

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 31

The Final Vision

Section IV

The Real Alternative

An explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats is at the end of the commentary. See also the note there about the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition.

Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Overview of Section IV

• Study Question •

1. *This section is titled “The Real Alternative.” What false alternatives have been discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter, and what do you think the real alternative might be?*

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After you reply to the question above, check the answer in the Answer Key to see how you did. That answer contains a good overview of the section.

Paragraph 1

There is a tendency to think the world can offer consolation and escape from problems that its purpose is to keep. ²Why should this be? ³Because it is a place where choice among illusions seems to be the only choice, and you are in control of outcomes of your choosing. ⁴Thus you think, within the narrow band from birth to death, a little time is given you to use for you alone; a time when everyone conflicts with you, but you can choose which road will lead you out of conflict and away from difficulties which concern you not. ⁵But they *are* your concern. ⁶How, then, can you escape from them by leaving them behind? ⁷What must go with you, you will take with you whatever road you choose to walk along.

• Study Question •

2. (1:4). *We all feel beset by conflict and we all have some remaining hope that we will find the road (in this world) that leads out. Think of some of the difficulties that hem you in right now—that really seem like they should not be your concern, as if someone else should be dealing with them. You may want to write a few of these difficulties in the space below in the Answer Key.*

The ego made the world to *keep* problems, but we think it offers us a *way out* from problems (1:1). That is very clearly the case. We have run down a multitude of paths in the maze, and every time we've arrived at a dead end. Nevertheless, we keep trying. We keep expecting different results from doing the same things, over and over. "Maybe *this* way will work," we think. "Or maybe *that* way." We have not figured it out for some reason: There *is* no way out of the maze! It isn't a maze; it is a prison. The ego *designed* it to prevent escape.

"Why should this be?" asks Jesus (1:2) rhetorically because he is about to answer his own question. Why do we keep making the same mistake over and over? Why don't we just give up and look for the answers elsewhere? "Because it [the world] is a place where choice among illusions seems to be the *only* choice" (1:3). Such a simple answer! We don't look for answers anywhere else because there doesn't seem to be anywhere else to look. The world is the playing field; we have nowhere else to turn. Everything in the world is an illusion, but the illusions of the world *seem* to be the only options we have.

The critical word there is "seems." That word is what offers us the key to escape from our prison. Because there *really is* another choice besides the illusions of the world, as we will see in the next paragraph. But first, Jesus wants to make sure we are clear about how very thoroughly we are trapped and how firmly we are entrenched in thinking that "the world can offer consolation and escape" (1:1). Unless we recognize the problem, we won't accept or even *see* the answer when given to us: "Let me recognize the problem so it can be solved" (W-pI.79.title).

We *think* we have a choice; we think that we can choose among various alternatives that present themselves to us and determine the outcome. We can find consolation or escape from our difficulties (1:1,3). We think that our options are limited to one little lifetime ("the narrow band from birth to death" (1:4)). This lifetime is *ours to use as we see fit* (so we think, 1:4). Within this lifetime, "everyone conflicts with [us]" (1:4), but if we make the right choices in our situations, knowing wisely when to lead and when to follow, when to justly judge the others who conflict with us, somehow we'll find our way out of the whole mess (1:4). Some of the problems that confront us seemingly do not even concern us. We just want to get away from them (1:4; 1:6).

I think, for instance, of a relative of mine who was for many years a practicing alcoholic and drug abuser, eventually ending up penniless and homeless. He bottomed out, got into recovery, and got clean, but shortly afterward, most likely due to his past cocaine abuse, he had a massive stroke that left him half-paralyzed and mentally impaired. We ended up having to take him into our home for over one year. His presence in our house was a *huge* problem, and in one sense, it seemed like it was not really our concern. After all, he brought this on himself, right? There was

a part of me that just wanted to get rid of him. “Not my problem.” Yet, even though he is responsible for his circumstances, I *did* (and do) feel concerned.

Yet Jesus says, “They *are* your concern” (1:5). I don’t think he is saying here, “You *should be* concerned about these things; they *are* your responsibility.” Rather, I think he is saying, “Even though they have nothing to do with you directly, and the problems seem to be outside of you, you *are* concerned about them.” A more explicit example of the kind of thing I think he is referring to is this: Someone we know is doing something we disapprove of or think is a mistake, and we butt in uninvited to offer advice or try to “fix” the situation. The problems that appear to be outside are really within us. As we saw in the last section, “You never hate your brother for his sins, but only for your own” (T-31.III.1:5 (FIP), -31.III.1:4 (CE)). “Yet here is a world, clearly within your mind, that seems to be outside” (T-18.II.5:3). Because that is so, we cannot escape from them by “leaving them behind” (1:6). The problems are not *out there*, but *in here*. As the clever title to Jon Kabat-Zinn’s book about mindfulness meditation puts it, “Wherever You Go, There You Are.” You take the problems with you wherever you go (1:7).

To put it in even more concrete terms: The problem is not who is President; the problem is not having the wrong relationship partner, the wrong house, the wrong job, or the wrong geographical location. The problem is *you* and your choice to look outside yourself for happiness and completion. You don’t need to change the world; you need to change your mind *about* the world (T-21.In.1:7 (FIP), T-21.I.1:6 (CE)).

Paragraph 2

2 Real choice is no illusion. ²But the world has none to offer. ³All its roads but lead to disappointment, nothingness, and death. ⁴There is no choice in its alternatives. ⁵Seek not escape from problems here. ⁶The world was made that problems could not be escaped. ⁷Be not deceived by all the different names its roads are given. ⁸They have but one end. ⁹And each is but the means to gain that end, for it is here that all its roads will lead, however differently they seem to start, however differently they seem to go. ¹⁰Their end is certain, for there is no choice among them. ¹¹All of them will lead to death. ¹²On some you travel gaily for a while before the bleakness enters, and on some the thorns are felt at once. ¹³The choice is not what will the ending be, but when it comes.

• Study Question •

3. (2:2). *The world has “none” of what?*
4. (2:2-4). *In your own words, why does the world offer no real choices?*
5. (2:4). *How many times does the phrase “there is no choice” appear in paragraphs 2 and 3?*
6. (2:7). *What are some of the names that you have given to the roads by which you have sought consolation and escape?*

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There isn’t a lot of need for extensive comments on this paragraph. It very plainly states its message and could be summed up as: There is no actual choice among all the various roads.

Sentence 2:6 reiterates the thought of 1:1, which is that we made the world to keep us locked up with our problems. Seeking in the world for a means of escape is as foolish as trying to use dynamite to build a house. Dynamite does not *build* houses; it destroys them. The world does not *offer* the means of escape; it *conceals* it.

It may be difficult to accept the idea that every road in this world leads to death and that we *made* them to lead to death (2:9–11). Of course, that's true in the obvious sense. Whatever road anyone chooses, everyone eventually dies (with the possible exception of a few enlightened masters who chose a truly different road). But, as we saw in T-31.I.7:1–10, T-31.I.10:3, and elsewhere in the first three sections of the chapter, the outcome of the lesson that God's Son is guilty *is* death.

The Course agrees with the Bible that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 3:23; T-19.II.3:6); that is, if sin exists, death will follow. But it notes that death exists only if sin is real. Since, as the Course declares, “There is no sin. It has no consequence” (W-pI.101.6:7), there is, therefore, no death.

Every road of the world, however, in some way involves guilt and therefore leads to death, if only in an illusion. Sometimes the fatal flaw is discovered promptly (2:12), and we quickly switch to a different path. Or, the path may begin “gaily for a while,” but eventually, “the bleakness enters” (2:12). The dictionary defines “bleak” as “providing little comfort or shelter” and “without hope or expectation of success or improvement.” Perhaps, we start out with high hopes, but as time goes by, we find little comfort in the new job or relationship or whatever. We begin to realize that it isn't going to get any better; we cannot repair the flaws we have exposed in our hoped-for escape plan. The end of the journey is still death. As we grow older, we start to realize that “The choice is not *what* will the ending be, but *when* it comes” (2:13).

To me, this sounds a lot like the attitude of some drug addicts or obsessive pleasure seekers. When you point out that they are hurting themselves, they laugh cynically and say something like, “What does it matter? We're all going to die. I may as well enjoy myself while I can.” Or, as the biblical proverb goes, “Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (Isaiah 22:13).

If this is starting to sound depressing and hopeless, you are right! As we'll see, there is a sense in which the Course *wants* us to lose hope. But that is just one step, not the end.

Paragraph 3

3 There is no choice where every end is sure. ²Perhaps you would prefer to try them all, before you really learn they are but one. ³The roads this world can offer seem to be quite large in number, but the time must come when everyone begins to see how like they are to one another. ⁴Men have died on seeing this, because they saw no way except the pathways offered by the world, and learning they led nowhere, lost their hope.¹ ⁵And yet this was the time they could have learned their greatest lesson. ⁶All must reach this point, and go beyond it. ⁷It is true indeed there is no choice at all within the world, but this is not the lesson in itself. ⁸The lesson has a purpose, and in this you come to understand what it is for.

• Study Question •

7. (3:4-5 (CE), 3:4-6 (FIP)). *Why exactly does it mean that “men died” on seeing the sameness of the world’s pathways? What phenomenon in the world is this talking about? To answer this, please put together the hints in Sentences 4 and 5 and use your knowledge about the forms that death can take in the world.*

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When the outcome of every choice is the same, there is no actual choice—just the *illusion* of choice (3:1). The roads *do* look different, though. Jesus observes that we may want to try all of the paths, just to be sure (3:2). Although he is telling us as clearly as possible that every road has the same destination, he seems willing for us to go ahead and try every last path. He knows how futile it is; he *tells us* how futile it will be; and yet, he seems to recognize that some of us are so stubborn that we won’t “*really* learn they are but one” until we’ve tried them all.

Some of the people who have researched past life regression tell us that many people go this route. It makes me think of the Sinatra song, “My Way”: “I’ve been a puppet, a pirate, a pauper, a poet, a pawn and a king....” Probably not all in one lifetime! The gentle permission Jesus seems to give for such experimentation implies that it is harmless. “Nothing real can be threatened” (T-In.2:2); that’s the good news. But it also implies that he already knows what we will discover: there’s no point to it. Eventually *everyone* will wake up to the fact that the roads all lead to nowhere (3:3). The way it is worded (“the time must come when everyone begins to see...”) leads me to think that seeing the futility of the world is a necessary primal insight, a prerequisite to enlightenment. Jesus says something similar in one of the Workbook lessons:

“The world you see holds nothing that you need to offer you; nothing that you can use in any way, nor anything at all that serves to give you joy... No one but must accept this thought as true, if he would leave the world behind and soar beyond its petty scope and little ways.” (W-pl.128.1:1, 3)

¹ “Men have died” here seems to refer primarily to suicide, given the many references in the Course to suicide and given the fact that suicide is a result of loss of hope (“lost their hope”). However, it may also refer to dying (rather than actively taking your life) as a result of profound hopelessness.

He clearly states the necessity of this revelation a few sentences later: “All must reach this point, and go *beyond* it” (3:6). Let us each ask ourselves: *Have I reached this point? Have I seen that “this world holds nothing that I want”?*

“The way up is down” is a well-known spiritual saying, usually understood to refer to humility, taking the smaller piece of pie, and so on. But to me, it means that the way to awakening is through our deepening despair of the world. Unless we lose hope of finding consolation in the world, we will continue to look for it there and never turn whole-heartedly to God alone. Eckhart Tolle was in a suicidal frame of mind when he had his spiritual breakthrough. Byron Katie had her awakening while living in a halfway house, depressed and suicidal. So, if you are feeling depressed—rejoice! You are probably on the right path.

(3:4–5 (CE), 3:4–6 (FIP)). These sentences are a profound insight into and commentary on *suicide*. In other words, when people kill themselves, it is because they see no way (road) out of their problems and so lose all hope and decide to end it all. Suicide must often stem from a deep insight into the essential futility of all of this world’s alternatives. They have seen that all the roads lead to death anyway, so why not just cut to the chase, rush to the single end of all pathways, and spare themselves the false promises and prolonged suffering along the way? This reasoning is similar to that of terminally ill patients who commit suicide. When you are terminal and have nothing to look forward to, why not just hasten the end? The Course is saying that many people who commit suicide realize the essentially terminal nature of all life in this world. The Course, therefore, is extolling the insight that people have on the brink of suicide, the very insight that drives them to it. Pretty odd to hear this from a spiritual teaching!

Yet the Course, in the following sentences and paragraphs, urges us to see this insight as a *crucial beginning*, not a final end. There is a positive lesson to be learned, the “greatest lesson” (3:5). It is a lesson that we can only learn *after* we have learned that all the roads of the world offer nothing but death. Jesus implies as much in 3:6, as we noted earlier.

Going beyond the loss of hope in the pathways of the world is vital here. If we stop mid-way, we end up in total depression. The lesson the suicides and nihilists of the world have learned is definitely true, as gloomy as it seems: “There is no choice at all within the world”. “But this is *not* the lesson in itself” (3:7). It’s only half the lesson or only the prelude to the ultimate lesson. It’s a *good* lesson, but its purpose (3:8) is to pry us free from our attachment to seeking outside ourselves for salvation.

“Seek not outside yourself” is a note that has been sounded often in the Course. In the Text, as recently as T-29.VIII, the author dedicated an entire section to advising us, over and over, to “seek not outside yourself.” In the Workbook, a series of three lessons teach us, “The world I see holds nothing that I want,” “Beyond this world there is a world I want,” and “It is impossible to see two worlds” (Lessons 128–130). The course seems intent on disillusioning us about the world so that we can learn to look for our answer elsewhere.

Paragraph 4

4 Why would you seek to try another road, another person, or another place, when you *have* learned the way the lesson starts, but do not yet perceive what it is for?² Its purpose is the answer to the search that all must undertake who still believe there is another answer to be found. ³Learn now, without despair, there is no hope of answer in the world. ⁴But do not judge the lesson which is but *begun* with this. ⁵Seek not another signpost in the world which seems to point to still another road. ⁶No longer look for hope where there is none. ⁷Make fast your learning now, and understand you but waste time unless you go beyond what you have learned to what is yet to learn. ⁸For from this lowest point will learning lead to heights of happiness in which you see the *purpose* of the lesson shining clear, and perfectly within your learning grasp.

• Study Question •

8. (4:7). What does it refer to when it says, “go beyond what you have learned”?

Notice that in 4:1, the author assumes that, “. . .you *have* learned the way the lessons starts,” namely that you have learned how alike the roads of the world are, in that they all end up in despair and death. Given that you have learned that lesson, what possible reason could there be to keep trying to find another road, person, or place to bring you happiness? What would be the point? Just because you have not yet seen the *purpose* of that learning is not sufficient reason to ignore it and continue your seeking (4:1).

We shouldn't stop with the lesson that searching for salvation in the world always fails. The final answer to our failure only comes when we recognize where that lesson can lead us (4:2). Don't stop with the first part of the lesson! *Do* learn it and learn it well: “There is no hope of answers in the world” (4:3). But—and this part isn't so easy—learn this lesson “without despair.” How is that even possible? If every search within the world for an answer must fail, how can we *not* despair? The only way you can avoid despair is to realize there is *someplace else* to look for an answer.

“Don't judge the lesson,” he says, which to me sounds a lot like, “Don't kill the messenger!” We may not like this first part, but it is just the *first part* (4:4). Don't brush it off and go back to looking again in the world for some sign pointing the way to hope. There isn't any hope in the world (4:5–6)! Instead, get a firm grasp on what the lesson is telling you: You cannot find the answers you are seeking in the world, and further searching here will be a waste of time. Stop wasting time; *now*, having grasped the first part of the lesson, it is the time to move on to learn something else (4:7). If you are willing to do that, you'll find that this “lowest point” will become the launching pad to “heights of happiness” you never dreamed of. The *purpose* of your learning this bitter lesson will be very clear, and you will know you can quickly learn the second half of the lesson (4:8).

² “The way the lesson starts” is that all the roads of the world “but lead to disappointment, nothingness, and death” (2:3). “You *have* learned” this, yet in spite of this you still try to muster hope that you will find an exception, something in the world that *will* deliver happiness.

Indirectly, this refers to Section I and responds to our imagined difficulty with learning what the Course wants to teach us (T-31.I.1:5–6, for instance).

Paragraph 5

5 Who would be willing to be turned away from all the roadways of the world, unless he understood their real futility? ²Is it not needful that he should begin with this, to seek another way instead? ³For while he sees a choice where there is none, what power of decision can he use? ⁴The great release of power must begin with learning where it really has a use. ⁵And what decision has power if it be applied in situations without choice?

• Study Question •

9. (5:1-2). *Now we begin to glimpse the real lesson, and also see why it had to start with such a depressing insight. Based on these sentences, do you have a guess as to what the lesson is?*
10. (5:3-5). *We have a terrific power, the power of decision. But if all our alternatives amount to the same thing, what happens to that power?*

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The purpose of the lesson's first half is to make us *willing* "to be turned away from all the roadways of the world" (5:1). The seemingly depressing lesson is necessary because it readies us to be willing to give up our fruitless search for completion in the world (5:2). Our great power of decision is impotent as long as we see "a choice where there is none" (5:3). We exercise our power without any change because we choose nothing more than a different version of the same mistake. The power of decision is impotent until there is a genuine alternative for choice (5:4–5).

Think a bit about the disappointments you've encountered in your lifetime. Can you perceive, now, that they taught you a valuable lesson? They helped you stop wasting time and energy on looking in the wrong places for happiness and triggered your opening to God. Say a prayer of gratitude for the lessons life has taught you.

This need to learn the futility of seeking outside oneself is one of the big reasons, in my opinion, that very few young people are strong Course students. They are still operating under the illusion that they can find happiness in the world. Until they learn otherwise, the Course seems uninteresting and not worth the effort to investigate.

Paragraph 6

6 The learning that the world can offer but *one* choice, no matter what its form may be, is the beginning of acceptance that there is a *real* alternative instead.³ ²To fight against this step is to defeat your purpose here. ³You did not come to learn to find a road the world does not contain. ⁴The search for different pathways in the world is but the search for different forms of truth. ⁵And this would keep the truth from being reached.

• Study Question •

11. (6:2–5). “This step” refers to “learning that the world can offer but one choice.” What are some ways you see yourself and others fighting against this step? What result does this fighting have?

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In sentence 1, we encounter the phrase that titles the section: “a real alternative.” If you think back over the three earlier sections of this chapter, you may realize that the terms “alternative” and “choice” or “choose” have occurred many times. They will *continue* to recur throughout the chapter; they are one of the threads that tie it all together. For instance, the term “alternative” shows up in T-31.II.2:9 (FIP), T-31.I.3:4 (CE); IV.2:4 (both); IV.6:1 (both); IV.8:1 (both); V.12:1,6 (FIP), V.12:1,7 (CE); VII.6:5 (both); VII.14:6 (FIP), VIII.8:6 (CE); and VIII.5:7 (FIP), IX.5:7 (CE). When you read this word in sections VII, VIII, and IX, it should call to your mind this entire discussion about the world’s illusory alternatives and “the one alternative that is a different choice” in Section II. Section IV is an expansion of that idea. This kind of interconnection runs all through the Course. It is a big part of what fills the Course with such rich layers of meaning.

Sentence 1 is also a recasting of a similar idea expressed in Section 31.I:

“What is temptation but a wish to make the wrong decision on what you would learn, and have an outcome that you do not want? It is the recognition that it is a state of mind unwanted that becomes the means whereby the choice is reassessed; another outcome seen to be preferred.” (T-31.I.11:1-2)

We have to recognize that we no longer want our current state of mind before becoming willing to change it. It’s a theme that runs all through the Course. Chapter 2 of the Text also prepared us for this:

“The misuse of will engenders a situation which, in the extreme, becomes altogether intolerable. Pain thresholds can be high, but they are not limitless. Eventually, everybody begins to recognize, however dimly, that there must be a better way. As this recognition is more firmly established, it becomes a perceptual turning point.” (T-2.VI.8:1–4 (CE), T-2.III.3:4–7 (FIP))

³ This sentence finally reveals “the *purpose* of the lesson” (4:8). The lesson only begins with the idea “that the world can offer but *one* choice” (described earlier as “disappointment, nothingness, and death” [2:3], which means that “there is no hope of answer in the world” [4:3]). The actual purpose of the lesson is to learn “that there is a *real* alternative instead.”

So, if we fight against this step, we're defeating our true purpose: remembering the truth (6:2). Why would we fight it, and how? We might readily *argue* with the conclusion it draws. We might insist that just because a few roads we've tried have proved to be dead ends, that does not prove they *all* are dead ends. We might not want to give up the search. We might not want to believe that *this* job, or *that* new relationship, will not make us happy. If we fight it, we're fighting the truth. We're wasting our time trying to find something that does not exist in the world—a way out of suffering or, in a word, happiness. We need to accept that this is not what our life is about; we cannot “find a road the world does not contain.” We need to get on with our real purpose (6:3). There are no “different forms” of truth, and thinking there is keeps us from finding the actual truth (6:4–5).

Paragraph 7

7 Think not that happiness is ever reached by following a road away from it. ²This makes no sense and cannot be the way. ³To you who seem to find this course to be too difficult to learn, let me repeat that to achieve a goal you must proceed in its direction, not away from it. ⁴And every road that goes the other way will not advance the purpose to be found. ⁵If this be difficult to understand, then *is* this course impossible to learn. ⁶But only then. ⁷For otherwise, it is a simple teaching in the obvious.

• Study Question •

12. (7:1–4). *Have you felt that learning the Course is difficult? Recall how the theme of the Course's seeming difficulty was also discussed in Section I of the chapter. What reason for that apparent difficulty do these lines suggest to you?*

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The author seems to be stating the obvious. Clearly, a road leading *away* from happiness will not take you *toward* it (7:1–4). And the obviousness of that is just the point! He repeats it three times in different words: “To achieve a goal you must proceed in its direction”; “Every road that leads the other way will not advance the purpose” are the other two. By this time, the reader is probably muttering, “Duh!” But then, with dry humor, Jesus nails us by saying, “If *this* be difficult to understand, then *is* this course impossible to learn” (7:5). He's saying, “It's *that* easy to understand. It's *that* obvious. The roads of the world all lead away from happiness. Can't you see that you're never going to find happiness by following *any* of these roads? How long will it take for you to get the point?” We have to admit that the fact that “Going away from the goal won't get you to it,” is *not* tricky to understand! Therefore, we have to admit equally that the Course “is a simple teaching in the obvious” (7:7).

You might want to compare this paragraph with a passage that makes the same point more concretely, from Chapter 13:

“You do not really want the world you see, for it has disappointed you since time began. The homes you built have never sheltered you. The roads you made have led you nowhere. And no city that you built has withstood the crumbling assault of time. Nothing you made but has the

mark of death upon it. Hold it not dear, for it is old and tired and ready to return to dust even as you made it.”

“This aching world has not the power to touch the living world at all. You could not give it that, and so although you turn in sadness from it, you cannot find in it the road that leads away from it into another world.” (T-13.VII.2:3-3:2 (CE), (T-13.VII.3:1-7 (FIP))

Paragraph 8

8 There is a choice which you have power to make when you have seen the real alternatives. ²Until that point is reached you have no choice, and you can but decide how you would choose the better to deceive yourself again. ³This course attempts to teach no more than that the power of decision cannot lie in choosing different forms of what is still the same illusion and the same mistake. ⁴All choices in the world depend on this: You choose between your brother and yourself, and you will gain as much as he will lose, and what you lose is what is given him. ⁵How utterly opposed to truth is this, when the lesson's purpose is to teach that what your brother loses you have lost, and what he gains is what is given you.⁴

• Study Question •

13. (8:5). This refers to “the lesson.” Find several other references to “the lesson” in this section. What lesson is being spoken of?
14. (8:4–5). What is the essential difference between all the choices in the world, and the truth which “the lesson” teaches us?

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Picture yourself standing at a remarkable confluence of many roads, trying to choose which to follow. You do not know that all but one of them leads to death, and only one leads to life. How can you choose until you know the destination for each road? Any choice you make is likely to be for the same thing, although the roads may *look* very different. But when you know the destinations for each road, the choice becomes both real and uncomplicated.

When you see genuine alternatives, you can genuinely choose (8:1). Once you see *alternatives*, the power of choice is operational. Until then, you can only deceive yourself by repeatedly choosing the same mistake in varying forms (8:2). These first two sentences sum up the argument Jesus has been making. First, it's necessary to realize that all the choices *in the world* are the same dead ends, and second, to become aware that another alternative exists. He tells us that we could summarize the entire Course into this one lesson about the effective use of our power of decision (8:3). The whole Course attempts to teach nothing but how to see the actual alternative and make a genuine choice. Compare this to T-26.III.5:3–6:

⁴ This tells us the *content* of the real alternative. The content of all the world's roads is that “You choose between your brother and yourself, and you will gain as much as he will lose, and what you lose is what is given him.” The content of the real alternative is “that what your brother loses you have lost, and what he gains is what is given you.”

“Yet who can make a choice between the wish for Heaven and the wish for hell unless he recognizes they are not the same? This difference is the learning goal this course has set. It will not go beyond this aim. Its only purpose is to teach what is the same and what is different, leaving room to make the only choice which *can* be made.” (T-26.III.5:3–6 (CE))

This line is a setup for what follows, which spells out the alternative. The world’s choices all consist of choosing how you can gain at your brother’s expense while limiting your losses (8:4). That’s a damning assertion, but I think that, with a little reflection, you can see its accuracy. As such, all of the world’s choices are “utterly *opposed* to truth” (8:5). The truth is based on our unity with one another, so that what another person loses *we* lose, and what they gain is what *we* gain (8:5). That is is the “real alternative.” It’s “win/win”, not “win/lose.”

The alternative lesson we must learn is that you and your brother gain or lose together (8:3).

Paragraph 9

9 He has not left His thoughts!⁵ ²But you forgot His presence and remember not His love. ³No pathway in the world can lead to Him, nor any worldly goal be one with His. ⁴What road in all the world will lead within, when every road was made to separate the journey and the purpose it must have unless it be but futile wandering? ⁵All roads that lead away from what you are will lead you to confusion and despair. ⁶Yet has He never left His thoughts to die, without their Source forever in themselves. ⁷He has not left His thoughts. ⁸He could no more depart from them than they could keep Him out. ⁹In unity with Him do they abide, and in Their oneness Both are kept complete.

• Study Question •

15. *The roads of the world lead “away from what you are” (9:5), and not to God, not to the Divine within you. Think of some of the worldly goals you have pursued, or may be yet pursuing, and try to understand how this applies to them. What lesson are these goals teaching you? How does that teach you something false about yourself??*

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There seems to be a leap in logic in 9:1. I believe it is connecting us back to the discussion in T-30.IV of “The Thought God holds of you.” Jesus is connecting the alternative lesson we are learning to the place to which it leads us: the memory of God and our Reality as “His Thoughts.” To learn that we gain through giving is to recognize our likeness to God. To realize that my gain or loss is the gain or loss of all my brothers and sisters is to remember that we are all thoughts in God’s mind. God has not left His Thoughts, although we have forgotten Him and His Thoughts (9:1) and gone chasing illusions in the world’s paths.

The world’s paths do not lead to Him nor to the remembrance of what we are (9:2). How could any worldly goal lead us *within* (9:4)? They were made to separate us from that goal, to

⁵. “He” refers to God.

split apart the journey from anything that would give it its true purpose. They lead *away* from what we are., and leave us in confusion and despair (9:5).

But although we left God, He never left us. He would not allow us to die, devoid of our Source in Him (9:6). No! God has not left His Thoughts! That would be as unthinkable as believing that somehow we could keep God out (9:8)! We are as we always have been: United with Him, where both God and we find our completion (9:9).

Paragraph 10

10 There *is* no road that leads away from Him.⁶ ²A journey from yourself does not exist. ³How foolish and insane it is to think that there could be a road with such an aim. ⁴Where could it go? ⁵And how could you be made to travel on it, walking there without your own reality at one with you? ⁶Forgive yourself your madness, and forget all senseless journeys and all goalless aims. ⁷They have no meaning. ⁸You cannot escape from what you are, for God is merciful, and did not let His Son abandon Him. ⁹For what He is be thankful, for in that is your escape from madness and from death. ¹⁰Nowhere but where He is can you be found. ¹¹There *is* no path that does not lead to Him.

• Study Question •

16. (10:1–3). *What are God's Thoughts?*
17. *How do you react to hearing that all your worldly goals don't really exist? Let yourself become aware of your thoughts and feelings about this, and reflect on why you react in this way.*
18. (10:6–7). *Perhaps you feel guilty for having so many worldly goals. Spend a few moments quietly applying these two lines, and forgiving yourself, recognizing that your "goal-less aims" have no meaning.*
19. (10:11). *If there is no path that does not lead to God, does it matter what path you follow? Compare with 3:4–5 and 4:5–7.*

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Nothing can separate God and His Thoughts; we abide in unity with Him (9:7–9). No road leads away from Him; to think there is, is foolish and insane. After all the talk about the world's roads, which lead us "away from what you are," the Course says there are no such roads. They cannot exist because it is impossible to journey away from yourself. We should all heave a great sigh of relief!

How could you travel away from your Self (10:1–3)? The logic of what the Course is saying here is quite simple. We are God's Thoughts, thoughts that never leave His Mind. Separating us from God is an impossibility. God is all-encompassing; there is no place that God is not:

"Can you exclude yourself from the universe, or from God Who is the universe?"
(T-11.1.6:4 (CE))

⁶ The world's roads were built to lead away from God, but because we cannot actually leave Him, they only produce an *illusion* of traveling away from Him.

How could there be any road away from God? “Where could it go” (10:4)? There is no place away from God and no place away from your Self! Even if there were such a road, you could not separate from your Self, so if you walked along this impossible road, *you* would be there. So you cannot escape from your Self (10:5). The notion that you could somehow abandon God or abandon your divine Self is nothing short of madness!

You do not need to return to God or recover your Self. You have never left Him and never lost your Self. All you need is to “Forgive yourself your madness, and forget all senseless journeys and all goalless aims” (10:6). They are meaningless (10:7).

Your Reality is *changeless*; that is the central message of this section. You can’t escape from your Self; God in mercy did not allow that to happen (10:8). God is changeless, and since you are part of God, you are changeless. The Course calls you to thank God for what He is because His nature determines yours. In that knowledge lies “*your* escape from madness and from death” (10:9). You cannot be anywhere but where God is (who is everywhere); all paths lead to Him (10:9–10).

Answer Key

1. The first section discussed the false choice between two lessons: “The Son of God is guilty” and “The Son of God is innocent.” The second section presented our imagined choice between being leader or follower, and having our brother play the opposite role (the truth being that we walk side by side as equals). The real alternative, therefore, is very likely some form of learning the lesson that my brother and I are equally innocent as God created us, and find our innocence in one another’s innocence. Jesus will gradually dispense with false alternatives and introduce the real alternative, not in this section alone, but over the next few sections, culminating in the final section of the Text, “Choose Once Again,” calling on us to choose that real alternative.
2. Each person can write their own “difficulties that hem you in, difficulties that seem to you should not be your concern”:
3. The world has no real choices.
4. Choice assumes different outcomes. If two alternatives yield the exact same outcome, then they aren’t really different. They are the same. Thus, the choice between them is not a real choice.
5. Four times: 2:4, 2:10, 3:1, 3:7.
6. Some examples are: Romance, positive thinking, wealth (money), travel, job security, domination of others, good sound system, electronic toys, drugs,
7. This refers to suicide.
8. What you have learned is that the world’s pathways (at least many of them) are futile. We are urged not to stop with this negative lesson, but to keep on to learning the positive alternative
9. Something about turning away from all the roadways of the world and seeking another way instead.
10. Your great power of decision has been rendered apparently powerless, because we have exercised it choosing between dead ends, rather than a truly different path that really goes somewhere.
11. Fighting means continuing to look for some pathway, or answer, in the world. (You may have listed several specific ways of doing this.) It keeps us from actually ever reaching the truth, which is that the alternative exists beyond the world.
12. The difficulty lies in that you have been following roads in the world that led in the wrong direction—nowhere

13. See 3:6, 9, 10; 4:1, 4, 8. “The lesson” is the greatest lesson to be learned in this world, the lesson which begins with the realization that all the world’s roads lead to death, and there is no hope of answer in this world. The purpose of this lesson is recognizing the real alternative. This purpose will be stated clearly later in the section.
14. All the world’s choices are based on the idea that someone must lose for anyone to gain. The truth taught by the lesson is that your brother’s loss is your loss, and your brother’s gain is your gain. This is a central idea in the Course.
15. The lessons of the world all teach that you gain when someone else loses. You gain by being special, or better than someone else. In truth we are all Thoughts of God, equally in union with God, part of God. We share the same Self. That shared Identity is denied by the lesson taught by the world’s goals.
16. We are God’s Thoughts.
17. A question for your reflection.
18. A question for your reflection.
19. Yes, it matters. It does not mean that all paths are the same and all lead to God; it means that all the paths but one are illusions that lead nowhere at all. Attempting to follow any such path merely wastes time going nowhere. They are senseless journeys, goal-less aims. The whole section is telling us there is only one real alternative, only one possible path to choose, and that is the path of recognizing who we are and remembering our union with God.