

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Chapter 9

“The Acceptance of the Atonement”

Section II, “The Answer to Prayer”

This section, “The Answer to Prayer,” amplifies the argument about prayer, particularly *unanswered* prayer, given in Section I, and adds to it the dimension that our prayers are answered *through our brothers*.

The argument in the previous section (T-9.I.7:1–3; T-9.I.10:1–8) was that prayers seem to be unanswered largely because we are not asking *only* for what we really want, which is to know our own reality, and to know God as Love. Instead, we are mixing in requests for the ego’s illusions and asking for what would hurt us. We don’t receive because in truth we *don’t want* what we are wishing for. God will never give us anything that increases our separation because He will not give us what hurts us.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹Everyone who [has] ever tried to use prayer to ask for something has experienced what appears to be failure. ²This is not only true in connection with specific things that might be harmful, but also in connection with requests that are strictly in line with this course. ³The latter in particular might be incorrectly interpreted as “proof” that the course does not mean what it says. ⁴You must remember, however, that the course states, and **repeatedly**, that its purpose is the **escape from fear**.

• Study Question •

1. *The preceding section said we often do not receive what we ask for in prayer because God will not give us what would hurt us. What other kind of unanswered prayer is the subject of this paragraph?*

This section goes beyond Section I by saying that apparent failure in prayer can come in regard to requests for *good* things as well as requests for things that would harm us (1.2) We might, for instance, pray for a specific form of healing, and not receive it. Does this prove the course is incorrect? Or is there an explanation? (1:3).

The explanation, Jesus says, comes when we remember that *the purpose of the course is escape from fear* (1:4). The previous section has made it clear that most of us, on a profound level, are actually afraid of our true Self and our true will. This fear exists because we are too closely identified with the ego, which is our image of ourselves as separate from God and alone. Our reality, which is united with God and profoundly *corporate* as opposed to individual, appears to our ego-dominated mind as a threat to its existence. Now, if we are actually afraid of what we are (and therefore of what we truly

want), and if the goal of the course is *escape* from fear, then to *give* us what we want would *increase* that fear! Therefore, we don't receive it.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Let us suppose, then, that what you ask of the Holy Spirit **is** what you really want, but **you are still afraid of it**. ²Should this be the case, your **attainment** of it would no longer *be* what you want [**even if it is**]. ³This is why **certain specific forms** of healing are not achieved, even when [**even though**] the **state** of healing **is**. ⁴[**It frequently happens that**] An individual may ask [**asks**] for physical healing because he is fearful **of bodily harm**. ⁵[**However,**] At the same time, if he **were** healed physically, the threat to his thought system might [**would**] be considerably **more** fearful to him than its physical **expression**. ⁶In this case he is not really asking for **release** from fear, but for the removal of a symptom **that he himself selected**. ⁷This request is, therefore, **not** for healing at all.

• Study Question •

2. *Try to recall some instance when you prayed for something you felt was a genuinely good thing, and yet you did not receive it. Then, see if you can apply this paragraph to your situation.*

As Jesus said in the preceding paragraph, if we have made requests in prayer, we've experienced what seems to be failure. We don't always receive what we ask for. This is especially puzzling when we ask for something *good*, something we truly want (as opposed to something our ego tells us we want; such things we do not *truly* want because they are harmful). Suppose, for instance, we are asking for physical healing. That is something we truly want, and it would be good for us. Why don't we get it?

On the deepest level of spirit, we do want the healing. But superimposed over that is a layer of false self-image, a layer filled with fear. On that level, we *don't want* the healing; we are afraid of it (2:1). The healing would be too direct an affront to our thought system. In that case, Jesus says, our subconscious fear is canceling out our conscious desire for healing (2:2). Perhaps we still ask, but we cannot ask whole-heartedly. Part of our mind says "yes" while another part says "no."

The request is not actually "unanswered." Rather, it is not answered in the form we expect, that is, our body is not healed. And yet our mind may actually receive the healing! In this case, the mind receives healing but the body does not follow (2:3) because the mind has not *accepted* the healing. We receive the *content* of the healing, but not the specific *form* of healing we consciously asked for.

Another way of looking at it: Perhaps we want the *result* (a healed body) but do not want the *means* (a miraculous transformation of our body, something that defies scientific law). Jesus says that when we ask for physical healing we often do not receive it because the shock of sudden healing would be too great for our minds (2:4–5). I think that we are so wedded to the idea of our body as solid and real—or to the reality of the material universe in general—that it would "blow our mind" if the body suddenly healed itself. The healing would be tangible evidence that our thought system is invalid, and the destruction of our thought system is even more terrifying than the destruction of our bodies (2:5). The bodily illness is a symptom *we ourselves selected* (2:6) to reinforce the

ego's thought system; despite our conscious thoughts, we don't really want the symptom removed by God—because it would prove God is real! We are not *truly* asking for that kind of healing, so we don't receive it (2:7).

This can be a frustrating teaching if we take it only halfway. I can tell myself that I want my back pain to be healed. Then, when I ask and do not receive healing of my back, I may at first doubt that God hears. Then, hearing teaching like that of this paragraph, I realize that I must have some unconscious desire to have this pain. According to the Course, I have actually *selected* this pain. But I am not aware of having selected it. My back *hurts*, and all I can think about is wanting the pain to be gone. How can I be held accountable for some *unconscious* choice I am making? It doesn't seem fair. Either I end up feeling guilty for having such a masochistic love for pain, or else I get mad at God for putting healing out of my reach, in control of an inaccessible part of my mind. I'm left in pain feeling that there's nothing I can do about it.

What helps me, personally, is to remember that Jesus is not telling us this to lay a guilt trip on us. He's just explaining why it works the way it does. I think this whole teaching is the reason that he tells us not to make healing the body our goal, but rather healing of the mind (T-8.IX.1:5). When we ask for physical healing and don't get it, we end up guilty or angry. What's the solution? *Don't ask the Holy Spirit to heal your body.* If asking for physical healing ends up causing us pain, *just don't ask.* Instead, ask for healing of our perceptions of the body.

Why is it so frustrating that our prayers for physical healing go unanswered? It is frustrating because physical healing is the focus; we have made healing the *body* the goal, and we aren't reaching that goal. The problem, according to the Course, is not that our prayer is unanswered; the problem is that our prayer is not sincere! For our request to be pure we need to have our *minds* healed. Pray for *that*, and you will be answered.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹The Bible emphasizes that all prayer is answered [*all prayers are answered*], and this is indeed true [*if no effort is wasted*]. ²The very fact that the Holy Spirit has been asked for anything will ensure a response. ³Yet it is equally certain that no response given by Him will ever be one that would increase fear. ⁴It is [*even*] possible that His answer will not be heard [*at all*]. ⁵It is impossible, however, that it will be lost. ⁶There are many answers you have already received but have not yet heard. ⁷I assure you that they are waiting for you. [*It is indeed true that no effort is wasted.*]

• Study Question •

3. *Paragraph 3 continues with this same theme. When an answer would increase your fear, it will not be heard. In this case, will the Holy Spirit still answer, or will He withhold the answer?*

For what it's worth, please notice that the Course once again is agreeing with the Bible and building on what it teaches. In my opinion (and some Course teachers may disagree), Course students would do well to at least read, if not study, the Bible. Much (although not all) of what it teaches is true, and the teaching of the Course is very evidently related to that of the Bible as a child is to its parent. Knowledge of the Bible is

a definite asset in understanding the Course. Although it need not always be taken literally, and though some of its history may be suspect, learning to interpret it symbolically or metaphysically can be an avenue to increased spiritual understanding.

The Course, like the Bible, teaches, "...that all prayer is answered" (3:1). There is no such thing as unanswered prayer. The answer just isn't always the one we are expecting! The Holy Spirit will never give us anything that would increase our fear (3:3). This is the same general idea that was present back in Chapter 2:

This [approval of use of external means for healing] is because the last thing that can help the non-right-minded, or the sick, is an increase in fear. They are already in a fear-weakened state. If they are prematurely exposed to a miracle, they may be precipitated into panic (T-2.IV.4:7-9).

"Magic is the mindless or the miscreative use of mind. Physical medications are forms of "spells," but if you are afraid to use the mind to heal, you should not attempt to do so. The very fact that you are afraid makes your mind vulnerable to miscreation. You are therefore likely to misunderstand any healing that might occur, and because egocentricity and fear usually occur together, you may be unable to accept the real Source of the healing. Under these conditions, it is safer for you to rely temporarily on physical healing devices, because you cannot misperceive them as your own creations. As long as your sense of vulnerability persists, you should not attempt to perform miracles" (T-2.V.2:1-6).

What is added here is that, whatever our state of mind, and whatever we ask for, the Holy Spirit *always* answers us (3:2). We may not hear what He says (3:4). If we've asked for the healing of our bodies, not "hearing" Him may translate into not having our body healed. He "sent" healing into our minds, but it got stalled there. It got blocked. Our fear of the loss of our ego intercepted the healing.

The healing, though blocked, *has not been lost* (3:5). The answer has been "...received but...not yet heard" (3:6). The idea presented here is one that is repeated several times in the Course. The word "heard" can be understood as synonymous to "accepted." Our minds have a sort of repository or storehouse. When the Holy Spirit gives us a healing answer that we are not yet ready to accept, He saves it for us in the storehouse. That answer waits for us (3:7) until we are ready to accept it. We have received the answer, but something in us (our fear) prevented us from making use of it, so it has been put in storage until we are ready for it. The Manual for Teachers presents the same idea like this, from the perspective of someone offering healing to another, rather than from the patient's point of view:

Healing is always certain. It is impossible to let illusions be brought to truth and keep the illusions. Truth demonstrates illusions have no value. The teacher of God has seen the correction of his errors in the mind of the patient, recognizing it for what it is. Having accepted the Atonement for himself, he has also accepted it for the patient. Yet what if the patient uses sickness as a way of life, believing healing is the way to death? When this is so, a sudden healing might precipitate intense depression, and a sense of loss so deep that the patient might even try to destroy himself. Having nothing to live for, he may ask for death. Healing must wait, for his protection.

Healing will always stand aside when it would be seen as threat. The instant it is welcome it is there. Where healing has been given it will be received. And what is time before the gifts of God? We have referred many times in the text to the storehouse of treasures laid up equally for the giver and the receiver of God's gifts. Not one is lost, for they can but increase. No teacher of God should feel disappointed if he has offered healing and it does not appear to have been received. It is not up to him to judge when his gift should be accepted. Let him be certain it has been received, and trust that it will be accepted when it is recognized as a blessing and not a curse (M-6.1:1-2:9).

All the answers to our “unanswered” prayers have been given to us, and, if we were not ready to receive them, have been stashed and preserved in the “storehouse of treasures.” And, says Jesus, “I assure you that they are waiting for you. It is indeed true that no effort is wasted.”

Paragraph 4

4. ¹If you would know your prayers are answered, never doubt a Son of God. ²Do not question him and do not confound him, for your faith in him is your faith in **yourself**. ³If you would know God and His Answer, believe in me whose faith in **you** cannot be shaken. ⁴Can you ask of the Holy Spirit truly, and doubt your brother? ⁵Believe his words are true because of the truth that is in him. ⁶You will unite with the truth in him, and his words will *be* true. ⁷As you hear him you will hear me. **8Listening** to truth is the only way you can hear it now, and finally **know** it.

• Study Question •

4. *What can you do to ensure that you will hear the Holy Spirit when He answers your prayers?*

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The subject now appears to change abruptly from not doubting that the Holy Spirit answers our prayers to never doubting *your brother*—seemingly a *very* different topic. What is actually being said is that the Holy Spirit will answer us *in and through* our brothers. Anyone who has ever experimented with prayer would like to be certain that his prayers are always answered. What an incredible comfort prayer would be if we *knew* that, every time we spoke to God in prayer, He heard and answered! Oh, we may say we know that is true, but we do not really *know* it. We just *hope*. We just *believe*. How can we know *for sure*?

I don't think I would have ever guessed the answer. Would you have guessed? “If you would know your prayers are answered”...what? Pray more fervently? Spend hours in meditation? Obey the Ten Commandments? No, none of those. “Never doubt a Son of God” (4:1). What on earth has that got to do with certainty in prayer? And, perhaps more relevant yet, what does that mean: “Never doubt a Son of God”? Let's take those two questions in reverse order.

What does it mean to not doubt a Son of God? First of all, we have to realize that “Son of God” refers to anyone and everyone, male or female, spiritual or unspiritual, loving or attacking. Everyone you know is a Son of God. Everyone in the world is a Son of God. To doubt a person means to think they are not sincere, genuine, or trustworthy.

Does this mean that we should simply take everyone at their word, even when they are known to be flagrant liars? Does it mean we should naively trust everything anyone tells us? Of course not! I don't know of anyone who thinks that is a wise spiritual approach, do you? In the Bible, Jesus tells his disciples to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). So let's just eliminate that interpretation.

Workbook Lesson 181 is titled, "I trust my brothers, who are one with me." Trust is the opposite of doubt, so the teaching of this lesson can help us understand what it means never to doubt our brothers and sisters.

Remove your focus on your brother's sins, and you experience the peace that comes from faith in sinlessness (W-pI.181.2:5).

And if a brother's sins occur to us, our narrowed focus will restrict our sight, and turn our eyes upon our own mistakes, which we will magnify and call our "sins." So, for a little while, without regard to past or future, should such blocks arise we will transcend them with instructions to our minds to change their focus, as we say:

It is not this that I would look upon.

I trust my brothers, who are one with me (W-pI.181.6:2-5).

According to Lesson 181, it means never to believe in their "sins." It means to look past their mistakes and to recognize them as the sinless Son of God. To never doubt a brother means that we never question who he really is. We are not deceived by his ego, no matter how flagrant (or perhaps "fragrant" would be a better word) it is. We never doubt he is the holy Son of God, no matter how convincing his disguise. By not agreeing with his own confusion of himself with his ego and body, we do not "confound" him; we do not add to his confusion.

Second, *what does trusting our brother have to do with knowing our prayers are answered?* This question is a bit harder to answer. Our first clue is in the words, "...for your faith in him is your faith in yourself" (4:2). The word "for" is a flag; it tells us, "this is the reason for what I just said." What "faith" are we being asked to have in our brother? That he will always say wise things? No. That he will always be kind and loving? No. That he will never act from selfish, ego-driven motives? No. That he will always speak the truth? No. What we are being asked to believe about him is that, regardless of any behavior he may exhibit, he is God's Son and worthy of God's love, with the Holy Spirit dwelling within his mind.

Now if whatever we believe about another is what we believe about ourselves, which is another way of saying what is said in 4.2, then if we trust our brothers, we will trust ourselves. We will believe that we are God's Son and worthy of God's love, with the Holy Spirit dwelling in our minds. If that is so, how could God not hear our prayers?

The unspoken assumption here is that we are choosing pain for ourselves because *we think we deserve it*. That idea is very clearly presented elsewhere in the Course. If we are condemning our brothers, we will also be condemning ourselves. Therefore, when we ask for release from pain we won't really believe we deserve it, and therefore we will not allow ourselves to receive it. In a word, we need to forgive ourselves before we can receive healing.

How do we forgive ourselves? The Course is quite consistent in its answer to this question: We forgive ourselves by forgiving our brothers. The sins we see in our brothers

are our own sins, so when we forgive them we *are* forgiving ourselves. “Only in someone else can you forgive yourself...” (S-2.I.4:6). Therefore, if we want to know our prayers are answered, we must forgive our brothers. We must learn to trust in their essential divinity, despite all appearances. Only that will allow us to come to believe in our own divinity, despite much that appears to contradict it.

Jesus said something similar in the Bible, in a much more direct way:

“So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”

(Matthew 5:23–24 NRSV)

Our prayers and offerings to God will not be effectual unless things are right between us and our brothers and sisters.

I said above that not doubting a brother does not mean we believe everything he says. Yet here, the Course says: “Believe his words are true...” (4:5). The reason to do so is that he has the truth in him. That is, he has the Holy Spirit in him, or he has the divine nature in him. He is a holy Son of God. I think that this *does* mean that when someone expresses a “higher” sentiment—a desire for peace, an intention to be kind or to love—we *should* believe them. We don’t necessarily believe that they will *act* on their beliefs, but those words represent something that is true within them. That really is who they are! Seen in this light, believing a brother’s words means basically the same thing as believing that he is essentially loving and loveable.

The clue that this is what Jesus means, to me, is that he tells us that when we *do* believe our brother’s words and join with the truth that is in him, “...his words will be true” (4:6). It is as though *my* believing in *his* words *makes* them true. (He states this quite directly in the next paragraph, 5:1.) They may be uttered insincerely to begin with, but if I lend my support to the meaning that those words carry, my faith in his loving nature will connect with that nature and elicit from him the loving response his words promised.

This is exactly how Jesus interacts with us. I think this is why he asks us to believe in him (4:3), and points out his unshakable faith in us. His faith in us draws forth the love from within us. He is offering himself and how he interacts with us as an example of how we are to interact with everyone around us. If we give our brothers and sisters the same unshakable faith that Jesus gives us, we will not only hear (perceive) the truth in that person, we will also hear Jesus as well. The voice of truth in our brother *is* Jesus’ voice, or rather, it is the same Voice that speaks through them both. If we want to hear the truth, we are going to have to *listen* for it (4:8), and that means listening for it *in the very people who seem to us to be out of touch with God*.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹The message your brother gives you is **up to you**. ²What does he say to you? ³What would **you** have him say? ⁴Your decision **about** him determines the message **you** receive. ⁵Remember that the Holy Spirit is in him, and His Voice speaks to **you** through him. ⁶What can so holy a brother tell you **except** truth? ⁷But are you **listening** to it? ⁸Your brother may not know who he is, but there is a light in his mind that **does** know. ⁹This light can shine into yours, giving truth

to his words [making his words true] and making you able to hear them. ¹⁰His words are the Holy Spirit's answer to you. ¹¹Is your faith in him strong enough to let you [listen and] hear?

• Study Question •

5. *If your brother says something that you know to be false, can you still believe that his words are true? Why and how, or why not?*

What a stunning realization! The other person does not determine the message I receive from him; *I do*. I hear him say whatever *I want* to hear him say, based on what I believe he *is!* (5:1–4).

That is so far from how we normally perceive things it almost takes my breath away and leaves my mind reeling. How much of our time communicating with one another do we normally spend trying to determine just what it was the other person *meant*. What message was she sending to me? When she said, “Do you have to wear that shirt today?” did she mean:

Your shirt is dirty.

You look awful in that color.

That shirt is too casual.

I *hate* that shirt.

You have terrible taste in clothes.

Why don't you save that shirt for a special occasion?

The idea that I—not she, but I—determine what message I receive is mind-boggling!

Now I don't think this means that the other person does not contribute to the situation, or that we can make their words mean whatever we like. I'm sure that when my wife asks me a question like that about my shirt, she has *some* meaning in mind: perhaps one of those I list above, perhaps something else entirely. However, I'm equally certain that sometimes I receive a message that is entirely unrelated to what she meant to say!

For instance, one day she might comment, “This counter is wet.” Given my propensity towards guilt it is quite likely I will interpret this as some kind of accusation. Perhaps she is telling me I failed to clean up the kitchen properly. Perhaps she is telling me I'm losing my eyesight because I didn't see the wet spot. If I see her as a person who is likely to attack me (which in turn is based on seeing myself as deserving attack), I will probably put some kind of guilt-related spin on almost *anything* she says.

The way we see our brothers determines the message we hear them sending (5:4). In simple terms, this means that the reason we do not hear the Holy Spirit speaking through our brothers is that we do not see them as the sort of people through whom the Holy Spirit would speak! If we see them as separate, competing with us and attacking us, we will not hear the Holy Spirit. If we see our brothers as like ourselves, truly wanting what we truly want, we will hear the Call for Love (which is the Holy Spirit) in them (5:5–6).

To hear the Holy Spirit speaking in the people around us we have to make a decision. We have to *listen* for the Holy Spirit's Voice (5:7). We have to decide that this brother has the Holy Spirit in him, and open our ears to hearing His voice in him. The “light in his mind” (5:8) knows who our brother is. Our job is to *hear that Voice*.

Once again there is an implication here that something is perceived at first one way, and then another. Our brother's words at first seem false to us. They seem to be informing us of his hatred, his desire to augment his own ego at our expense, his lack of love, or his self-centeredness. When we decide to listen to the Holy Spirit in him, however, it will *give truth to his words* (5:9). It will transform the way we hear them, and instead of the ego's attack we will hear "the Holy Spirit's answer" (5:10). We will hear a call for love.

Jesus refers to this as "faith" (5:11). Sometimes it takes a great deal of faith to look for the Holy Spirit in someone who seems to be attacking us. Some part of us does not want to do that. We want to counter-attack. We want to punish the perceived attacker. Looking past the apparent attack to hear the call for love that lies beneath it seems like a great sacrifice; we feel that we are sacrificing our "right" to revenge. If we look at the person from the ego perspective there is no hint of holiness in what we see. It seems as though listening for the Holy Spirit in *this* person is a waste of time! That's why it is called *faith*; it takes a deliberate act of will on our part, a choice that says, "I don't care what *seems* to be true about him (or her), I choose to believe that beneath that disguise lies a child of God, both lovable and loving. I want to hear the voice of that divine child."

Paragraph 6

6. ¹You can no more pray for yourself alone than you can find joy for yourself alone. ²Prayer is the restatement of inclusion, directed by the Holy Spirit under the laws of God. [These first two sentences were moved from the middle of T-6.II.8; why is unknown.] ³Salvation is of your brother. ⁴The Holy Spirit extends from your mind to his, and answers *you*. ⁵You cannot hear the Voice for God in yourself alone, because you are **not** alone. ⁶And His answer is only for what you **are**. ⁷You will not know the trust I have in you unless you **extend** it. ⁸You will not trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or believe that it is for **you** unless you hear it in others. ⁹It **must** be for your brother *because* it is for you. ¹⁰Would God have created a Voice for you alone? ¹¹Could you hear His answer **except** as He answers **all** of God's Sons? ¹²Hear of your brother what you would have me hear of **you**, for you would not want **me** to be deceived.

• Study Question •

6. *Make a list of the things in this paragraph that we cannot do alone or cannot do without our brothers.*

The message the Course gives us is that we cannot make it by ourselves. This isn't quite the same thing as saying we can't make it on our own; in fact, we *can* make it on our own, it's just that "our own" is a corporate "our." We cannot pursue a private spiritual path because the words "spiritual" and "private" are mutually exclusive. They are irreconcilable states. No true prayer can be offered on behalf of a separate individual. Every effectual prayer includes everyone (6:1-2). In the kind of prayer the Course encourages, we are not asking for things, we are asserting the fact of our unity with one another and with God. "Prayer is the restatement of inclusion..." (6:2). Read the prayers in Part II of the Workbook to see what I mean. They are more pronouncements than they are petitions.

Since prayer is an affirmation of what is always so (rather than asking for something that isn't so now), prayer *must* recognize Christ in our brothers. Therefore, the answer to our prayers is in our brothers (6:3). (Remember that back in paragraph 4 the question we asked was how we could be certain our prayers were answered, and that the answer was, "Never doubt a Son of God" (4:1). We are still following Jesus' explanation of why trusting our brothers is the way to find the answer to our prayers.) When we extend faith to our brother, trusting in the Christ within him, trusting in the reality of who our brother really is, what we extend extends back to us from his mind (6:4). What we give we receive. Let's remember also that in true prayer what we are asking for is true perception; the healing of our minds, not the healing of the body. It would be impossible to envision that somehow physical healing would extend from our brother's mind to ours; it makes perfect sense that as we perceive the Christ in him, something extends from his mind back to our own, enabling us to perceive the Christ in ourselves. That perception will also adjust the way we see our bodies, because when we see ourselves as the Christ, we will realize that our bodies are nothing but tools the mind can use, and not an essential part of ourselves at all.

We can't recognize God's Voice in ourselves unless we recognize Him in everyone. There *is* no Voice for God in any *individual*; the Voice exists only in the corporate, shared Self (6:5–6) that is our true Identity.

We cannot know how much trust Jesus has in us unless we first extend trust to our brothers (6:7). Again this is a matter of healing our perception of ourselves. That isn't going to happen without forgiving those around us. If we hold on to misperceptions of evil in our brothers we will never perceive the holiness in ourselves. If we cannot trust our brothers, how can we ever believe that Jesus could trust us? We are made of the same stuff. We are human just like they are; if they cannot be trusted, neither can we.

Can you imagine a God who would send special guidance to select individuals, while ignoring the rest of the human race? Could you really believe that God speaks to *you* but not to your brother? (6:10). If so, what incredible hubris makes you think that way?

It's true that many groups down through history have believed exactly that: That God spoke to them specially, and not to anyone else. The Course rejects that idea out of hand. It won't even consider the possibility. If guidance is for anyone it is for all (6:9). If God answers anyone, He will answer everyone in the same way (6:11). Therefore, unless we are willing to recognize that the Voice for God speaks to, in and through *everyone* (especially *that* person; yes, even *that* one), we won't hear His Voice, or if we do, we won't recognize that it is meant for us (6:8).

I've been there; I know what this is talking about. I've heard God's Voice speaking of perfect innocence, saying, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1, KJV). I've heard that over and over and yet remained locked in guilt. I could not accept that the message was *about me*.

The final sentence of this paragraph is a real gem in my mind: "Hear of your brother what you would have me hear of you..." (6:12).

Imagine that you were sitting down with Jesus to talk about your life. You are going to tell him your story and explain how you have lived and why you have lived that way. How would you want him to hear you? Would you want him to listen with a critical ear, ready to point out every failure? Or would you prefer that he listen with compassion and

love, quick to point out your triumphs and to gloss over your mistakes? Would you rather that he watch for points to praise or for cause to condemn?

When you have formed a clear mental picture of how you would like to have Jesus hear your story, transfer that attitude to yourself, and imagine yourself listening to your brother in just that same compassionate, understanding way. That, in my mind, is what this whole section has been talking about. That is what it means to trust your brother.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹I love you for the truth in you, as **God** does. ²Your deceptions may deceive **you**, but they cannot deceive **me**. ³Knowing what you **are**, I **cannot** doubt you. ⁴I hear only the Holy Spirit in you, Who speaks to me through **you**. ⁵If you would hear **me**, hear my brothers in whom God's Voice speaks. ⁶The answer to **all** [your] prayers lies in them. ⁷You will be answered as you **hear the answer in everyone**. ⁸Do not listen to anything else or you will not hear truly [not hear truth].

• Study Question •

7. *Jesus does not doubt us and is not deceived by our deceptions. He hears only the Holy Spirit speaking in our words. What does this say about how to listen to the words of others?*

Here Jesus expands on his suggestion in 6:12 that we listen to our brothers and sisters in the same way as he listens to us, and with the same faith and trust in who they are as he has in who we are. He loves us because he knows that we have the truth in us (7:1). We may have lost sight of our Identity, but he has not (7:2). Just so, our brothers may behave entirely as egos because they believe that is who they are, but we know better, and therefore we cannot doubt them (7:3). Instead, we hear the Holy Spirit in them (7:4), as Jesus does with us. Every one of us has the answer within himself or herself: "Not one of us but has the answer in him, to give to anyone who asks it of him" (T-11.VIII.8:7).

When all your prayers are such that what you ask for yourself you ask for everyone, they will be answered (7:7). "Prayer is the restatement of inclusion" (6:2) means that in true prayer, you never ask for yourself alone but for everyone. You are endeavoring to uncover the truth that is in everyone, not just to find something for yourself. This is what takes us away from viewing reality as containing many separate selves towards seeing reality as a single Self that includes everyone. You can only find your Self in your brothers because your Self includes your brothers.

In sum: The answer we are looking for is the healing of our minds' perception that we are separated individuals (and therefore guilty). We will not find that answer until we begin to share it with everyone.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹Believe in your brothers **because** I believe in you, and you will learn that my belief in you is justified. ²Believe in me *by* believing in them, for the sake of what God gave them. **3They will answer you** if you learn to ask only truth of them. ⁴Do not ask for blessings without blessing **them**, for only in this way can

you learn how blessed **you** are. ⁵By following this way you **are** seeking [looking for] the truth in **you**. ⁶This is not going **beyond** yourself but **toward** yourself. ⁷Hear only God's Answer in His Sons, and **you** are answered.

• **Study Question** •

8. *For thought: Is finding guidance from the Holy Spirit in my brothers, am I guilty of seeking outside myself for the answer?*

Jesus repeats his request that we give our brothers the same trust that he gives to us (8:1–2). Only in doing so will we come to rely on his trust, because in discovering the God-given Self we all share in our brothers, we will know the *reason* for his trust in us. We will see in others that which he sees in us. In fact, he tells us that the way to believe in *him* is to believe in our brothers (8:2). What a contrast to some forms of traditional Christianity, where all the emphasis is placed on believing in some special status (even divinity) that is accorded to Jesus! If believing in Jesus means believing in the Christ in our brothers, it places a whole new meaning on the words, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). “Salvation is of your brother” (6:3).

Apparently, when we hold a certain mental picture of our brothers and expect certain things from them, our pictures and our expectations evoke those very things in our brothers (8:3). We literally call them forth. As we do, we enable ourselves to see these same things in ourselves.

Normally, when some spiritual teacher advises us to seek the truth within ourselves, we think of closing our eyes and focusing our attention somewhere deep inside of ourselves. The Course itself actually uses such exercises in the Workbook. Here, however, the Course presents a strikingly different understanding of seeking the truth in ourselves (8:5). Seeking the truth in ourselves consists in asking the truth of our brothers and asking for blessing for them, including them as beneficiary of every prayer we pray (8:3–5). This may sound like looking for the answer outside ourselves, but that is only because we have such a fundamental misperception of what our Self really is (8:6).

Paragraphs 9, 10 and 11

9. ¹To disbelieve is to side **against**, or to **attack**. ²To believe is to accept, and to **side with**. ³To believe is not to be credulous, but to accept and **appreciate**. ⁴What you do **not** believe you do **not appreciate**, and you **cannot** be grateful for what you do not **value**. ⁵There is a price you will pay for judgment, because judgment **is** the setting of a price. ⁶And as you set it you **will** pay it.

10. ¹If paying is equated with **getting**, you will set the **price** low but demand a high **return**. ²You will have forgotten, however, that to price is to **value**, so that **your** return is **in proportion to your judgment of worth**. ³If paying is associated with giving **it cannot be perceived as loss**, and the **reciprocal** relationship of giving and **receiving** will be recognized. ⁴The price will then be set high, because of the value of the **return**. ⁵The price for **getting** is to **lose sight of value**, making it inevitable that you will **not** value what you receive. ⁶Valuing it little, you will not appreciate it and you will not **want** it.

11. ¹Never forget, then, that **you [have]** set the value on what you receive, and price **[have priced]** it **[set the value on it]** by what you give. ²To believe that it is possible to get much **for** little is to believe that you can bargain with God. ³God's laws are **always** fair and **perfectly** consistent. **4By** giving you receive. ⁵But to receive is to **accept**, **not** to get. ⁶It is impossible not to **have**, but it is possible **not to know you have**. ⁷The recognition of **having** is the willingness for **giving**, and **only** by this willingness can you **recognize** what you have. ⁸What you give is therefore the value you put on what you have, being the exact measure of the value you **put** upon it. ⁹And this, in turn, is the measure of **how much you want it**.

• **Study Question** •

9. *These paragraphs are hard to understand. Take just a part of it: You set the value of what you receive by how much you pay for it. What do you think the phrase "If paying is associated with giving" means (10:3, contrast with 10:1)?*

I want to treat these three paragraphs as a unit because the concept they are presenting about value and price is hard to understand without taking in everything they have to say on the subject.

Paragraph 9 first explains in more detail what Jesus means by believing in our brother, or trusting him. It says pretty much what I've already pointed out above, which is that believing in someone does not mean that we are "credulous" (9:3), which is a great word, meaning "disposed to believe on little evidence" (Wordnet) or "gullible." In other words we are not fools. We don't believe whatever anyone tells us. Rather, it means that we "accept and appreciate" and to "side with" everyone (9:2-3).

To do otherwise—to "disbelieve" (9:1)—is not just a kind of objective standing apart from someone; it is an actual *attack* on them (9:1). It is an assault on their integrity. When we fail to believe in a brother we cannot appreciate him or be grateful for what he is (9:4). Think about it. Do you feel appreciation and gratitude toward someone if you suspect them of malicious motives? Of course not!

In my own words: "What you judge you do not value." When we judge someone we are determining their worth, or setting a price. And we are setting the price very, very low. When we fail to recognize the Christ in a brother, we have greatly diminished him. If we do not value something, we don't think it is worth very much and therefore we will not pay much for it.

The argument, in simple form, is that what you pay for something goes hand in hand with how much you value it, and it works both ways. If you don't value a thing you won't pay much for it, and conversely, if you pay a very low price for something, you won't value it much. If I buy a \$10 digital watch, I won't value it much. If I buy a Rolex for \$1000, I will value it highly. Thus, the more I give, the more value I receive. And *I set the price*.

Therefore, we can gauge how much we value something by how much we are willing to give for it:

What you give is therefore the value you put on what you have, being the exact measure of the value you put upon it. (11:8)

So the worth I ascribe to my brother—that is, how much I see him to be worthy of my love, worthy of my time, worthy of my trust that the Holy Spirit is within him—is the measure of the value I will receive from the relationship. What I *give* determines what I *receive*. In this case we are not talking about giving in the material sense, like giving money or gifts to someone. To give to my brother, in the way this passage uses the word “give,” means to acknowledge something about my brother. I give to him when I “grant” him his holiness, his innocence, his loving nature, and his right to the Kingdom of God. I give to him by *believing in him*. And as I give I will receive. What I acknowledge in him, I will recognize and strengthen in myself.

There are two diametrically opposed ways of seeing your brother. They must both be in your mind, because you are the perceiver. They must also be in his, because you are perceiving him. See him through the Holy Spirit in his mind, and you will recognize Him in yours. What you acknowledge in your brother you are acknowledging in yourself, and what you share you strengthen (T-5.III.3:1-5).

We can view “paying” in one of two ways. We can view it as a way to *get* something, or we can view it as a way to *give* something. Typically we view paying as a way to get things, as when we pay for our groceries. When we carry that over to our relationships, we tend to think of acknowledging and appreciating the value of a brother or sister as some kind of obligation; we think it *costs* us something to look beyond their mistakes and see the holy Son of God. We begrudge every ounce of acknowledgement we offer to them, and often will do so only if there is some clear benefit to ourselves in return (10:1). Acknowledging another becomes a ploy we use to manipulate them into giving us what we want.

The Course asks us to think of paying as a way of *giving*, bearing in mind “the reciprocal relationship of giving and receiving” (10:3). When we think of payment in this way, we realize that the more we give, the more we will receive (10:4). Thus, the more I acknowledge Christ in my brother, the more I will acknowledge Him in myself. The more I see my brother as sinless, the more I will see myself as likewise free of sin. And so on.

When we see payment as a way of getting something, it causes us to undervalue what comes back to us (10:5). We end up feeling that we probably paid too much! Most of us have experienced this in relationships. We extend “love” to a brother or sister, expecting a certain return. Perhaps he or she responds favorably, but without sufficiently gushing gratitude, so that we feel our efforts were not adequately compensated. She or he offered us some love in return, but we don’t value it because it does not measure up to our expectations. Viewing love as a kind of barter, giving to get, destroys the value of what is given and what is received.

When we recognize that giving *is* receiving, feeling cheated is impossible. Whatever I give to my brother *I am* giving to myself, so I am *immediately* repaid; I don’t have to wait on my brother’s response. The value of what I receive is determined by what I give (11:1). “By giving you receive” (11:4).

The Course makes another extremely important distinction in paragraph 11. Earlier, we pointed out that giving does not mean that something I have passes from my hands to my brother’s hands; it means that I am acknowledging or honoring something in my brother that he *already has*. Likewise, “receiving” is not the same as “getting” (11:5).

When we say that “*by giving [we] receive,*” we do *not* mean that by giving we *get*. In fact that is the exact opposite; that is “giving to get.” In the Course, *to receive* means *to accept* (11:5). It means recognizing something that we *already have*. Thus, we could expand “by giving [we] receive” like this: “By acknowledging what is already true about our brothers, we come to accept what is already true about ourselves.” By honoring the Christ in others, we begin to remember what we have always had but had forgotten (11:6).

Our “willingness for giving” (11:7) is what enables us to remember the truth about ourselves. Our generosity and our enlightened self-awareness go hand in hand; as one grows, so will the other (11:8). The more enlightened we are about our own true Self, the more generous, accepting, and tolerant we become toward others; the more generous we are toward others, the more profoundly we recognize our Self.

Paragraph 12

12. ¹You can **ask** of the Holy Spirit, then, **only** by giving **to** Him, and you can **give** to Him only **where you recognize [see] Him**. ²If you recognize [*see*] Him in everyone, consider how much you will be **asking of** Him, and **how much you will receive**. ³He will deny you nothing because you have denied Him nothing, and so you can **share everything**. ⁴This is the way, and the **only** way to have His answer, because His answer is all you can ask for and **want**. ⁵Say, then, to everyone:
⁶*Because I will to know myself,
I see you as God's Son and my brother.*

• Study Question •

10. What unusual form of prayer (asking) is advocated in this paragraph?

When I recognize the Holy Spirit in a brother, that act is a gift from me to the Holy Spirit. When I give a gift to the Holy Spirit, then because giving is receiving, my gift is actually a form of prayer! In prayer as we normally understand it, I tell the Holy Spirit (or God) what I want by my words. In the Course's form of prayer, I indicate what I want by what I give to my brother; therefore, that gift is a prayer, which “asks” for an answer from the Holy Spirit (12:1).

I think that if there is one quality that can serve as a barometer of spiritual maturity for me, it is generosity of spirit. When a person freely and easily recognizes and acknowledges the spirit in others, it indicates to me that he or she has arrived at a comfortable acceptance of his or her own spirituality. There is little or no self-promotion or self-protection. There is no desire to tear down others, but rather to build them up. True saints recognize the saint in everyone (12:2). That very generosity, that willingness to acknowledge the divine in everyone, is what gives such people their spiritual power. It allows the Holy Spirit to pour His grace into them and through them without danger of ego contamination (12:3).

Recognizing the Holy Spirit in everyone “is the way, and the only way to have His answer” (12:4). Notice how the focus has shifted from the start of this section, even though we are returning to the theme of the answer to prayer. We have moved from prayer as pleading for physical healing, to prayer as asking for a change of perception, to

prayer as extending love and acknowledgment to our brothers. The answer we receive is the same acknowledgment we give, the same looking past of body and ego to see the eternal wholeness of spirit within. We cannot see that in ourselves unless we are willing to see it in others. We cannot move beyond the infirmity of body until we have embraced the soundness of spirit in ourselves; we cannot recognize that in ourselves until we acknowledge it in our brothers.

Like the preceding section, this one ends with a *practice* that sums up the teaching of the section in a succinct phrase that, if practiced as instructed, will implement the teaching in our lives. In this case it is a prayer or declaration that we are asked to repeat (silently) to ourselves whenever we encounter another person: “Because I will to know myself, I see you as God’s Son and my brother” (12:6). This harks back to paragraph 4’s initially odd-seeming admonition about how to know that our prayers are answered: “Never doubt a Son of God” (4:1). Who would have thought that the solution to unanswered prayers lay in acknowledging the Holy Spirit in other people?

• **Study Question** •

11. Try to imagine what your day would be like if, today, you put this exercise into practice. How different would your perception of people and situations be if, every time you met someone, you mentally repeated these words?

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Answer Key

1. This paragraph deal with unanswered requests that are in line with this Course. That is, things that we ask for that would be genuinely good for us.
2. No written answer is expected.
3. He will always answer and the answer will always be received, even though it may not be heard.
4. To be sure of hearing the answer of the Holy Spirit, never doubt, question or confound your brother. (“Confound” means “to puzzle or confuse.” I think that confounding my brother means adding to his confusion by supporting his ego illusions.)
5. Yes, you can still believe his words are true in a certain sense. If you see the truth within him, that truth will shine into your mind, revealing the truth that lies beneath his words, regardless of his consciously intended meaning for those words. For instance, he may be saying, “I am very angry at you,” but you will hear the buried meaning, “I need to know that you love me.”
6. Things we cannot do alone or without our brothers:
 - a. Pray for myself
 - b. Find joy for myself
 - c. Hear the Voice for God
 - d. Know the trust Jesus has in me
 - e. Trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit
 - f. Believe that the guidance of the Holy Spirit is for me
7. When we listen to others, we should strive to not hear their egos, but to hear only the Holy Spirit speaking in them. We should do as Jesus does with us, and trust in the reality of the Christ within the person we are listening to.
8. No. In listening for truth in our brothers we are actually listening for it in our Self, because they are part of that Self. Rather than going beyond ourselves, we are going *toward* our Self (8:6).
9. To associate paying with *giving* means that you recognize that what you give you receive. Paying for something is seen a form of giving. You are “purchasing” by giving, so that the more you give the more you will receive. You realize that you are not “paying,” you are giving to yourself. When you associate paying with *getting*, you are “giving to get.” You try to give as little as possible in return for as much as possible.
10. This paragraph describes prayer as recognizing the Holy Spirit in a brother (the same as “giving” in the preceding paragraphs).
11. No answer expected.