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# A BETTER WAY

## “The Loneliness Is Gone” Thoughts on Inviting a Closer Relationship with Jesus

by Robert Perry

The value of having a relationship with Jesus is a theme that weaves throughout the pages of *A Course in Miracles*. While this is not a required obligation, the Course makes clear that it *is* an added benefit: “Yet he would help you yet a little more if you will share your pains and joys with him, and leave them both to find the peace of God” (C-5.6:7).

Why is this relationship so important? Ultimately, it is important for the same reason that all our relationships are important. At one point, Jesus says, “Hold me dear,” and then justifies this plea by saying, “for what except your brothers can you need?” (T-13.VII.16:3). We should hold him dear because we need our brothers. They are the means by which we make it home.

However, our relationship with Jesus does have a unique significance, for the simple reason that he, unlike the other people in our lives, stands on both sides of the divide. To use the Buddhist image of enlightenment as getting to the other side of a river, Jesus stands on both sides of the river. He stands on God’s side and on our side.

What I have recently realized is that this single idea—that he stands on both sides—is the key to his function in our lives, to why we back away from him, and to why instead we should draw near to him.

### Standing on both sides, guiding us to the other side

Jesus expresses this “both sides” concept in many ways in the Course. In the early dictation of the Course, for instance, he describes himself as having “feet on the ground and fingertips in Heaven,” and says, “Because my feet are on the ground and my hands are in Heaven, I can bring down the glories of Heaven to my brothers on earth.” He also describes himself as bridging the distance:

Without me the distance between God and man is too great for man to encompass. I bridge the distance as an elder brother to man on the one hand and a Son of God on the other. (original version of T-1.II.4:4-5)

By standing on both sides, in other words, he can be a bridge, enabling us to walk across the river. Yet he goes further than the bridge analogy, for he repeatedly tells us that he will actively guide us. So although he is the bridge, he is also our guide *across* the bridge. This role of guide is another thing that flows from him standing on both sides, for a good guide is someone who both can mentally put himself in your place *and* is mentally standing in the place where you are going.

In this sense, Jesus is like the ideal Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor: He knows exactly what it’s like to be the drunk we are now, yet also knows what it’s like to have achieved sobriety. And he knows each step that he himself took to get there, which is why he is able to help us take those same steps. We see this very idea in the Workbook, where he tells us:

I must understand uncertainty and pain, although I know they have no meaning. Yet a savior must remain with those he teaches, seeing what they see, but still retaining in his mind the way that led him out, and now will lead you out with him. (W-pI.rV.In.6:4-5)

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## WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT SAYS

*A Course in Miracles* is a spiritual path. Its purpose is to train us to work miracles—to accept and extend to others the shifts in perception that awaken us to God. It consists of three volumes, which signify the three aspects of its program:

- ◆ Text : Through studying the teaching, the Course's thought system first enters our minds.
- ◆ Workbook for Students: Through doing the practice, the Course's thought system penetrates more and more deeply into our minds.
- ◆ Manual for Teachers: Through extending our healed perception to others, the Course's thought system receives its final reinforcement and becomes the only thing in our minds.

The Course's message is that the source of our suffering is not the world's mistreatment of us, but rather our egocentric attack on the world. This attack convinces us that we have defiled our nature beyond repair, that we are irredeemably guilty. Yet the Course says true reality cannot be defiled; it is a realm of pure, changeless, unified spirit. This realization allows us to forgive the world's apparent mistreatment of us by recognizing that it did not actually occur. And as we see this forgiveness come forth from us—see that we are capable of something genuinely loving and egoless—we gradually realize that we never defiled ourselves. Thus we awaken to the untouched innocence of our true nature.

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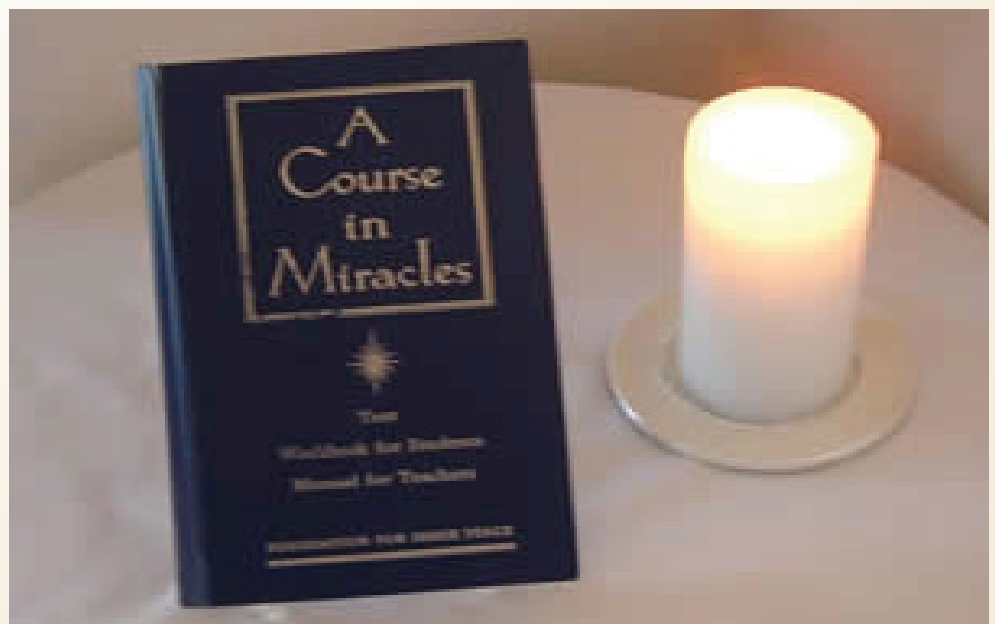
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Notice the references to both sides: “I must understand uncertainty and pain, although I know they have no meaning”; “seeing what they see, but still retaining in his mind the way that led him out.” This passage shows the benefits for us that come from him standing on both sides. He understands our pain. He sees exactly how things look through our eyes. He knows what it’s like to be on the inside of us, because he *is* on the inside. And yet he also knows the view from the other side, in which our pain is truly meaningless and thus unnecessary. Finally, because he is “still retaining in his mind the way that led him” to the other side, he can lead us there.

## Recoiling from the agent of change

The fact that he stands on both sides, then, is why this relationship can be so powerfully beneficial for us. Yet this same fact is why, I think, we all back off from the relationship, even if only unconsciously.

The reason is simple: He is trying to get us to change. He’s all about leading us to that distant shore. Let’s be honest, we all resist change, especially such a profound change as that. Our fantasy is to stay firmly planted on this side yet somehow claim the benefits of the other side. Like any good teacher, Jesus asks us to snap out of this absurd contradiction. He calls us to pull up stakes, to uproot the false roots we have put down, to leave our comfort zone.

We fear and resist Jesus, then, for the exact same reason we fear and resist the Course. We may feel that we love the Course, and we probably do, but we also fear the change it asks of us. We see this in the many stories of students throwing the Course across the room, against the wall, or in the trash, or flushing it down the toilet page by page. But it’s also manifest in milder stories of simply putting it back on the shelf for a few years, or distorting its words so that it says what we want it to say, or loving its inspiration but silently refusing to do what it asks.

That last form of fear is particularly revealing. Isn’t it odd how we can read the Workbook lessons and weep over their achingly beautiful truths, but then simply refuse to do the practice they instruct us to do? Aren’t we in essence saying, “I like it when you inspire me, but I am afraid of the control you are trying to exert over me”?

The Course open acknowledges our fear and resistance of it:

You have been told again and again that it [the Course] will set you free, yet you sometimes react as if it is trying to imprison you. You often dismiss it more readily than you dismiss the ego’s thought system. [Originally: “Most of the time you *dismiss* it, *but you do not dismiss the ego’s thought system.*”] To some extent, then, you must believe that by not learning the course you are protecting yourself. (T-13.II.7:3-5)

The connection between this and the fear of Jesus is obvious. By fearing and resisting the Course, we are fearing and resisting its author.

In reading the Course, it is hard to escape the sense that Jesus is single-mindedly devoted to a change in us so profound that we have never seriously considered going there. I remember talking to a close devotee of an American spiritual master, who said of him, “He’s not content until every last cell goes up in smoke.” It’s easy to get the same impression from the author of *A Course in Miracles*. He’s not content until every last atom of your ego has gone up in smoke. And to this end, he urges you to question all your values, to give up all you hold dear, to discipline your mind throughout the day, and then to get up and serve the needs of your brothers, rather than the needs of your separate self.

Who wouldn’t be afraid of this guy? Who wouldn’t put up barricades to keep him at a safe distance? We may love him, but we don’t want to let him get too close. We may attend his weekly exercise class, but we don’t want to let him move in with us, for at that point, the threat of being told to drop and do fifty would be *constant*.

You may not be aware of this fear of Jesus, but I suspect it is there nonetheless. Even if you don’t have the obvious, upfront fear that someone like Helen Schucman had, that doesn’t mean the fear is not there, taking more subtle forms. For instance, do you actually do everything Jesus asks in the Course? If not, doesn’t that mean you fear the control he would exert and, as a result, are keeping him at arm’s length?

I think this image of Jesus as the uncompromising agent of change tends to mingle in our minds with more traditional views of Jesus as the threatening cosmic Judge. The new Jesus looks at our ego and says, “This is all wrong. It all needs to change or else you won’t be with God.” The traditional Jesus looks at our sinful nature and says...the exact same thing. We can easily envision both of them looking down with cool disapproval on everything we think and do.

## Who is really with us?

We all tend to divide people into those we want to bring close and those we want to keep at a distance. To start with, let’s think about the former category, which consists of our friends, family, colleagues—our loved ones. In our view,

they are really with us. They are the ones who understand us and see us. They are on our side. Therefore, we can relax with them. We can let our hair down. We seek out their presence because with them we can be ourselves.

For most of us, Jesus is not in this category. In our view, he clearly doesn't *really* understand us, because if he did, he would more fully appreciate where we are now. He would understand the validity of how we currently think, feel, and react. He would see the necessity of it all given what life has dished out to us. And he would respond with empathy and consolation, not with lectures about how we can change. He is therefore not really on our side. He's not really with us.

As a result, rather than seeking out his presence so we can be ourselves, we regard his presence as something akin to the boss showing up. He signifies work. He signifies challenge. He represents the opposite of just relaxing and being ourselves. He is the walking acknowledgement that we haven't done it right.

To appreciate how Jesus differs from our loved ones, we can look at how they each finish the following sentence from the Manual for Teachers. The sentence starts like this:

You who are sometimes sad and sometimes angry; who sometimes feel your just due is not given you, and your best efforts meet with lack of appreciation and even contempt...

We know how those who are really with us would finish this sentence. "You poor thing!" they'd say. "I know exactly how you feel. I can't believe those awful people would treat you like that." Jesus, however, finishes it completely differently. Just when we think we are going to get some sympathy out of him, he says, "give up these foolish thoughts!" (M-15.3:1).

Now who would you draw close to you? Those who approve of how you are now? Or the one who refuses to grant that approval and instead asks you to change? Those who want to hang out in the hot tub with you, or the one who wants you to get out, dry off, and get down to work?

### **Jesus as the one who is truly with us**

It seems, then, that by virtue of standing on the other side, Jesus is not really with us on *this* side. That place is occupied by our loved ones, the ones who stand *only* on this side. At least that's how it seems to us. Yet if we look at what Jesus says in the Course, we find that we have got it precisely backwards. Let's go through some passages that will show you what I mean.

Jesus tells us that he does not hold himself aloof, but that, rather, the only gift he wants to give us is that of unrestricted union with him: "The gift of union [with you] is the only gift that I was born to give" (T-15.X.3:4). Can we say that of our friends and family?

He cares so much about our happiness that he experiences our gains as his gains, our breakthroughs as his liberation:

My resurrection comes again each time I lead a brother safely to the place at which the journey ends and is forgot. I am renewed each time a brother learns there is a way from misery and pain. I am reborn each time a brother's mind turns to the light in him and looks for me. (W-rV.in.7:1-3)

Do our loved ones experience our gains as being just as much *their* gains?

As we saw in the earlier quote about how "a savior must remain with those he teaches," Jesus understands our pain. He sees how the world looks through our eyes. He "gets us" from the inside, because he *is* inside. Can we say that about the other people in our lives? Do they really understand what it's like to be us? Can they really get us from the inside?

In a remarkable passage, Jesus tells us that *we* are what he treasures, and that as a result, he gives us all his faith, all his trust, and all his love:

Like you, my faith and my belief are centered on what I treasure. The difference is that I love only what God loves with me, and because of this, I treasure you beyond the value that you set on yourself, even unto the worth that God has placed upon you. I love all that He created, and all my faith and my belief I offer unto it. My faith in you is as strong as all the love I give my Father. My trust in you is without limit, and without the fear that you will hear me not. (T-13.X.13:1-5)

In regard to the other people in our lives, do they treasure us so much that they consequently invest all their faith and belief in us? Do they treasure us beyond the value that we set on ourselves? Does their valuing of us reach all the way up to the value that God has placed on us?

Jesus views us as so flawlessly pure and lovely that he sees *us* the way history has seen *him*—as a symbol of God on earth:



You do not love yourself. But in his [Jesus'] eyes your loveliness is so complete and flawless that he sees in it an image of his Father. You become the symbol of his Father here on earth. To you he looks for hope, because in you he sees no limit and no stain to mar your beautiful perfection. (M-23.5:4-7)

Do the people close to us see us as the symbol of God on earth? Do they believe that there is actually hope for the world *because we exist*? Do they see no limit and no stain to mar our beautiful perfection?

These quotes give us a view in which Jesus really is with us, far more than those we call our loved ones.

But is this such a surprise? No matter how many people we call friend, there is a place in all of us where we feel profoundly alone. The Course describes this poignantly: “And so they wander through a world of strangers, unlike themselves, living with their bodies perhaps under a common roof that shelters neither; in the same room and yet a world apart” (T-22.In.2:8). Who of us can’t relate to that?

It’s as if each of us lives inside our own bubble. Inside that bubble are our needs, our hopes and dreams, our private thoughts and secret feelings. Outside are our loved ones, caught up in their own dramas, pursuing their own plans, secretly competing with us—living inside their own bubbles. Three times the Course describes our current condition with the phrase “alone in all the universe.”

What Jesus is telling us is that, of all the people in our lives, he is the one who is actually inside our bubble. He alone knows exactly what we are feeling. He alone is really on our side, really experiencing our gains as his gains. He alone has complete faith and trust in us. *He alone is really with us.*

This means that even though we feel “alone in all the universe,” we are not. Someone is inside our bubble with us. And that, says Jesus, “is why I am the light of the world. If I am with you in the loneliness of the world, the loneliness is gone” (T-8.IV.2:5-6). When we think of someone to draw close in order to alleviate our loneliness, do we think of Jesus? And do we realize that he already *is* close to us?

Likewise, when we think of someone we can relax around, we should first and foremost think of him. A passage from the Clarification of Terms says:

Walking with him is just as natural as walking with a brother whom you knew since you were born, for such indeed he is. (C-5.5:6)

There is nothing more natural than hanging out with a sibling you’ve known since birth. There are parts of you that can relax in that person’s presence which cannot relax in other situations. What a remarkable idea, then, that “walking with [Jesus] is just as natural.” In fact, one could argue that it’s more natural. He not only has none of the fangs that lurk in even the nicest of us, we have also known him far longer than since we were born into this life; we have known him since we were born in God. That’s a lot of history.

## Putting things right-side up

Why have we gotten it so upside down? Why have we kept the one who is really with us waiting at the front gate, while eagerly inviting in those who often betray us? I think the answer is obvious. We identify with our ego. And so the people our ego feels comfortable and at home with *we* feel comfortable and at home with. Consequently, the one who wants to set us free from our ego feels like the intruder, the drill sergeant who wants to break our will in service of his alien agenda.

To go back to the analogy of the Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor: We are like the alcoholic, and to some degree, our loved ones are like the people who while away the hours with us at the bar. We identify with our disease, and so we feel at home with those who *share* our disease. And we turn away the one who stands for the cure, the one who sat in the very seat we are in now and who, step by arduous step, found his way to freedom—and now can lead us there.

Ironically, the reason that Jesus is really with us on this side of the river is *because* he stands on the other side. The fact is that our own nature lies on the other side, and along with it our worth, our needs, our true desires, and our home. Therefore, only someone who stands on the other side can really see our worth, understand our needs, hear the call of our heart, and know where we feel truly at home. Isn’t it strange, then, that what makes us keep Jesus at arm’s length is the very thing that allows him to join us inside our bubble?

Thus, accepting Jesus as the one who is really with us means accepting a new picture of ourselves, one in which our identity is firmly planted on the other bank of the river. If you are in a foreign country and yet your best friend, the one you spend all your time with, is someone from your home country, what does that say about you? It says that you have not really assimilated, that you are not *of* this place. Thus, to see Jesus as our closest companion is to affirm that this world is not really our home, that we are *of* somewhere else.

As with any relationship, developing a sense of relationship with Jesus takes time. And there are special hurdles in this case, given that we don't see or hear him with our physical senses. Therefore, gaining a fund of experienced interaction, which is crucial for any relationship, can be both a lengthy and more subjective process. Yet these hurdles are far from insurmountable. In the end, the key thing is our desire. Do we want to have him near or do we want to keep him at a safe distance? My hope is that we can take the ideas we have seen here and, to whatever extent is applicable, use them to shift our desire toward nearness.

It will certainly help if we remember something he said about God, but which was also his answer to our attempts to shut him out:

Yet it is not possible to keep away One Who is there already. (T-19.IV(B).8:4)



E-mail your comments to the author at: [robert@circleofa.org](mailto:robert@circleofa.org)

**Robert Perry.** *He is the author or co-author of over twenty books and booklets, including Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with 'A Course in Miracles'.*

## CIRCLE MAILBOX

*The following are reader responses to Greg's article in A Better Way #115, "At Home in a New World: Making the 'Foreign' Language of A Course in Miracles Your Own."*

Great article you've written about the Course with the analogy of learning a new language. I can vouch for the difference it made for me to have a teacher (Mary Anne Buchowski) and have continued the learning with my dear friend Paula Fraser, who is now a Course teacher.

I really enjoy *A Better Way*...and this particular one really struck close to home.

— Shelley Séguin

• • •

Thank you for sharing your journey of learning Spanish. Two things popped to my mind as I read your article. Firstly the role of the Holy Spirit in your pursuit. I know before I bite into anything that I may perceive as challenging (starting a new business, tackling an unresolved issue, not knowing which route to take etc), I call upon the Holy Spirit to show me the way that better serves my path to salvation.

The second point is then linked to the first point. The Holy Spirit nearly always shows me to teach what it is that I wish to learn!

This sprang to mind when I read about you and how you have immersed yourself as the pupil, which is most certainly valid at your early stage in this language but also cuts you off from sharing what you already know and thus having a simultaneous role as teacher.

I'm sure since 1991 you have learned more from the Course as teacher of it...?

Another tool I use is to ask the Holy Spirit to help me *remember* what I have to do. As an eternal being you *do* know Spanish, you have just forgotten it — or rather your ego has!

Asking to remember has a completely different energy than asking to learn anew, not least you remember your own eternity in that question posed.

I offer you these thanks and these thoughts to share with you the message from the Holy Spirit within me.

Have fun!

— SarahJayne Edwards