

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 17, Section V.8–15

The Holy Relationship, Part 2

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
~~strickethrough-blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition
-

Review of the First Half of the Section

Recall that this material originally addressed the scribes, Helen and Bill, in their relationship, in which they came together with the holy purpose of producing the Course. It applies equally well to any two people who mutually join in a common goal. That joining invites the Holy Spirit to enter their special relationship because it is the beginning of transcending separateness, based on private goals, with the shared interest of a common goal. As a result the structure of the relationship, which originally was built to meet the ego's private goals, has to change into something suited to the mutual interest they now share. This creates significant stress in the relationship as long as the structure remains in its old form. The two people may be tempted to give up and just move on to another special relationship. Instead, Jesus appeals to them (and to us) to have faith that the goal is reachable, that each person can and will do their part, and that the Holy Spirit will guide them.

These instructions, then, are directed to people who *have already entered into a holy relationship with someone*. They are intended to help us get past the early, difficult phase of such a relationship.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹Accept with gladness what you do not understand, and **let** it be explained to you as you perceive its purpose work in it to **make** it holy. ²You will find many opportunities to blame ~~your brother~~ [*each other*] for the “failure” of your relationship, for it will seem at times to have **no** purpose. ³A sense of aimlessness will come to haunt you, and to remind you of all the ways you once **sought** for satisfaction and **thought** you found it. ⁴Forget not now the misery you **really** found, and do not breathe life into your failing **ego** [*egos*]. ⁵For your relationship has **not** been disrupted. ⁶**It has been saved.**

• Study Question •

1. *When you are in a fledgling holy relationship, but going through the initial period of distress, what temptation is likely to arise? (More than one answer may be correct.)*
 - A. *Blaming each other because the relationship isn't working.*
 - B. *Regretting the choice to join together in common purpose.*
 - C. *Wishing you had not given the Holy Spirit permission to enter.*
 - D. *Longing after past relationships that, in memory, seemed more satisfying.*

A lot of trust is called for in the early stages of a holy relationship. There are things we don't understand; we must simply accept them "with gladness," willing to let our understanding grow over time as the new goal gradually transforms the relationship (8:1). There will be times that the relationship seems to be failing, and it will be tempting for both parties to blame the other. Thoughts such as, "What's the point?" may cross your mind (8:2). Things that were previously our goal in the relationship, guided by our egos, start to disappear, and "a sense of aimlessness will come to haunt you" (8:3). The line of thought will be something like, "These are the things I hoped to get from this relationship, and now, it looks as though I won't be getting them. What am I here for?" We may think back on past relationships, or the past of this relationship, and remember "all the ways you once *sought* for satisfaction and *thought* you found it" (8:3). In memory it may seem as though we actually found the satisfaction we were seeking, but Jesus encourages us *not* to breathe life into our failing egos by forgetting "the misery you *really* found" (8:4).

The relationship, he insists, has *not* been disrupted. Rather, *it has been saved* (8:5–6). The distress we experience does not come from the change of purpose; rather, it comes from our failure to allow the structure of the relationship to change to fit the new goal.

Paragraph 9

9. ¹You are very new in the ways of salvation, and think you have **lost** your way. ²Your way is lost, but think not this is **loss**. ³In your newness, remember that you and your brother have started again, *together*. ⁴And take his [each other's] hand, to walk together along a road far more familiar than you now believe. ⁵Is it not certain that you will remember a goal unchanged throughout eternity? ⁶For you have chosen but the goal of God, from which your true intent was **never** absent.

• Study Question •

2. *This paragraph includes many images of process (the ways of salvation, walking along a road, remembering a goal). This paragraph implies that*

*this shift in your relationship is the beginning of some kind of new process.
What process is that?*

- A. *The process of salvation, the journey to God.*
- B. *The process of purifying your body.*
- C. *The process of remembering your past lives.*
- D. *Processed cheese.*

Again, Jesus emphasizes that we are new to all this (9:1). Our relationship has taken a dramatic turn, and the familiar landmarks and road signs are no longer in view, so we suspect that we've lost our way. In a sense we have! We have lost *our* way, but it's a loss that is actually a profound gain (8:2). We are no longer walking an isolated journey. We have joined with another person, and *together*, hand in hand, we have begun walking on a road that, as we progress, will seem more and more familiar, because it is the journey to a goal we have *always had*, although we had forgotten it (9:3-5). *Of course* we'll remember the "new" goal, because it has been "unchanged throughout eternity" (9:5). He told us so back in Chapter 8:

The journey to God is merely the reawakening of the knowledge of where you are always, and what you are forever. It is a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed (T-8.VI.9:6-7).

We have "chosen...the goal of God." It is the joint will we shared with God in the beginning, a will ("your true intent") that has always been within us (9:6). It is what we have always wanted!¹

1 Father, I thought I wandered from Your Will, defied it, broke its laws, and interposed a second will more powerful than Yours. Yet what I am in truth is but Your Will, extended and extending. This am I, and this will never change. As You are One, so am I one with You. And this I chose in my creation, where my will became forever one with Yours. That choice was made for all eternity. It cannot change, and be in opposition to itself. Father, my will is Yours. And I am safe, untroubled and serene, in endless joy, because it is Your Will that it be so.

Today we will accept our union with each other and our Source. We have no will apart from His, and all of us are one because His Will is shared by all of us. Through it we recognize that we are one. Through it we find our way at last to God (W-pII.329.2:1-4).

Paragraph 10

10. ¹Throughout the Sonship is the song of freedom heard, in joyous echo of your choice. ²You have joined with many in the holy instant, and **they** have joined with you. ³Think not your choice will leave **you** comfortless, for God Himself has blessed your **holy relationship** [**special relationship**]. ⁴**Join** in His blessing, and withhold not yours upon it. ⁵For all it needs now **is** your blessing, that you may see that in it rests salvation. ⁶Condemn salvation not, for it **has** come to you. ⁷And welcome it **together**, for it has come to **join** you and your brother together in a relationship in which **all** the Sonship is together blessed.

• Study Question •

3. *The Sonship, "many," and God Himself have all blessed your holy relationship. All it needs is your blessing. In light of the previous paragraphs, what form would that blessing take (there may be more than one correct answer)?*
- A. *Having faith in the Holy Spirit to guide the relationship to its goal.*
 - B. *Not blaming the relationship's difficulties on your brother.*
 - C. *Not withdrawing yourself from the relationship to focus on other relationships.*
 - D. *Realizing that the difficulty of the relationship means something good--that it has been reborn as holy--not something bad.*
 - E. *Getting the hell out of the relationship.*

When we first join with another in holy relationship, we are not aware that there is a cosmic song of freedom heard throughout the Sonship, a song that is the “joyous echo of your choice” (10:1). We may realize that we have joined together with another individual, but what we don’t realize is that we have joined *everyone* who has ever awakened (10:2)! As Jesus says in the gospels, “There is joy throughout heaven, and with all the angels of God, when one lost person chooses to change his mind” (Luke 15:7,10, my paraphrase). When we choose a holy instant, heaven throws a party! They are so glad we’ve come home! We have taken the first crucial step in remembering that we are part of The One.

Rather than resisting our special relationship, now become our new, holy relationship, because it is stressful at first, Jesus calls on us to bless it. God has blessed it, and wants us to join Him (10:3–4)! If we will just bless it, we’ll cease to see it as a problem and understand that “in it rests salvation,” that this relationship is the means by which we find our way home to God (10:5). To condemn it is to condemn salvation (10:6). As I, and my partner, join *together* to welcome the changes in our relationship, we will realize that not only have *we* been blessed, we have together become something “in which *all* the Sonship is together blessed” (10:7). We are saved, and we are saviors to the world.

Paragraph 11

11. ¹You undertook, together, to invite the Holy Spirit into your relationship. ²He could not have entered otherwise. ³Although you ~~may~~ have made many mistakes since then, you have also made enormous efforts to help Him do His work. ⁴And He has **not** been lacking in appreciation for all you have done for Him. ⁵Nor does He see the mistakes at all. ⁶Have you been similarly grateful to ~~your brother~~ [each other]? ⁷Have you consistently appreciated the **good** efforts, and **overlooked** mistakes? ⁸Or has your appreciation flickered and grown dim in what **seemed** to be the **light** of the mistakes? ⁹~~Perhaps~~ you are now entering upon a campaign to blame ~~him~~ [each other] for the discomfort of the situation in which you find ~~yourself~~ [yourselves]. ¹⁰And by this **lack** of thanks and gratitude you make ~~yourself~~ [yourselves] unable to **express** the holy instant, and thus [you] lose sight of it.

• Study Question •

4. *When you first share a holy instant with another person, the relationship between you begins to seem strange, and it seems to be that the other person is acting very strangely. In light of this paragraph, what should you not do about this realization?*
- A. *Be grateful for his/her good efforts.*
 - B. *Overlook his/her mistakes.*
 - C. *Realize that you have made many mistakes, but that the Holy Spirit has overlooked them and instead has been grateful for your good efforts.*
 - D. *Convince the other that the difficulty of the situation you are in could be alleviated if only he/she would change.*

The Urtext, addressed directly to Helen and Bill, omits the word “may” in the third sentence because the first sentences here speak of something they had actually done. For the rest of us it is a possibility, not necessarily a fact, although what it speaks of is a common occurrence. Let’s assume we are in a holy relationship. We have invited the Holy Spirit into our relationship (whether or not we knew it at the time we joined in common purpose), and we may have made many mistakes since then (11:1–3). Nevertheless, we have also made considerable efforts on behalf of the Holy Spirit’s work and, when we have done so, the Spirit has very much appreciated it (11:3–4). The idea behind all this, for me, is that the Holy Spirit, or God, has a certain attitude toward us, and a way He behaves toward us, and we are asked to emulate it. He *overlooks our mistakes*. He does not even see them (11:5). Like the father in the story of the prodigal son, He welcomes us back with open arms.

Some of you, reading this, may be troubled by the anthropomorphic references to God as a separate, divine “Person” who interacts with us, preferring to think of God as an

abstract, impersonal Principle, not as a superior Being but as Being Itself, as *beingness*. That's fine. An impersonal principle, such as gravity, does not care what mistakes we have made in the past. It responds with equal "enthusiasm" to anyone who acts in accord with its nature, its "law." God is like the sun and the rain, which fall equally on "the just and the unjust."

That's how we are asked to be in regard to one another, especially in the context of a holy relationship (11:6). Appreciate the *good* efforts and *overlook* the mistakes (11:7). It's so easy to let our appreciation of the good be undercut and stifled because our partner has made mistakes (11:8). I know I make that mistake quite often! It seems somehow easier to do the opposite: focus on the mistakes and overlook the good stuff! It's such an obvious and practical bit of advice. Years ago, Kenneth Blanchard noticed how well this worked in business, and made a fortune writing and selling a little book called *The One Minute Manager*. One of the principles he set forth was that you help people realize their potential by catching them *doing something right*. A boss who constantly points out what you did wrong is eroding your motivation to do well. Pointing out when you do a thing right reinforces your motivation. It's that simple. And it works that way in relationships as well. Of course it does! Boss-employee is just another kind of relationship.

As this discussion points out, blaming the other person for any discomfort in the relationship rather than expressing thanks and gratitude has exactly the same effect as the critical boss. It erodes motivation. It stifles the expression of the holy instant, and causes *both* of you to lose sight of it (11:9–10).

Paragraph 12

12. ¹The experience of an instant, **however** compelling it may be, is easily forgotten if you allow time to close over it. ²It must be kept shining and gracious in your awareness of time, but not **concealed** within it. ³The instant remains. ⁴But where are **you**? ⁵To give thanks to ~~your brother~~ [each other] is to **appreciate** the holy instant, and thus enable its **results** to be accepted **and shared**. ⁶To **attack** ~~your brother~~ [each other] is not to **lose** the instant, but to **make it powerless in its effects**.

• Study Question •

5. *How can you keep the holy instant "shining and gracious in your awareness of time", as also mentioned in Paragraph 1?*
- A. *By having a holy relationship.*
 - B. *By entering another holy instant.*
 - C. *By being grateful toward your brother.*
 - D. *By letting the Holy Spirit shift the goal.*

The experience of a holy instant can be a compelling thing. Nevertheless, it can be "easily forgotten if you allow time to close over it," which I think refers to allowing

ourselves to build up grievances about our partners mistakes. The burden of past baggage gets heavier and heavier until it is all we can think of, and the shining joy of the holy instant disappears from our awareness (12:1). A holy instant needs constant polishing, to be “kept shining and gracious in your awareness of time” (12:2). It isn’t *negated* or lost by our growing pile of grievances. It remains (12:3), but it does become *concealed*. You have not allowed the holy instant to bear fruit in your lives (12:6). The *instant* is here and now, “but where are *you*” (12:4)? You are stuck in the past!

When you give thanks to a brother or sister for every action or word that furthers the goal of the holy relationship, you are appreciating the holy instant that drew you together (12:5). You are polishing it, calling it to mind. The *results* of the holy instant—the holy relationship—can thus be accepted and *shared* (12:5). You will find the relationship transforming from something “special” to something holy. And by its very nature, the effects will extend beyond itself to touch those around you as well.

Paragraph 13

13. ¹You *have* received the holy instant, but you ~~may~~ have established a condition **in which you cannot use it**. ²As a result, you do not realize that it is **with you still**. ³And by **cutting yourself** [*yourselves*] **off** from its **expression**, you have **denied yourself** [*yourselves*] its benefit. ⁴You **reinforce** this every time you attack ~~your brother~~ [*you attack each other*], for the attack **must** blind you to **yourself**. ⁵And it **is** impossible to **deny yourself** [*yourselves*], and ~~to~~ recognize what has been given and **received** by you.

• Study Question •

6. *It's possible that, although you have received the holy instant, you have cut yourself off from its expression, the holy relationship. How might you have done this, according to this section (there may be more than one right answer)?*
- A. *You have attacked your brother and blamed him for the period of discomfort.*
 - B. *You have been tempted to focus on other situations, since this one seems so hopeless.*
 - C. *You have not allowed the Holy Spirit to fully shift the goal.*
 - D. *You have turned the relationship back into an unholy relationship.*

Again, the Urtext omits “may” in the first sentence, speaking something that had already happened with Helen and Bill. It was added by the editors because perhaps not *everyone* will make this mistake.

Even though you have received the holy instant (13:1), by focusing on the flaws of one another and refraining from appreciation of the good, you can cut yourselves off from the expression of the holy instant (the experience of the holy relationship). You are not

receiving the joy that is to be found in a holy relationship (13:2–3). Your grievances, as the Workbook teaches, hide the light of the world in you. Your nature is love, but when you attack your brother, it blinds you to the reality of what you are (13:4). Once you have thus denied yourself you can no longer recognize the value of the holy instant and what it has given you (13:5).

Practically speaking, most of us have experienced this kind of thing in association with others. We come together with some high-minded goal, but the union disintegrates with competition, wounded egos, and bitterness. That's just another form of what the Course is talking about.

Paragraph 14

14. ¹You and your brother stand together in the holy presence of truth itself. ²Here is the goal, together **with** you. ³Think you not the goal **itself** will gladly arrange the **means** for its accomplishment? ⁴It is just this same **discrepancy** between the purpose that has **been** accepted and the means as they stand now which **seems** to make you suffer, but which makes Heaven glad. ⁵If Heaven were **outside** you, you could **not** share in its gladness. ⁶Yet because it is **within**, the gladness, too, **is** yours. ⁷You **are** joined in purpose, but remain still separate and divided on the means. ⁸Yet the **goal** is fixed, firm and unalterable, and the means will surely fall in place **because** the goal is sure. ⁹And **you** will share the gladness of the Sonship that it is so.

• Study Question •

7. *The discrepancy between the holy relationship's goal and the old, ego-based structure, seems to cause us suffering. Yet this paragraph says it makes Heaven glad! Why?*
- A. *Because Heaven has been upset with you for a long, long time.*
 - B. *Because this discrepancy has the power to change your mind about what the whole relationship is for.*
 - C. *Because the goal has the power to lift the current structure of the relationship out of its unholy state.*
 - D. *Because this discrepancy is a sign that the relationship has been reborn as holy.*
 - E. *Because Heaven often feels glad for no good reason.*

I get the feeling from this paragraph that a holy relationship is a gateway to Heaven. Standing together, we are “in the holy presence of truth itself” (14:1). The second sentence says, “Here is the goal, together *with* you” (14:2). The emphasis on “with,” to me, implies that the holy relationship *is* the goal, or rather, the union experienced between *two* people is a “miniature” or facet of the greater Union of which we all are

parts. We are hooked in to something much greater than we realize, something that can, and will, “gladly arrange the *means* for its accomplishment” (14:3). In joining together with one another we have become connected to a divine life-force. We have planted a seed, and it *will* grow into a full-grown, mature form. It cannot be stopped.

The seeming suffering we are enduring is just growing pains. The discrepancy between goal and structure, as uncomfortable as it may be, is really a *good* thing, and it “makes Heaven glad” (14:4). It is evidence that a new life has been planted in us and is pushing against the soil, striving to break forth into full expression; and when it does, we will “share the gladness of the Sonship” as we come fully into line with the goal of our holy relationship (14:5–9).

Sentence 7, I believe, originally spoke in particular to the relationship between Helen and Bill. They *had* indeed joined in common purpose, but they remained “still separate and divided on the means.” The both wanted the same thing, but they disagreed on how to accomplish it. Perhaps this is what Jesus had in mind when he used the word “disjunctive” to describe the fledgling relationship back in T-17.V.3:3. That same situation can easily crop up in any of our relationships; perhaps you have run across it in one of your relationships. The assurance given here is that, despite the disagreement about means, that “the means will surely fall in place,” drawn ineluctably to agreement just as the power of gravity draws everything back to earth, drawn by the operative power of the “fixed and unalterable” goal (14:8).

Paragraph 15

15. ¹As you begin to recognize and **accept** the gifts you have so freely given to ~~your brother~~ [*each other*], you will also accept the **effects** of the holy instant and use them to correct **all** your mistakes and free you from **their** results. ²And learning this, you will have **also** learned how to release **all** the Sonship, and offer it in gladness and thanksgiving to Him Who gave you **your** release, and Who would **extend** it through you.

• Study Question •

8. *There is a two-step process described here. What are the two steps?*

•

How will that play out? How will the goal of the holy relationship bring disparate ideas about the means into alignment with each other?

It begins with a mutual appreciation of one another, and of the gifts that each has brought to the relationship, especially the crowning gift of joining in a holy instant. That will lead to acceptance of “the *effects* of the holy instant” (15:1). Look back, for a moment, at the last two sentences of Paragraph 12:

To give thanks to each other is to *appreciate* the holy instant, and thus enable its *results* to be accepted and *shared*. To *attack* each other is not to *lose* the instant, but to *make it powerless in its effects*.

This is clearly talking about the same thing as Paragraph 15. Note all the words in common: *accept, effects, results*. Rather than attacking each other for all the faults you see in each other, you *thank* each other for the gifts you have given and that you have received. This opens the door so that the power of the shared goal can flow in and enable you both “to *correct* all your mistakes and free you from *their* results,” instead of using the mistakes to drive a wedge of separation between you. This is simply the application, in the context of the holy relationship, of the principles of forgiveness taught over and over in the Course: Rather than judging mistakes as sins that demand punishment, we look upon them as mistakes that call for correction. We see them as a call for love, not a call for vengeance.

As we learn this lesson in the context of our one-on-one relationships, we are simultaneously learning “how to release *all* the Sonship.” The lesson of forgiveness implemented here can now be extended to the world—which *is the purpose* given all relationships by the Holy Spirit (15:2).

• **Study Question** •

9. *Suggestion: Write a one- or two-paragraph story, in which two people go through the process that this section talks about, from beginning to end. At least cover these elements:*
- *holy instant*
 - *period of discomfort*
 - *ego reactions and "solutions" to the period of discomfort*
 - *true solution to the period of discomfort*

•

Answer Key

1. A and D
2. A
3. A,B,C,D
4. D
5. C
6. A,B
7. B,C,D
8. The first step is to forgive yourself; the second step is to forgive your brother and the Sonship.