we operate apart from God we are helpless. In another sense it might mean that we *cannot* operate apart from God! That is the sense given to the words here. Separation from God is not possible. We cannot *do* anything "of ourselves" because we cannot *be* "of ourselves" (7:3).

Jesus assures us that he will always remember the truth about us (7:5). That is our guarantee that *we*, one day, will also wake up and remember. He won't let us forget!

Meanwhile, we can practice remembering ourselves by remembering the Christ in each other, just as Jesus remembers the Christ in himself and in us. A sentence worth memorizing is, "In our remembrance of each other lies our remembrance of God" (7:6). Remembering one another is how we remember God, and that is true whether we are talking about remembering and affirming the Christ in Jesus, or remembering and affirming the Christ in Jane Smith. Waking up to who we really are is what true freedom is all about, because *being* who we really are is what true freedom *is*.

This mutual recognition of the Christ in one another is how we praise God (7:8). Acknowledging the eternal beauty of God's creations is the way we can give Him our "gift of gratitude" (7:9).

Part of recognizing the Christ in our brother or sister entails acknowledging the freedom of their will. Part of being the Christ is being free to make mistakes! Therefore, unless we are willing to grant that freedom to our brother, we are not recognizing our own freedom in God (7:11). As in all things, the way to have freedom is to give it (7:11), because acknowledging what they are, and what God is, is the only gift we can give to one another.

[The editors chose to make the latter part of sentence 11 into the first sentence of the next paragraph. I have chosen to include it in both places.]

Paragraph 8

8. ¹Freedom is the only gift you can offer to God's Sons, being an acknowledgment of what they are and what **He** is. ²Freedom is creation, because it is love. ³Whom you seek to imprison you do **not** love. ⁴Therefore, when you seek to imprison **anyone**, including **yourself**, you do not love him and you cannot identify with him. ⁵When you imprison yourself you are losing sight of your true identification with me and with the Father. ⁶Your identification **is** with the Father *and* [and] with the Son. ⁷It **cannot** be with one and not the other. ⁸If you are part of one you **must** be part of the other, because they **are** one. ⁹The Holy Trinity is holy *because* It is One. ¹⁰If you exclude **yourself** from this union, you are perceiving the Holy Trinity as separated. ¹¹You **must** be included in It, because It **is** everything. ¹²Unless you take your place in It and fulfill your function **as** part of It, the Holy Trinity is as bereft as **you** are. ¹³No part of It can be imprisoned if Its truth is to be known.

Offering the gift of freedom to one another acknowledges what we are and what God is (8:1). I think, on a simple level, we all know this. When someone else tries to impose their will on you, or tries to "rescue" you from some problem you are having, don't you feel somehow demeaned? Our egos may react in anger, with words like, "Please leave me alone; I'd rather do it myself!" But there is a truth in that reaction! When someone else refuses to grant me the freedom to make my own choices in some situation, I feel diminished. They are treating me like a child, with themselves in role of parent, and that feels somehow like an attack, not an act of love.

When we try to dominate someone else or to "rescue" them from their own choices, we *are* attacking them. We are imprisoning them, and that is not love! (8:3) Furthermore, we are separating ourselves from them, rather than identifying with them (8:4).

I feel there is real wisdom in the words of a poster I remember from the 70's or 80's, that said something like this: "If you love something, let it go. If it is yours, it will return to you. If it does not return, it was never yours to begin with." The most loving thing we can do, at times, is to let one another go. The most loving thing we can do is to refrain from trying to fix one another, and to give one another the freedom to choose for ourselves. God offers *us* the gift of freedom, and the way we claim that gift is by offering the same gift to each other.

Giving freedom in this way is not abandonment. It is an affirmation of the truth! It is saying, "I trust what is sane in you to lead you to the light. I trust God in you to bring you to Himself. I affirm that you are identified with me and with God, and you do not need me to make your choices for you. We are equals in God."

When we fail to offer freedom to each other, we are simultaneously denying our own freedom. That's probably *why* we are denying it to one another, because we do not want to accept responsibility for our own choices. If I see my brother as imprisoned I must be seeing myself in the same way. If we are to claim our place in God (or in the Trinity), we must claim it together. I cannot see myself in God if I perceive you as outside of God. The Sonship is part of God. If I am in God as part of that Sonship, so are you, so is everyone (8:8-13). To know my own freedom I must affirm that same freedom for everyone.

The assertion the Course makes here, that *we* are an integral part of the Holy Trinity, is probably astonishing to those of us from traditional Christian backgrounds, if not verging on seeming heresy. Yet if the Trinity is One, and if It "is everything" (8:11), we *must* be a part of It, and we must fulfill our function *as* part of It (8:12), which means that we join our will with God's and affirm our union with God and the entire Sonship. In the Course, the Trinity includes the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the *Sonship* (which includes all of us).

Answer Key

1. By disobeying God's laws you deny His Will, which is your own power; you thus deny yourself everything, including power and safety. You deny you are in God and so deny His help; you feel you don't deserve to have His help; therefore, you feel alone and thus helpless.
2. I believe that, in this context, the phrase "remembrance of me" means acknowledging Jesus' presence as God's light with us all the time, refuting our illusion of loneliness and separation. His being with us proves that we are not separated from or rejected by God, but still linked to Him. This reminds us of both the truth about ourselves and the truth about God—namely, that we are still as God created us, and He is still our loving Father.
3. As a result of accepting that Jesus is with you, you deny the world and accept God. You accept that your will is one with God's. You decide to hear God's Voice. Therefore, Jesus will send you to others and go there with you.
4. "Healing is a collaborative venture," means that you do not perform healings alone. The meaning is quite similar to Miracle Principle #5 (T-1.I.5; see also T-1.III.4:1–3). Jesus tells you to heal someone and you do what he says. This results in you yourself being healed. In the previous use of this phrase, it referred to collaboration between you and your brother, while here it refers to collaboration between you and Jesus.
5. Our will is as powerful as his will, for God's Sons are equal. Our will is as free as his will. God Himself would not go against our will and Jesus will not go against God's Will for us.
6. Nothing can oppose our decision because God gave our will its power and nothing can oppose God's Will. Jesus can only honor God's Will, which means honoring our choices. Jesus can only teach us the freedom of the Kingdom by allowing us to be free in our choices. Jesus cannot teach us freedom through dominating us. Jesus came to teach the lesson that we are all equal in will. He cannot teach us our equality by dominating us.
 - a. He means he will always remember who we really are. (b) No written answer is necessary. For me, this idea carries a powerful sense of reassurance. I don't always remember who I am. In fact, I forget *a lot*. In Jesus, I have someone who always remembers and who can consistently remind me of the truth, calling me to rise up to the highest in myself. Ultimately, I can know that I will eventually transcend my ego because he will never stop reminding me and urging me onward; he will never lose faith in me and give up. He *knows* who I really am.