

# Study Guide and Commentary

## ACIM® Text, Chapter 15, Section VIII

### The Only Real Relationship

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#### Legend:

**blue text** = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)

**bold blue text** = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext

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### Overview of the Section

The previous section told us that we need to learn that true communication, which involves the transformation of our special love relationships into holy relationships through forgiveness, is our salvation and not our doom. It ended by telling us that the holy instant is the means by which we can become convinced that it is truly possible, not impossible, for us to learn the lesson. But simply being convinced of its possibility is only the beginning. Just how is the Holy Spirit going to teach us this lesson? That's what this section begins to explain.

### Paragraph 1

1. <sup>1</sup>The holy instant does not **replace** the need for learning, for the Holy Spirit must not leave you as your Teacher until the holy instant has extended far beyond time. <sup>2</sup>For a teaching assignment such as His, He must use **everything** in this world for your release. <sup>3</sup>He must side with **every** sign or token of your willingness to learn of Him what the truth **must** be. <sup>4</sup>He is swift to utilize **whatever** you offer Him on behalf of this. <sup>5</sup>His concern and care for you are limitless. <sup>6</sup>In the face of your fear of forgiveness, which He perceives as clearly as He knows forgiveness **is** release, He will teach you to remember that forgiveness is **not** loss, **but your salvation**. <sup>7</sup>And that in **complete** forgiveness, in which you recognize that there is nothing to forgive, **you** are absolved completely.

• Study Question •

1. *The Holy Spirit will use everything in this world to teach you how to live forever in the holy instant. Based on the previous section, why do you fear forgiveness and think it is a loss?*
  - A. *Because you fear that by forgiving, you will lose the other person as they are no longer held by guilt.*
  - B. *Because you want their guilt to obligate them to sacrifice for your sake. Without that guilt they will not do so.*
  - C. *Because you fear that you, not they, were to blame.*
  - D. *Because you fear that by forgiving, you will allow someone to truly join with you, and so will lose your private identity.*
  - E. *A, B and D.*
  - F. *All of the above.*

Never mistake the holy instant for enlightenment; we still need to learn as the Holy Spirit teaches us (1:1). The holy instant is not yet our permanent experience, and that is the ultimate goal: your “life becomes a holy instant, set in time, but heeding only immortality” (W-pI.135.19:1). The Holy Spirit will use literally “*everything* in this world” to teach us this (1:2). The Workbook stresses the same in Lesson 193: “All things are lessons God would have me learn.” Everything, even the most dire calamity, can be turned to a positive purpose by the Holy Spirit if we are willing. And when we are, He is quick to do so (1:3–4).

Emma Curtis Hopkins, a remarkable woman who taught spiritual principles to the founders of three American religious movements (Religious Science, Unity, and Divine Science), once wrote a marvelous affirmation:

This, too, is good.

This, too, is God.

This, too, is *for me*.

I *demand* to see the blessing in it.

That can become your natural response to every challenging situation if you grasp the fact that the Holy Spirit stands ready and waiting to “utilize whatever you offer Him on behalf of” your release. For me, that’s what offering it to Him *means*. There is a lesson God wants me to learn in every circumstance, every situation, and the lesson is always the same (according to Lesson 193): *Forgive, and you will see this differently*. The pain I perceive in the situation will disappear, and I will be able to recognize it as “another step to Him, and to salvation of the world” (W-pI.193.13:1).

We are afraid of forgiveness. We think it will result in loss, and that’s why we drag our feet (1:5–6). Learning that forgiveness is “good” and “*for me*” sometimes seems to be impossible. But the Holy Spirit can use anything and everything—and *will* use it—if we are willing to bring the situation to Him and demand to see the blessing in it. When we can look at any situation and realize “that there is nothing to forgive,” that is when we

have learned “*complete* forgiveness.” When that happens, we will know that *we* are completely forgiven (1:7).

I think it is important here to realize that Jesus has not suddenly changed subjects, and started talking about forgiveness instead of oneness, communication, special love relationships, guilt, and holy instants. They are intimately, inextricably connected subjects, and forgiveness is the umbrella term that encapsulates them all. To forgive is to break the cycle of guilt and blame that the ego uses in a vain attempt to paste its relationships together. To forgive is to see the oneness. To forgive is to set aside all sense of separation and difference. To forgive is to open to total communication.

## Paragraph 2

2. <sup>1</sup>Hear Him gladly, and learn of Him that you have need of no special relationships at all. <sup>2</sup>You but seek in them what you have **thrown away**. <sup>3</sup>And through **them** you will never learn the value of what you have cast aside, but still desire with all your heart [hearts]. <sup>4</sup>Let us join together in making the holy instant all that there is, by desiring that it *be* all that there is. <sup>5</sup>God's Son has such great need of your willingness to strive for this that you cannot conceive of need so great. <sup>6</sup>Behold the only need that God and His Son share, and will to meet together. <sup>7</sup>You are **not** alone in this. <sup>8</sup>The will of your creations calls to you, to share your will with them. <sup>9</sup>Turn, then, in peace from guilt to God and them.

### • Study Question •

2. *Paragraph 2* says that you don't need any special relationships at all. What could that possibly mean?
- A. *You don't need relationships.*
  - B. *You don't need relationships in which you use sacrifice to instill guilt.*
  - C. *You don't need to get something from the outside.*
  - D. *You don't need to get from someone else what you can find in the holy instant.*
  - E. *B, C and D*

What? “...need of no special relationships at all” (2:1)? What about, “the Holy Spirit would not deprive you of your special relationships” (T-17.IV.2:3)? Or what about this from Section V?

In His function as Interpreter of what you made, the Holy Spirit uses special relationships, which you have chosen to support the ego, as learning experiences that point to truth. Under His teaching, every relationship becomes a lesson in love (T-15.V.4:5-6).

How can he say the Holy Spirit won't deprive us of special relationships, but will use them as learning experiences and lessons in love, and then turn around and say we don't have any need of them at all?

I believe he is speaking from a higher perspective here, with the end of the learning curve in view. When we have learned complete forgiveness we will also have learned that we don't need special relationships. We've already been told that there are no special relationships in Heaven, right? That's because there will be no need of them. We will be totally related with everyone equally; we will be One in God. So part of what the Holy Instant and the Holy Spirit are teaching us is that we don't need special relationships, and the Holy Spirit is *using our special relationships to teach us that*. It's the same thing with time, whose only purpose is as a learning device that will vanish when the learning is complete:

The purpose of time is to enable you to learn how to use time constructively. It is thus a teaching device and a means to an end. Time will cease when it is no longer useful in facilitating learning (T-1.I.15:2-4).

Special relationships are teaching devices, too, and they will cease when learning is complete.

Our purpose for special relationships, however, is quite different. We look to them to provide the sense of intimacy and connection and wholeness that can only be found in the Holy Instant (2:2). As long as we set our hopes on the special relationship, we will never find what we are truly seeking, what we have always been seeking with all our hearts: the Holy Instant (2:3). We won't even know what we are missing! As St. Augustine is reputed to have said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

Jesus asks us to join together (with him) in "making the holy instant all that there is, by desiring that it *be* all that there is" (2:4). We go through life, it sometimes seems, hoping against hope to experience, every now and then, just for a moment, a glimpse of Heaven, a sense of the divine, a mystical experience. Our lives are maybe 99% stuck in time, and 1% holy instant. If that much! What an amazing goal Jesus sets before us: to make the holy instant *all* that there is, to *live* in the holy instant 100% of the time. That, dear brothers and sisters, *is* the goal. How can it be accomplished? "By desiring that it *be* all that there is" (2:4). There's the rub; we have to be willing to let go of everything else but the holy instant. Ask yourself if you are really ready for that. And if not, don't despair. The Holy Spirit is using literally everything in the world to help you learn the lesson!

According to this paragraph, the Sonship ("God's Son"), which includes our own creations (2:8), has an inconceivably great need of your willingness, and of mine (2:5). It's a need we share with God, and God wills that the need be met. So it *will* be met! (2:6). Although at times it feels as if you are in this spiritual battle all by yourself, "you

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1 "Everyone on earth has formed special relationships, and although this is not so in Heaven, the Holy Spirit knows how to bring a touch of Heaven to them here" (T-15.V.8:1).

are *not* alone in this” (2:7). God, your creations, and the entire Sonship are joined together with you to bring it to fruition. Knowing this should encourage us to turn away from guilt and the ego to join our will with all of theirs. I see the same encouragement expressed in the Bible:

For the *creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God*. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that *the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth* until now. (Romans 8:19–22 ESV, my italics)

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for *it is God who works in you*, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12–13 ESV, my italics)

### Paragraph 3

3. <sup>1</sup>Relate only with what will never **leave** you, and what **you** can never leave. <sup>2</sup>The loneliness of God’s Son is the loneliness of his Father. <sup>3</sup>Refuse not the awareness of your completion, and seek not to restore it to **yourself** [**yourselves**]. <sup>4</sup>Fear not to give redemption over to your Redeemer’s Love. <sup>5</sup>He will **not** fail you, for He comes from One Who **cannot** fail. <sup>6</sup>Accept **your** sense of failure as nothing more than a mistake in ~~who you are~~ [*who you were*]. <sup>7</sup>For the holy host of God is **beyond** failure, and **nothing** that he wills can **be** denied. <sup>8</sup>You are forever in a relationship so holy that it calls to everyone to **escape** from loneliness, and join you in your love. <sup>9</sup>And where **you** are must everyone seek, and **find** you there.

• Study Question •

3. *We can have our completion restored to us, but not by ourselves. By ourselves we must fail to find completion, but He cannot fail. So, you walk up to an advanced teacher of God, who is the living embodiment of the Course. You say to her, "I would love to live with you for one year and learn how to live the Course from you." She says in reply, "I can relate only to what will never leave me." What the heck does she mean?*
- A. *Since you plan to leave in a year, she will have nothing to do with you.*
  - B. *Since bodies must inevitably separate, she will have nothing to do with you.*
  - C. *Since bodies must inevitably separate, she will relate only to that part of you which is not physical.*
  - D. *She is subtly asking for a lifetime commitment.*
  - E. *She is saying that your true relationship is beyond the temporary form it will take in this world.*
  - F. *She is trying to sound really mystical.*
  - G. *C, E and maybe F.*



The paragraph begins with several admonitions:

- Relate only with what will never leave you, and what you can never leave.
- Refuse not the awareness of your completion, and seek not to restore it to yourself [yourselves].
- Fear not to give redemption over to your Redeemer's Love.

In our relationships, nearly everyone starts out relating to what *might* leave you! Another person, another job, another place, another car. Jesus advises us to relate only to what will never leave us (3:1). How can we do that? In any relationship with another person, we know that, at best, everyone's body will die. If we live longer, the other person will inevitably leave us then, if they don't leave us sooner! How can you relate to a person, a place, or a possession in a way that fulfills Jesus's admonition?

With people, clearly, we need to learn to relate to one another purely as spiritual beings, to the part of one another that never leaves us because all of us are One. It means giving up our attachment to certain physical bodies and to their constant proximity to ours. We are actually related, continually and forever, to the entire universe of spirit (see 4:4). This topic is expanded on in the next paragraph.

The second admonition (3:3) gives a hint of *how* we can relate only spirit-to-spirit. We have to become aware of our own completion, and stop trying to ensnare others in special relationships to "complete" our imagined incompleteness. Once we know we are whole, wholly loving and wholly lovable, we won't have any needs, and therefore we won't be trying to snatch the love from someone else.

The third admonition is basically telling us to let go and let God. “Give redemption over” means “stop trying to save yourself,” particularly by seeking special love. “Your Redeemer” here seems to mean the Holy Spirit, because the next sentence tells us that “He comes from One Who *cannot* fail” (3:5). The Holy Spirit won’t fail because the Father *cannot* fail, and if it seems to you that *you* have failed in your spiritual pursuit, or in your relationships, Jesus tells us that all that was nothing more than “a mistake in *who you were*” (3:6). If we had remembered who we were, a holy and wholly complete creation of God, we would never have embarked on our self-generated plans of salvation. We would have known we didn’t need saving.

We’re already in a perfect holy relationship with God, a relationship so radiant that it draws everyone to join in its love (3:8). That relationship is where everyone will eventually find themselves—and find their Self—as well as finding *you* (3:9).

## Paragraph 4

4. <sup>1</sup>Think but an instant on this: God gave the Sonship to you, to ensure your perfect creation. <sup>2</sup>This was His gift, for as He withheld Himself not from you, He withheld not His creation. <sup>3</sup>Nothing that ever was created but is yours. <sup>4</sup>Your relationships are with the universe. <sup>5</sup>And this universe, being of God, is far beyond the petty sum of all the separate bodies **you** perceive. <sup>6</sup>For all its parts are joined in God through Christ, where they become like to their Father. <sup>7</sup>[For] Christ knows of no separation **from** His Father, Who is His one relationship, in which He gives as His Father gives to Him.

### • Study Question •

4. *I God gave everything to you in your creation: Himself, the Sonship, all that He created, and the universe. Doesn't this suggest that He created the physical universe?*
- A. *Yes, which makes it a very puzzling passage.*
  - B. *No, because He only gave you the universe. He didn't create it.*
  - C. *Yes. He didn't create our particular world, but He did create the universe.*
  - D. *No, because the universe being discussed here is beyond the physical bodies we see--it is non-physical.*

We try to satisfy ourselves with a finite, even tiny, number of special relationships, but God has given us a relationship with *the entire Sonship* (4:1). Nothing we could possibly require in a relationship is missing because we are in relationship with everything, so our “perfect creation” is ensured. God gives not only Himself, He gives His creation (4:2), every bit of It (4:3). You are in relationship with the infinitude of spirit, with the universe (4:4), “far beyond the petty sum of all the separate bodies *you*

perceive” (4:5). To think we are lonely when this vast, unfathomable relatedness has been given to us (4:2) is ludicrous.

The next two sentences speak about “Christ.” I believe that, as used here, the word “Christ” is virtually synonymous with “the Sonship.” In his *Glossary of Terms* (<http://www.circleofa.org/glossary-of-terms>), Robert Perry defines the two terms like this:

**Sonship:** The sum of all that God created; all the parts of the Son of God; the collectivity which includes the minds of all living things. The Sonship is a plural term, indicating some kind of plurality in Heaven, yet the Sonship is perfectly united in its one Self, the Christ.

**Christ:** God's extension, His one Son and one creation. Our true Identity; the single Self that is shared by all the members or parts of the Sonship (see T-15.V.10:10).

The Sonship signifies the union of “all the parts of the Son of God,” but all parts share one Self, the Christ; that is what unites them. Christ is “our true Identity, the single Self that is shared by all the members...of the Sonship.” As we read here, “all [the Sonship’s] parts are joined in God through Christ” (4:6). Christ, the one Self, God’s one creation, “knows of no separation *from* His Father”; indeed, Christ has only one relationship (4:7), with His Father, a relationship in which each gives without limit to the other. And *you* are related with that eternal union, the real YOU is the Christ Who is in total relationship with the Father. Your Self is everyone’s Self. You are them. You can’t be more closely related than that!

I find it mentally stimulating and challenging to hold in mind both the *partness* of the Sonship, which is a plurality that has *parts* that are *joined* by Christ, and also the single shared Self, which *is* Christ.

## Paragraph 5

5. <sup>1</sup>The Holy Spirit is God’s attempt to free you of what He does not understand. <sup>2</sup>And because of the Source of the attempt, **it will succeed**. <sup>3</sup>The Holy Spirit asks you to respond as God does, for He would teach you what **you** do not understand. <sup>4</sup>God would respond to **every** need, **whatever** form it takes. <sup>5</sup>And so He ~~keeps~~ **[has kept]** this channel open to receive His communication to you, **and yours to Him**. <sup>6</sup>God does **not** understand your problem in communication, for He does **not** share it with you. <sup>7</sup>It is only **you** who believe that it **is** understandable. <sup>8</sup>The Holy Spirit **knows** that it is not understandable, and yet He **understands** it because you **[have]** **made** it.

### • Study Question •

5. *Please identify these three things in the proper order; that is, describe what each of them is:*
1. *What you do not understand*



2. *What God does not understand*
3. *What the Holy Spirit does understand.*

There seems to be an underlying idea in the Course that if God *understands* anything, that makes it real. In light of that, it makes sense when we read that “God does not understand your problem in communication” (5:6). God understands only reality, only the Truth. To me, this also helps me to let go of my attempts to understand things such as, “How did the ego happen?” or “Why did we ever leave Heaven?” If God does not understand such things, how can I expect to? They are, quite simply, incomprehensible. Who can truly *understand* insanity?

And yet, God still attempts to free us of our insanity through the Holy Spirit (5:1). Thankfully, He does not need to understand our problem to free us from it; He will respond to it whatever form it takes (5:4), and the attempt *will succeed* (5:2). Our communication breakdown will be repaired, and full communication with God and each other will be restored.

The Spirit asks us “to respond as God does” (5:3). He responds to the unthinkable problem by acting to free us. He reaches out. He sends the Holy Spirit. He keeps the communication channel open (5:5). We are called upon to return the favor, to choose to communicate with God, to allow Him to teach us what *we* do not understand (5:3).

We don't understand communication.

God does not understand our problem in communication.

We think our problem is understandable.

The Holy Spirit knows it isn't understandable—and yet He *understands* it! (5:6–8) What's that all about? Think of “communication” as referring to our ability to “hear” God, and to know we have successfully communicated *to* God. That is what we really do not understand. We are not sure how to go about it. And God does not understand that. To us, there seems to be a barrier between us and God. For some of us it seems like an iron curtain; if we read the curse in Deuteronomy saying, “The heavens over your head shall be bronze,” we know what it means. Nothing getting through. But to God there is no barrier! It seems evident to us that there is a communication problem; to God, it's evident that there *is no problem*.

Enter the Holy Spirit. He is the Bridge. He knows God's perspective, but he sees ours as well. He knows there is no barrier, but He understands that we perceive one; He realizes we've “made” a barrier. It's an illusion, but to us it is real.

## Paragraph 6

6. <sup>1</sup>In ~~the Holy Spirit~~ [Him] alone lies the awareness of what God **cannot** know, and what **you do not** understand. <sup>2</sup>It is His holy function to **accept them both**, and by removing **every** element of **disagreement**, to join them into one. <sup>3</sup>He will do this **because** it is His function. <sup>4</sup>Leave, then, what seems to you to be impossible, to Him Who knows it **must** be possible because it is the Will of

God. <sup>5</sup>And let Him Whose teaching is **only** of God teach you the **only** meaning of relationships. <sup>6</sup>For God created the only relationship that **has** meaning, and that is His relationship with **you**.

• **Study Question** •

6. *As a way of summarizing this section, please describe as much as you can of what you are supposed to leave to the Holy Spirit (paragraphs 1,2,3,5 and 6 speak of things that He is supposed to teach us). How do these various things tie together into a unity?*

The Holy Spirit is the Bridge. He spans the two realms of Reality and illusion (6:1). God can't know an illusion, and we don't understand Reality. His job is to accept both and to join them into one "by removing *every* element of *disagreement*" (6:2). We need not know how He does this, and in fact we need to stop trying to figure out how to do it. We need to give control over to the Holy Spirit; He will do it for us (6:3). He will transform our relationships if we "leave...what seems to you to be impossible, to Him" (6:4).

Ultimately what we will learn is that our relationships with one another are, in fact, our relationship with God. Instead of trying to find completion or satisfaction in another separated person, and instead of seeking to have a private relationship of our own with God, we will learn to find God in one another. The "*only* meaning of relationships" is the meaning to be found in "His relationship with *you*" (6:5–6). The Course says that, "God ... is approached through the appreciation of His Son" (T-11.IV.7:2). The way to God lies through one another. My experience of the Divine expands as I experience the Divine *in you*.

## Answer Key

1. E
2. E
3. G
4. D
5.
  1. God, that your completion lies in Him.
  2. Your problem in communication.
  3. Your problem in communication.
6. The Holy Spirit is supposed to.:
  - teach me that release comes from forgiveness
  - teach me that I need no special relationships
  - restore to me the awareness of my completion in God, my one relationship, my communication with all that is
  - free me from my communication problem
  - join me and God by removing elements of disagreement between what He cannot know and I do not understand
  - teach me the meaning of relationships

It all ties together in the idea that we are to let Him teach to us the true meaning of relationships so that we use relationships and the holy instant to recover our awareness of the only real relationship.