

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Chapter 20, *The Vision of Holiness*

Section IV, *Entering the Ark*

Legend:

Sans serif text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)

Italic sans serif text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext

Bold sans serif text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext

Typewriter text = editorial comments

~~strike through sans serif text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

Overview of the Section

The central theme that began in the previous chapter continues to be the center of attention here: It is through holy relationships that salvation will come to the world. This section hammers home the indispensable part your holy relationship plays in God's plan of reawakening His laws in every mind.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹Nothing can hurt you unless you give it the power to do so. ²Yet you give power as the laws of this world *interpret* giving; as you give you *lose*. ³It is not up to you to give power at all. ⁴Power is of God, given by Him and *reawakened* by the Holy Spirit, Who knows that as you give you *gain*. ⁵He gives *no* power to sin, and therefore it *has* none; nor to its results as this world sees them, — sickness and death and misery and pain. ⁶These things have not occurred because the Holy Spirit sees them not, and gives no power to their seeming source [sin]. ⁷Thus would He keep you free of them. ⁸Being without illusion of what you are, the Holy Spirit merely gives everything to God, Who has already given *and received* all that is true. ⁹The *untrue* He has neither received *nor* given.

• **Study Question** •

1. Which of the following statements about power are true according to this paragraph? (There may be more than one.)
 - A. You provide things power to hurt you.
 - B. When you give power away, you lose it.
 - C. When you give power away, you gain more power.
 - D. You cannot really give power.
 - E. The Holy Spirit gives you power.
 - F. The ego is ruled by the power of sin.

The opening line of the section flies in the face of common sense. We all “know” that there are criminals who might mug us as we walk along some dark street one night. Auto accidents can happen to anyone. Planes fall out of the sky sometimes. Hurricanes or floods or earthquakes can kill us. So what on earth does Jesus mean here? “Nothing can hurt you unless you give it the power to do so.” Does he mean that we somehow *attract* such disasters? I don’t think so.

The first thing to notice is that every one of those scenarios of hurt have to do with our bodies. We need to remember that, to Jesus, a basic assumption is that we are not bodies! That is not who we are. The Course is quite aware that we experience bodily harm: “The body in the service of the ego can hurt other bodies” (T-7.V.3:5). But Jesus, when discussing his own crucifixion and physical death, makes it very clear that hurting the body does not constitute true hurt to the *person*:

"Assault can ultimately be made only on the body. There is little doubt that one body can assault another, and can even destroy it. Yet if destruction itself is impossible, anything that is destructible cannot be real. Its destruction, therefore, does not justify anger. To the extent to which you believe that it does, you are accepting false premises and teaching them to others" (T-6.I.4:1-5).

"I elected, for your sake and mine, to demonstrate that the most outrageous assault, as judged by the ego, does not matter. As the world judges these things, but not as God knows them, I was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and finally killed" (T-6.I.9:1-2).

"If you will listen to [the Holy Spirit’s] Voice you will know that you cannot either hurt or be hurt, and that many need your blessing to help them hear this for themselves" (T-6.I.19:2).

Let me point out two things Jesus says about his body being “beaten, torn, and finally killed”: First, the destruction of the body “does not justify anger”: second, that it “does not matter.” He points out that the body can be hurt; then he points out that “you cannot either hurt or be hurt.” Clearly then, in this line in Chapter 20, he is not talking about *physical* hurt. It can only refer to *mental* hurt. That makes the line a lot easier to comprehend and accept. Nothing can hurt you *mentally* unless you give it the power to do so.

Now, let me point out that there certainly is a way this *includes* physical hurt. After all, that's what Jesus was talking about in reference to his crucifixion. He says:

You are free to perceive yourself as persecuted if you choose. When you do choose to react that way, however, you might remember that I was persecuted as the world judges, and did not share this evaluation for myself. And because I did not share it, I did not strengthen it. I therefore offered a different interpretation of attack, and one which I want to share with you (T-6.I.5:2-5).

His body underwent grievous physical harm, but he chose *not* to evaluate that as persecution. He recognized that, although his body was hurt, *he* was not! That is the “different interpretation of attack” that he wants to share with us. He was not hurt because he did not give bodily harm the power to hurt him! He gave *nothing* outside of him that power. He spells it out again in Workbook Lessons 338 and 190:

“I am affected only by my thoughts.” It needs but this to let salvation come to all the world. For in this single thought is everyone released at last from fear. Now has he learned that no one frightens him, and nothing can endanger him. He has no enemies, and he is safe from all external things (W-pII.338.2:1-1:4).

It is your thoughts alone that cause you pain. Nothing external to your mind can hurt or injure you in any way. There is no cause beyond yourself that can reach down and bring oppression. No one but yourself affects you. There is nothing in the world that has the power to make you ill or sad, or weak or frail. But it is you who have the power to dominate all things you see by merely recognizing what you are. As you perceive the harmlessness in them, they will accept your holy will as theirs. And what was seen as fearful now becomes a source of innocence and holiness.

My holy brother, think of this awhile: The world you see does nothing. It has no effects at all. It merely represents your thoughts (W-pI.190.4:1-6:3).

We then move into a discussion about the concept of giving power. We often speak of giving our power away, and we do, but we aren't *really* giving it away, although that's what we think. We think of it in terms of the world: “as you give you *lose*” (1:2). Actually, we cannot do that (2:3). True power is of God, *reawakened* in us by the Holy Spirit, and it does not diminish when given away; it *increases* (2:4). The Holy Spirit never gives this power to sin, sickness, death, misery, or pain (2:5). He does not even *see* them. He does not empower the sin that is their source (2:6), and He keeps *us* free of these things because of that (2:7). He knows the truth of what we are, and only what is true is shared with God (2:8–9).

Despite this protective attitude of the Holy Spirit, we still manage to experience hurt because we *imagine* we can give these things power. It is our perception of things, our interpretation of things and of people, that hurts us. Nothing *outside* of us hurts us; we are affected *only* by our thoughts. Even physical injury, properly perceived, cannot hurt the truth of our being.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Sin has no place in Heaven, where its results are alien and can no more enter than can their source [sin itself]. ²And therein lies your need to see your brother sinless. ³In him *is* Heaven. ⁴See sin in him *instead*, and Heaven is lost to *you*. ⁵But see him as he *is*, and what is yours shines from him to you. ⁶Your savior gives you *only* love, but what you would *receive* of him is up to you. ⁷It lies in him to overlook *all* your mistakes, and therein lies his *own* salvation. ⁸And so it is with *yours*. ⁹Salvation is a lesson in giving [giving to forgiveness to your brother], as the Holy Spirit interprets it. ¹⁰It is the reawakening of the laws of God [the law that giving and receiving are the same] in minds that have established *other* laws, and given them power to enforce what God created not.

• Study Question •

2. According to this paragraph, salvation consists in:
- A. Trying to understand the difference between truth and illusion.
 - B. Giving forgiveness to one another by overlooking mistakes.
 - C. Becoming obedient to the laws of God.

Having said that the Holy Spirit gives no power to sin (the thought of separation), and because no such untrue thought is received or given by God, “Sin has no place in Heaven” (2:1); neither sin nor its results (sickness, death, misery, and pain) can enter there.

Then, in a surprise move, Jesus said *this is why we must see our brother as sinless* (2:2), because “In him *is* Heaven” (2:3). If you see sin in him you will not be able to see Heaven; it will be lost “to *you*,” that is, not lost in truth, but any experience of it will be lost to you (2:4). If, on the other hand, you see your brother *without sin*, you will see Heaven shining from him to you (2:5).

Until we experience this, it all seems quite theoretical. But once we have experienced it, this will make abundant sense. There is nothing quite so memorable as seeing Heaven in another person!

Jesus then makes another hard-to-believe statement: “Your savior [that is, your relationship partner, that troublesome person in your life] give you *only* love, but what you would *receive* of him is up to you” (2:6).

Wait! My wife gives me *only* love? Your rebellious or troubled son or daughter gives you *only* love? That guy who mugs me gives me *only* love? Does he mean to say that *everyone* gives me *only* love, but I constantly misinterpret and misevaluate it?

Well, he did say once that if I want only love that's all I will see¹. He also said that the Holy Spirit perceives only love or a call for love,² and that I should share that perception with Him. So, yes, I think he is saying here that everyone offers us *only* love, but we choose to see something else.

This is a hard saying. It seems to be going further than “love or a call for love” to “only love.” Perhaps we are meant to understand a call for love as a form of love—misguided, perhaps, rooted in fear, but still love reaching out asking for love in return.

What is clear is that each of us has the power to overlook all of our brother's mistakes, choosing to see them as merely mistakes, not sins. In so doing we save *ourselves* (2:7–8). We give *this* power of overlooking, and it returns to us; we *do not* give power to sin to affect us. The entire process is a lesson in giving and receiving as the Holy Spirit understands it (2:9). This reawakens the laws of God, particularly the law of giving and receiving, in our minds, taking the place of the other concepts we have had—that giving is a loss, that “sin” in another person has power to hurt us (2:10).

Paragraph 3

3. ¹Your insane laws were made to *guarantee* that you would make mistakes, and give them power over you by *accepting* their results as your just due. ²What *could* this be but madness? ³And is it *this* that you would see within your savior *from* insanity? ⁴He is as free from this as you are, and in the freedom that you see in *him* you see your own. ⁵For this you *share*. ⁶What God has given follows *His* laws, and His alone. ⁷Nor is it possible for those who follow them to suffer the results of any other source.

• Study Question •

3. **Paragraph 3.** *The opening line of this paragraph makes a profound statement. Let's apply it. Let's say that you make up a set of rules for your household. Why, according to this first sentence, did you make this set of laws?*
- A. *So that you would be free from madness.*
 - B. *To guarantee that you would make mistakes so that you could learn forgiveness—the true result of your mistakes.*
 - C. *So that you would make errors and see their painful consequences as what you deserve.*
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¹ "When you want only love you will see nothing else. The contradictory nature of the witnesses you perceive is merely the reflection of your conflicting invitations" (T-12.VII.8:1-2).

² "There is but one interpretation of motivation that makes any sense. And because it is the Holy Spirit's judgment it requires no effort at all on your part. Every loving thought is true. Everything else is an appeal for healing and help, regardless of the form it takes" (T-12.I.3:1-4). I suggest reading through Section I of Chapter 12 with this teaching in mind, about offering *only* love.

Our belief in external causes, and in the idea that giving results in loss, guarantees that we will “make mistakes” (things others will interpret as “sins”). We, too, will see ourselves as guilty and deserving of, if not actual punishment, then at least some kind of suffering and pain (3:1). This is certainly a crazy way to go (3:2). We certainly don’t want it in ourselves, and if we are smart, we don’t want to apply this dynamic to *anyone*, especially not to the people we are in relationship with who have the power to save us from this kind of insanity in ourselves (3:3). In other words we need to realize that other people have this kind of insanity operating in their minds, which is what causes them to “make mistakes” that look, to us, like “sins.” That will allow us to pray, as Jesus did on the cross, “Father, forgive them; they don’t know what they are doing.”

Our brothers and sisters are just as free from the supposed power of sin as we are, and seeing that in another is what enables us to see it in ourselves (3:4–5). If we follow the laws of God (to give and to receive are one and the same), we cannot suffer the results of “sin” (sickness, death, misery, and pain) (3:7).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹Those who choose freedom will experience only *its* results. ²Their power is of God, and they will give it only to what *God* has given, [which He gave] to *share* with them. ³Nothing but this can touch them, for they see *only* this, sharing their power according to the Will of God. ⁴And thus their freedom is established *and maintained*. ⁵It is upheld through *all* temptation [**temptations**] to imprison and to *be* imprisoned. ⁶It is of *them* who learned of freedom that you should ask what freedom *is*. ⁷Ask not the sparrow how the eagle soars, for those with little wings have not accepted for *themselves* the power to share with you.

• Study Question •

4. *Who are symbolized here (4:7) by “the sparrow” and “the eagle”?*
- A. *Sparrows are weaklings, but eagles are strong people.*
 - B. *Eagles are people who have learned what freedom is; sparrows have not learned.*
 - C. *Sparrows are people who don’t know how to think high thoughts; eagles know how.*

Our choice is between the laws of this world (sin), which lead to guilt and pain, or the laws of God (freedom from sin) which have entirely different results (4:1). When we give no power to sin, we experience the power of God that is (and always has been) ours; we give this power only to God’s own creations (4:2). We are impervious to harm. Nothing that is not of God can touch us, and we see nothing else (4:3). Giving power only to God and His creations is what establishes our freedom and *maintains* it, preserving it against temptations to imprison others (judging them, condemning them, believing in their guilt) or to accept the imprisonment of guilt for ourselves (4:4–5).

Food for thought: If you think for a moment, recognizing power *only* in God's creations means recognizing that bodies, which are not created by God, have *no* power to harm us—and that includes our own bodies.

If we want to know what it means to live in the real world, to live free from fear, we need to look to people who have already achieved that kind of freedom—"eagles" who have learned fly free of earthly ties. People like Jesus. Buddha. The mystics. We need to listen to our spiritual heroes.

One interesting exercise is to make a list of five or six people who you admire and look up to as spiritual heroes. Then, next to each person, write down the one or two qualities about each person that you admire the most. Next, combine those qualities into one list, one statement of the sort of qualities you most admire. Finally—write "I am" in front of that list. The reason those people arouse your admiration is that those qualities are *in you* and are seeking to develop and blossom *in you*.

People who are attempting to "fly" under their own power, instead of opening to the power of God that is innate to us all if we care to surrender to it, can be of no help. The "sparrows" will tell us that we must find freedom in all kinds of material means, that freedom means having an unrestricted ego, doing whatever you want and having everything you want. The "eagles" know that true freedom comes only from giving no power to sin, or to any of sin's results, to hurt us (4:6–7).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹The sinless give as they received. ²See, then, the power of sinlessness within your brother, and share with him the power of the *release* from sin you offered *him*. ³To each who walks this earth in seeming solitude is a savior given, whose special function here is to release him, and so to free himself. ⁴In the world of separation each is appointed separately, though they are all the same. ⁵Yet those who *know* that they are all the same need not salvation. ⁶And each one *finds* his savior when he is ready to look upon the face of Christ, and see Him sinless.

• Study Question •

5. *The third sentence mentions that each one is given a savior whose job is to free him. Let's say you haven't found your savior yet. Why would this be?*
- A. *Your savior has not been appointed yet (sentence 4).*
 - B. *You have not yet realized that all saviors are the same (sentence 5).*
 - C. *You are not yet ready to look on the face of Christ (sentence 6).*
 - D. *You have too many people around you—you are not walking the earth in enough solitude (sentence 3).*

The first sentence (5:1) is simply a statement of a principle often reiterated in the Course: Those who have awakened to their own divinity ("the sinless") "give as they received." The gifts that are given to them are returned to the giver, usually increased.

Granted that this is so, how then should we live? How should we relate to our brothers and sisters? See them as sinless because “the power of the *release* from sin” we offer to her or him will *be returned to us* (5:2). What we give them, we will get back in spades. We must learn to be generous in our forgiveness with one another because *it pays off*.

The Manual for Teachers makes this quite clear:

To the world, generosity means giving away in the sense of giving up. To the teachers of God, it means giving away in order to keep (M-4.VII.1:4-5).

The teacher of God is generous out of Self interest. This does not refer, however, to the self of which the world speaks (M-4.VII.2:1-2).

But he does want to keep for himself all things that are of God, and therefore for His Son. These are the things that belong to him. These he can give away in true generosity, protecting them forever for himself (M-4.VII.2:10-12).

This is true with every person we interact with; everyone is the same. But, the Course says, there is one person (at least) who is *specially appointed* to release us from sin, and so to free himself or herself. Someone whose function is to be our savior. To me this implies the reverse as well: I am specially appointed to be some person’s savior, to forgive them and so to experience my own forgiveness (5:3–4). When the two of us meet and join together for this purpose, that is the ultimate holy relationship.

We’ve seen how significant the holy relationship is, and that it is a central theme of the entire Course. Our relationships are our salvation, and we cannot find God alone. We can comfort ourselves to some extent by realizing that *every* relationship, from brief encounters to life-long family relationships, can bring experiences of holy relating. Yet the way the Course talks, it does seem to have in mind something deeper than that. So the question seems to naturally arise in our minds:

How do I find someone who wants to have a holy relationship with me?

I believe that we go through a period of preparation, getting ready for holy relationships, and that when we are ready, we will meet those holy relationship partners inevitably. So you don’t really have to do *anything* about finding the right partner; you just have to get yourself ready. Even so, I know—from my own experience—that our greatest anxiety lies on the “how do we meet” part, so I’d like to deal with that now.

This discussion isn’t a part of the detailed commentary here, and will incorporate material from other parts of the Course, so I’ve placed it in an Appendix to this commentary. The gist of it is simply that when we are ready, someone will show up. It’s inevitable. Don’t sweat it, just get yourself ready.

How do we get ready? “And each one finds his savior when he is ready to look upon the face of Christ, and see Him sinless” (5:6). Work on letting go of judgments. Work on forgiveness. Work on seeing people as sinless. When you are really ready to do that, you will find your savior.

Paragraph 6

6. ¹The plan is not of you, nor need you be concerned with anything

except the part that has been given *you* to learn. ²For He Who knows the rest will see to it *without* your help. ³But think not that He does not need your part to help Him with the rest. ⁴For in your part lies *all* of it, without which is no part complete, nor is the whole completed *without* your part. ⁵The ark of peace is entered two by two, yet the beginning of another world goes with them. ⁶Each holy relationship must enter here, to learn its special function in the Holy Spirit's plan, now that it *shares* His purpose. ⁷And as this purpose is fulfilled, a new world rises in which sin can enter not, and where the Son of God can enter *without* fear and where he rests a while, to forget imprisonment and to remember freedom. ⁸How can he enter, to rest and to remember, without *you*? ⁹Except you be there, he is *not* complete. ¹⁰And it is his *completion* that he remembers there.

• **Study Question** •

6. *What is the most important thing you should be concerned with as you commit your life to God?*
- A. *Understanding the overall plan of God.*
 - B. *Learning what part you play in God's plan.*
 - C. *Knowing how to enter the ark.*

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So that's what 6:1 is talking about. You don't need to be concerned about finding a holy relationship (already assigned), you don't need to make any plans (Already handled!). Just take care of your little piece of the pie. The Holy Spirit can handle all the rest, and *will* handle it.³ He does not need your help (6:2)! When we try to make it happen we just muck things up. Leave the big picture to Him and take care of the little bit you've been given. That "little bit" is *huge* in its importance to the entire plan (6:3–4). It is, as Workbook Lesson 100 says, "essential to God's plan of salvation." So we must learn to let go of the overall plan, but focus to diligently carry out the part we've been given—the people around us needing our forgiveness.

The ark of peace is the holy instant. It is entered by joining with your brother in common purpose (that's the "two by two") (6:5). You enter the ark, the holy instant, to find your part—your relationship's special function—in the Holy Spirit's plan of saving the world (6:6). There you became the carriers of the new world, just as the inhabitants of Noah's ark were. In a sense, the whole plan of salvation is contained in your part—the whole new world rests in your relationship (6:5,7).

When Jesus refers to "the Son of God" here (6:7–10), he means the entire Sonship, God's One Son. Jesus is envisioning the completion of the goal, the re-union of all the

³ Again, I have come to believe that the Course's continual personification of the Holy Spirit, here saying He knows the whole plan and will take care of it without your help, is a kind of cultural shorthand way of explaining what really happens. We could say, "It will all work out perfectly in the evolutionary thrust of the universe," or, "It will all transpire according to the working of the nature of reality and its laws." The point is that our isolated, separated will can only cause interference; we need to let go and trust the flow.

separated sons. This completed Son enters this new world and rests, forgetting the past of imprisonment in sin and fear, and remembering the freedom in which He was created. But this is the *whole* Son. “How can he enter, to rest and to remember, without *you*? Except you be there, he is *not* complete” (6:8–9). This is so for each one of us. We are all essential components of the Whole, and without us, there *is* no wholeness! We must do our part.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹This is the purpose *given* you. ²Think not that your forgiveness of your brother [**each other**] serves but you two alone. ³For the whole new world rests in the hands of every two who enter here [*into the ark*] to rest. ⁴And as they rest, the face of Christ shines on them and they remember the laws of God, forgetting all the rest and yearning only to have His laws perfectly fulfilled in them and all their brothers. ⁵Think you when this [*the laws being perfectly fulfilled in everyone*] has been achieved that you will rest *without* them? ⁶You could no more leave one of them outside than I could leave you, and forget part of myself.

• Study Question •

7. *You enter the ark and are resting there with your holy relationship partner. You forgive her and she forgives you. True or false, this is where your sphere of concern ends, with entering the ark and forgiving your partner.*
- A. *False, your relationship is meant to save the entire world.*
 - B. *True, your sole responsibility is to accept the Atonement for yourself.*
 - C. *False, the Holy Spirit needs you to go beyond your little part and concern yourself with the whole plan.*

Seeing our significance in the completion of the Son of God puts our work of forgiving one another in a whole new, cosmic perspective. This makes what we are doing supremely important. It isn't something that is “just” between two people: “the whole new world rests in the hands of every two who enter here to rest” (7:3). Think of that! Try it on for size: “The whole new world rests in the hands of my partner and me.”

Remember how, passing through the obstacles to peace, you once saw glimpses of the face of Christ, lit with divine light, shining from beyond the veil? Now the face of Christ shines directly on you and your brother. Inspired and lifted by that light you forget all the fear and pain you've left behind, all the laws of the world you thought you were subject to, realizing now that the only thing you want is to have the laws of God perfectly fulfilled, not only in you but in *everyone* (7:4). How could you rest *without* all your brothers? You cannot even imagine leaving anyone “outside,” no more than Jesus could leave *you* out, thus forgetting part of his Self (7:6).

When I was a teenager I had a born-again experience. I was taught, and believed, that only those who received Jesus as their savior would go to heaven. My father was a self-described agnostic. He said, “There may be a God, there may not. I don’t know, and I don’t think it is really possible to know.” So I was convinced that he was in danger of hell. (I have a hard time writing this because the idea seems so insane to me now.) Before long, though, I began wondering—how could I be happy in heaven if my dad wasn’t there? How would that—how *could* that—be heaven for me? And if not for me, how could it be *for God*? That’s what I think of now, when I read this line, “You could not more leave one of them outside than I could leave you.”

Paragraph 8

8. ¹You may wonder how you can *be* at peace when, while you are in time, there is so much that must be done *before* the way to peace is open. ²Perhaps this seems impossible to *you*. ³But ask yourself if it is possible that *God* would have a plan for your salvation that does *not* work. ⁴Once you accept *His* plan as the *one* function that you would fulfill, there *will* be nothing else the Holy Spirit will not *arrange* for you *without* your effort. ⁵He will go before you making straight your path, and leaving in your way no stones to trip on, and no obstacles to bar your way. ⁶*Nothing* you need will be denied you. ⁷Not one seeming difficulty but will melt away before you *reach* it. ⁸You need take thought for nothing, careless of everything except the only purpose that you would fulfill. ⁹As *that* was given you, so will its fulfillment be. ¹⁰God’s guarantee will hold against *all* obstacles, for it rests on certainty and *not* contingency. ¹¹*It rests on you*. ¹²And what can be more certain than a Son of God?

• Study Question •

8. *The first sentence is difficult to understand. It suggests that we have a hard time seeing how we can be at peace when “in time, there is so much that must be done.” What is the so much that must be done? Pay careful attention to the context here, the preceding two paragraphs and the rest of this paragraph. It may not be possible to totally determine the answer; just take your best guess.*
- A. *The “so much that must be done” is all the busy activities we must engage in just to support a normal human life in this world.*
 - B. *The “so much that must be done” is all of the work we must do on behalf of the Holy Spirit’s plan for salvation, on behalf of opening the way to peace for everyone.*
 - C. *The “so much that must be done” is all the inner work we must do in order to awaken to peace within ourselves.*

That day, when the entire Sonship is gloriously, consciously, deliriously one, seems terribly far off. Even Jesus admits that “...the end can be a long, long way off” (M-2.1:9).

There are so many millions or billions of separated minds that, so it seems, have yet to recognize that there *is* a journey, and so many who, having heard, have not yet answered the Call. How can we be at peace? “Perhaps this seems impossible to you” (8:1–2). This is the reaction of so many people who listen to the daily news, who read of wars and bombings and the insanity of so many who seem to have risen to leadership in the world. “How can I be at peace when the world is like this?” Jesus recognizes our problem, but he has a response.

He suggests we ask ourselves if it is “possible that *God* would have a plan for your salvation that does *not* work” (8:3). The question leads back to the concept of inevitability once again. Would God, or whatever force set this whole thing in motion, have done so without being certain of success? Would the power that has developed consciousness, and beyond consciousness, compassion, love, and the power of *joining* consciousness with another, have done so if it were possible the whole thing could fail and fall to smithereens? I don’t think so.

What we must do is to stop trying to second-guess God. His plan leads to a world without the concept of sin, without fear, without guilt. We are here as part of the process of bringing that vision to fruition. Once we are willing to set aside all our little, lesser plans, and accept this divine plan as the *only* purpose we have in the world, *everything else* will fall into place. Stop trying to swim upstream or cross-current in the river of life, and go with the flow. That’s what happens. Life just starts to *work*, without your effort (8:4). It will be as if the Spirit of God goes before you, clearing away all the obstacles and stumbling stones, leaving you a smooth, straight path to follow (8:5). I picture Him as a giant bulldozer, creating a highway for my life. The prophets of God have long held this vision. In the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, it was written:

“And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:8–10 ESV)

“A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”” (Isaiah 40:3–5 ESV)

Every need will be provided (8:6), as long as your purpose is aligned with God’s. If there seems to be a problem looming on the horizon, it will disappear before you get there (8:7). If we just focus on the central purpose, all the peripheral minutiae will take care of themselves (8:8).

There is a perfect example of this in the original Notes Helen took down, material that didn’t make it even into the Urtext. It can be found in Wapnick’s *Absence from Felicity*, p.

235, and in Doug Thomson's *ACIM Complete 7-volume Urtext*, as a footnote I-4. Helen felt she needed a new fur coat, and was prepared to spend hours shopping around for just the right thing. Jesus wanted her to spend her time writing down the Course. So he told her:

The reason I direct everything that is unimportant is because it is no way to waste your free will. If you insist on doing the trivial your way, you waste too much time and will on it. Will cannot be free if it is tied up in trivia. It never gets out.

I will tell you exactly what to do in connection with everything that does not matter. That is not an area where choice should be invested. There is better use of time. [He wanted her to take notes, something he explicitly mentioned during a long discourse on wasted time.]

You have to remember to ask Me to take charge of all minutiae, and they will be taken care of so well and so quickly that you cannot bog down in it.

If we are entirely focused on God's purpose we can be at peace, even in this crazy world, because "God's guarantee will hold against *all* obstacles, for it rests on certainty and *not* contingency" (8:10). There are no unexpected or unforeseen occurrences that can interfere. God's plan isn't *contingent* on anything; it is *certain*. Why? Because, "*It rests on you*" (8:11). Lest that make you feel even *more* uncertain, Jesus adds, "And what can be more certain than a Son of God?" (8:12). After all, the plan calls for nothing more than you and I being *what we already are* and *always have been*. How difficult or uncertain can that be? Remember: We are just doing a slow-mo instant replay here; the game is already over! We've already won. So of course we can be certain. Of course we can be at peace.

Answer Key

1. A, C and D
2. B
3. C
4. B
5. C
6. B
7. A
8. B

My summary: Give power to sin and it will imprison you. See the power of sinlessness in your brother and he will free you. Concentrate only on your part in the Holy Spirit's plan and He will take care of the rest.

Appendix

How Do We Find a Holy Relationship?

Lets begin with some material from the Manual for Teachers, in which Jesus is discussing how pupils and teachers come together. The teacher/pupil relationship is a particular form of holy relationship, but most of the things said about it can be generalized to apply to all holy relationships.

M-2.1. Certain pupils have been assigned to each of God's teachers, and they will begin to look for him as soon as he has answered the Call. 2 They were chosen for him because the form of the universal curriculum that he will teach is best for them in view of their level of understanding. 3 His pupils have been waiting for him, for his coming is certain. 4 Again, it is only a matter of time. 5 Once he has chosen to fulfill his role, they are ready to fulfill theirs. 6 Time waits on his choice, but not on whom he will serve. 7 When he is ready to learn, the opportunities to teach will be provided for him.

The partners are *assigned* to one another. The *assigner* is, by implication, either the Holy Spirit or God. Now I don't happen any longer to think of God as a super Being, somehow separate from us and yet one with us at the same time. I tend to think of this more along the lines of natural selection: There is a person, or there are persons, who just fit perfectly with your learning needs. They are the square peg of learning that will fit the square hole of your learning needs. They are "assigned" to your case by virtue of that matching quality. "They were chosen for him because the form of the universal curriculum that he will teach is best for them in view of their level of understanding" (M-2.1.2).

The partner who belongs with you in this holy relationship will "begin to look for [you] as soon as [you] have answered the Call" (M-2.1.1). The Call is the call of your own true Christ nature: "You will awaken to your own call, for the Call to awake is within you" (T-11.VI.9:1). At some point everyone hears that call and answers, taking the beginning steps on the journey home. When that happens—as I'm sure it has for you if you are reading this!—your partner is looking for you, as you are for him or her. It's instinctual. The Call *is* the call to unite, to join, to see Christ as all in all, so you are naturally (by nature) on the lookout for persons with whom you can join in learning this lesson.

Relationship partners are waiting for each other, and their coming is certain (M-2.1.3). Again, it is the inevitability that is inherent in what we are. We are the offspring of God, the extensions of God, we *exist* for this. It has to happen. "Again, it is only a matter of time." (T-2.III.3:1, T-13.I.5:5) Time is only an illusion, albeit one that seems quite real to us. So the Course warns that it may take a *long* time:

The Call is universal. It goes on all the time everywhere. It calls for teachers to speak for It and redeem the world. Many hear It, but few will answer. Yet it is all a matter of time. Everyone will answer in the end, but the end can be a long, long way off" (M-1.2:4-9).

We are not waiting the "long, long" time for "the end," but we are waiting for the perfect fit to show up for us. Two people who have at least begun to answer the Call and are "ready to learn" will find that "the opportunities to teach [and learn] will be provided" (M-2.1.5-7). The point is that how long it takes *does not matter*.

I get the feeling that we will *inevitably* meet the right partners at the right time, as soon as we are ready to learn together, and that *prior* to that time, we probably would not even recognize them if we met them!

Should we be **looking for** our holy relationship partner? Well, this says that when the teacher is ready the pupils start looking for him, so apparently looking is part of the process. I think that looking is not what we usually think of it as, however. We make it a specialness thing; we are looking for that "special one," our "soul mate." That can get us stuck in thinking about a holy relationship as a really *special* kind of special relationship. I think we should be looking *all the time* for holy relationship partners, with everyone we meet! If every relationship is destined to become holy, we should look on everyone as a potential partner for a holy relationship. As I've said before, a holy relationship may last a few seconds or a lifetime; so everyone we meet is a candidate.

In M-2.3, the Course points out that time isn't what we think it is, and that in fact we are *reliving* what has already happened. In time, we appear to have choices yet to make to enter into our holy relationships. In reality we have already made those choices, and all we are doing now is re-enacting, within time, what has already happened, outside of time. Time is just the illusion that what already happened all at once is *gradually* being worked out. It's a slo-mo instant reply.

Dan Fogelberg sang a song that said, "Longer than there've been fishes in the ocean...I've been in love with you." Behind all our facades of separateness we have always been madly in love with each other. All we are choosing or deciding within time is to accept that this has always been so.

In M-2.4, Jesus says:

3 ...pupil and teacher seem to come together in the present, finding each other as if they had not met before. 4 The pupil comes at the right time to the right place. 5 This is inevitable, because he made the right choice in that ancient instant which he now relives. 6 So has the teacher, too, made an inevitable choice out of an ancient past. 7 God's Will in everything but seems to take time in the working-out.

"...finding each other *as if* they had not met before." That clearly implies that they *have* met before. They've already met; the relationship has already happened. We are just reliving it. So the whole thing is already complete; there is nothing to worry about, no doubt about the outcome. You will meet. You will go through your period of discomfort. You will forgive one another. You will mature into a relationship that blesses the entire world. It is a given; it cannot be otherwise because it has already happened and is only

being replayed in your consciousness, a “slo-mo” replay of what has already been accomplished in the eternal holy instant.

In the following section of the Manual, this idea is summed up as follows:

5 Therefore, the plan includes very specific contacts to be made for each teacher of God. 6 There are no accidents in salvation. 7 Those who are to meet will meet, because together they have the potential for a holy relationship. 8 They are ready for each other. (M-3.1.5–8)

“Those who are to meet will meet.” So, don’t sweat it. You have nothing to do except to “get ready.” No need to worry about it. It’s a done deal—literally, it’s already done.