

A Course in Miracles

Summary of
The Song of Prayer
Prayer, Forgiveness
and Healing

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Quotes throughout are from [The Song of Prayer](#) supplement to *A Course in Miracles*, published by the Foundation for Inner Peace. The content of this ebook complements a series of 24 classes based on *The Song of Prayer* presented by Robert Perry and Emily Bennington and included with [Course Companions](#) membership.

Introduction

The Song of Prayer: Prayer, Forgiveness and Healing was taken down in 1977 by Course scribe Helen Schucman and is the second and final supplement to *A Course in Miracles*. According to Ken Wapnick's book *Absence from Felicity*, the catalyst for it was a series of conversations between Ken and Helen in which Ken expressed discomfort over the practice of the group (which also included Bill Thetford and Judy Skutch) of asking for guidance for decisions about the Course's life in the world. These concerns were addressed directly in a discourse that preceded the supplement itself (this, too, is found in *Absence from Felicity*). This discourse confirmed the rightness of the group's guidance seeking, saying, "This should not be abandoned." But it also said that asking is not as straightforward as it seems, and that "We will have a series of lessons on asking because you have not understood it." The supplement, of course, is that series of lessons. Interestingly, after speaking at length about prayer, or asking, the dictation then moved on to include a chapter on forgiveness and another on healing. We will cover all three chapters in this summary.



*Prayer is the greatest gift with which God blessed
His Son at his creation.*

SOP 1.Int.1:1

Chapter 1: Prayer

The song of prayer

The Song of Prayer is founded on a concept of what prayer was in the beginning and still is in reality, in Heaven. This prayer asks for nothing, for in Heaven there are no needs. Instead, it is a song of pure celebration, a timeless song of love and thanksgiving that we sing to God and He sings to us, and in which we unite with Him in a single voice:

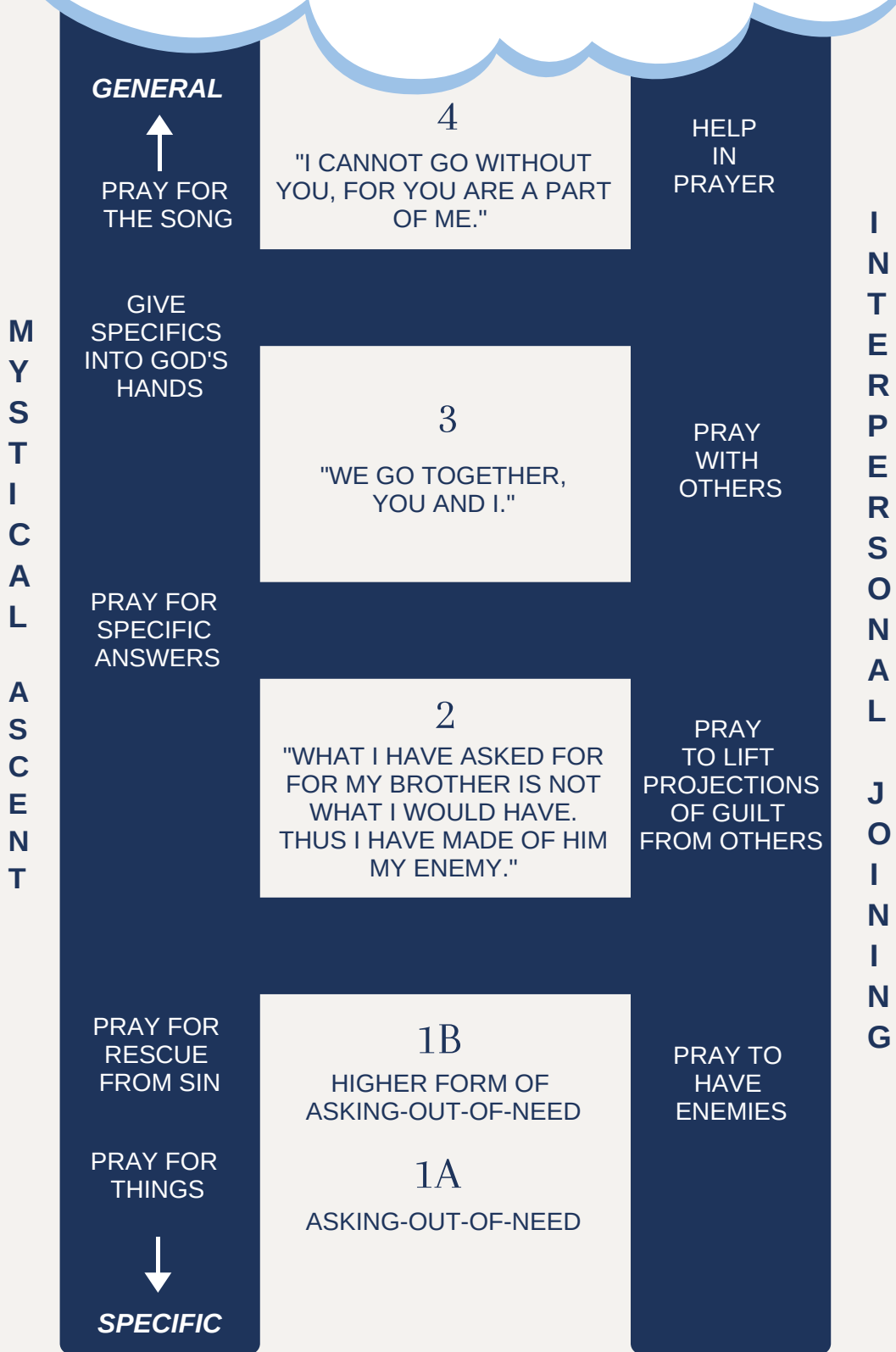
It was then what it is to become; the single voice Creator and creation share; the song the Son sings to the Father, Who returns the thanks it offers Him unto the Son. Endless the harmony, and endless, too, the joyous concord of the Love They give forever to Each Other. (1.In.1:2-3)

We have forgotten this limitlessly joyful prayer, but since this is what prayer really is, then all of our prayer in this world should really be about returning to this song. Chapter 1 therefore lays out a process whereby our prayer rises up a ladder, gradually transforming into higher and higher forms. It starts out asking for the things of this world and ends up being completely focused on returning to the ancient song. Our prayer, it says, “does change in form, and grow with learning until it reaches its formless state, and fuses into total communication with God” (1.II.1:3).

It is important to understand that this ladder of prayer, which is really the ladder of spiritual development, has two sides to it. There is an internal side, which I call “mystical ascent,” in which our prayer life aims at rising up the ladder to union with God. And there is an interpersonal side, which I call “interpersonal joining,” in which we begin in a state of antagonism toward others and gradually enter a state of true joining with them. Both sides are crucial to our ascent. This is reflected in the fact that as we go up the ladder, each of the levels has both components. In each level, our prayer ascends to a higher form than the last level and at the same time we rise closer to complete interpersonal joining.

SONG OF PRAYER

SONG OF LOVE AND THANKSGIVING
WE SING TO GOD, HE SINGS TO US, WE SING TOGETHER



LADDER OF PRAYER

The ladder of prayer

Level 1a: “Asking-out-of-need” (1.II.2:1)

Here at the very bottom of the ladder, we may not believe in God and therefore may not pray in any formal sense. We feel weak and lacking inside, and so our desires constantly reach out to the things of the world that we believe will fill the void. These ceaseless desires are our prayers. And thus, in a sense, we do pray without ceasing. We do not realize that we are already full, that the only thing we need is God, Who in truth is already ours.

Level 1b: “A higher form of asking-out-of-need” (1.II.3:1)

Here in this higher form of the first level, we have come to believe in God and thus formally pray to Him. We pray for favorable external circumstances. We pray for positive character traits, like “honesty or goodness” (1.II.3:4). We pray that God will forgive us, so that we can be clean again. And we pray for our enemies.

While there is clearly something admirable about this level, its foundation is an underlying sense of sinfulness, which we are asking God to rescue us from. This sense of sinfulness warps our understanding of God (1.II.3:2) and blurs our sense of connection with Him (1.II.3:3). It causes us to feel lacking and thus in need of being filled by external things. As Jesus says, “The sinless have no needs” (1.II.3:6). And it causes us to actually feel a *need* for enemies. Projecting our guilt onto them makes them seem like the bad guys who prove that we are the good guy. Our prayers for our “enemies” are thus deeply ambivalent. We pray for them to see the light while we secretly desire that they remain enemies and that God rain down His vengeance on them. While 1b is more advanced than 1a, we clearly have a long way to go.

Level 2: Undoing the concept of having enemies

The next ascent begins with this:

What I have asked for for my brother is not what I would have. Thus have I made of him my enemy. (S-1.III.3:4-6)

The second level starts with us beginning to question and undo the concept of enemies. We realize that our perception of our brother as our “nemesis” (1.III.1:5), the one who is hurting us (1.III.1:4), was an illusion that we superimposed on someone who is actually our dear brother. The sin we see in him isn’t his, but merely our own guilt that we have projected onto him.

How do we undo the concept of enemy? Through prayer: “Praying for others, if rightly understood, becomes a means for lifting your projections of guilt from your brother, and enabling you to recognize it is not he who is hurting you” (1.III.1:4). This prayer frees him, but it’s crucial to recognize that it also frees us. As Chapter 2 says, “Only in someone else can you forgive yourself, for you have called him guilty of your sins, and in him must your innocence now be found” (2.I.4:6). The guilt we lift off of him we simultaneously lift off of our own heart.

Level 3: Joining with others in prayer

The key to rising further still in prayer lies in this simple thought; this change of mind:

We go together, you and I. (S-1.IV.1:7-8)

The shift from seeing others as enemies to seeing them as dear brothers opens up whole new vistas, for now we can join in a common goal. As Jesus observes, “Enemies do not share a goal...Their separate wishes are their arsenals; their fortresses in hate” (1.IV.1:4, 6). Now that we have shared wishes, we can truly pray together. Before, we could sit down together and say the same words, but each of us was secretly praying for Heaven for ourselves and hell for the other. Now when we join in prayer, our inner desires are genuinely rowing in the same direction.

This is a hugely positive step forward: “The way is open, and hope is justified” (1.IV.2:3). But there is also a probable pitfall:

Yet it is likely at first that what is asked for even by those who join in prayer is not the goal that prayer should truly seek. Even together you may ask for things, and thus set up but an illusion of a goal you share. (1.IV.2:4-5)

Praying together has the power to release us from the “chains of past illusions” (1.IV.3:5). Yet if we pray for things of the world, then we use that power to merely repeat the past. We “stifle and imprison [prayer] in ancient prisons” (S-1.IV.4:2). Instead, Jesus says, “Do not restrict your asking” (S-1.IV.4:3). Use the power of joining to pray for your true goal: the peace of God.

Level 4: The humble recognition of oneness

Now can you say to everyone who comes to join in prayer with you:

I cannot go without you, for you are a part of me. (1.V.3:8-9)

On the previous level, we joined with others, recognizing that we share the same interests. Now, on the fourth level, we recognize that we share the same *Self*. We realize that others are part of us, that what is looking back at us through their eyes is our own Self.

How do you reach this place? Through true humility. Before, your separate self “thought it was alone and stood against the world” (1.V.1:3). It proudly claimed “that you must rule the universe” (1.V1:4) and stand over it as the all-knowing judge. Due to this astonishing arrogance, however, your separate self hid in shame and prayed out of lack. But now your mind has stepped down from the little hill it stood atop. In true humility, it has united with all its brothers as a fellow part of the one Self That was created by God, and has acknowledged Him as Father and Creator.

In this state of true humility, your mind no longer prays for things of this world. Now it joins with its brothers and prays only for God, only to join once again the infinite song of prayer. And as it thus prays, it stands at the very top of the ladder, right before Heaven’s gate.

What do we pray for?

Prayer for things of this world

Chapter 1 consistently frowns on prayers that ask for things of this world —“prayers for things, for status, for human love, for external ‘gifts’ of any kind” (1.III.6:1). The problem with them is two-fold. First, they assume that we are lacking within and need to be filled with things from outside of us. Second, they “distort the true purpose of prayer” (1.III.6:2), meaning they ask for externals, when, in fact, our only goal is God. Prayer needs to confidently ask for God, in the faith that He is forever ours.

This is a difference not only with traditional religious prayer, which tends to ask for external gifts, but also with New Age prayer, which so often seeks to use the “law of attraction” to manifest the things we desire.

Prayer for guidance about decisions

The attitude toward asking for guidance for our lives is more nuanced. This chapter, along with the Course itself, openly acknowledges that we need such guidance: “There are decisions to make here, and they must be made whether they be illusions or not” (1.I.2:4). We need this guidance; what is in question is how to best obtain it.

According to this chapter, God’s answer to our prayers has two aspects. Fundamentally, His answer “is always a song of thanksgiving and of Love” (S-1.I.2:9). To all our prayers, then, He responds in the same way: He sings to us of His love for us. Yet this song naturally generates echoes, and these are the second aspect of His answer—the specific guidance we seek about what to do in our current situation.

What we typically want, of course, is the specific answers more than the song of God’s love. We prefer “a bit of trifling advice about a problem of an instant’s duration” to the remembrance of God Himself (1.I.4:5-6). Our values are clearly upside down. Ironically, the very thing that we are pushing to the periphery—God’s love—is the source of the answers we seek. We are thus “asking for effects without the cause” (1.IV.2:6). How can you ask for an echo without asking for the sound that it’s an echo *of*?

We therefore ideally need to pray only for the song of God's love, because the echoes automatically come along with it. In other words, when you ask for the song, you get *both*. You get the experience of God's love *and* you get the answers you need. In the most advanced form of prayer, then, you don't ask for specifics at all; you don't need to. The answers you need just come, whenever and however you need them.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Jesus freely admits that "This is not a level of prayer that everyone can attain as yet" (1.I.6:1). In the Course, he emphasizes the need to ask "with increasing frequency" (M-29.3:1) and to keep this process up "until the habit of asking becomes involuntary" (Cameo 8). In the guidance that led up to *The Song of Prayer*, Jesus specifically supported the early Course family's practice of asking for guidance, saying, "This should not be abandoned," and "You have done well and will do better." Even in *The Song of Prayer* itself, Jesus encourages us to ask God, "What should I do for him, Your holy Son?" (2.III.5:1), after which we will be told "exactly what to do" (2.III.5:7). (More on this below.)

Let us not, then, be too quick to set aside the practice of specific asking. If, out of pride, we try to jump too soon to a higher level of prayer, the danger is that we are likely to stop getting much guidance at all. Rather than skipping levels, we need to move up them gradually and honestly.

Prayer for others

The Song of Prayer openly encourages praying for others. As previously mentioned, praying for them initially takes the form of using prayer to lift your projections of guilt off of them (1.III.1:4). But then, as you begin to see their interests as your own, and thus make them part of you (see 1.II.6:2), you can pray for them. And because they are not separate, praying for them is simultaneously praying for yourself. This is why the chapter emphasizes that prayer "is always for yourself" (1.II.6:1).

An important theme, however, is using the power of your prayer to lift others up in their prayer. The Song of Prayer (S-1.I.6:2, 3; S-1.IV.2:1) describes a scenario in which you are praying at a lower level—asking for things of the world to fill your lack—and someone who is more advanced in prayer "stands beside you and helps to raise you up to Him" (S-1.I.6:4). This other person lifts you up to a higher level of prayer, where you release your specific concerns. But in keeping with how prayer works, the specific answer to those concerns may then occur to one

or both of you (see 1.I.7:8-9). This reflects what Jesus told Helen, in the discourse leading up to The Song of Prayer, about asking for guidance for someone else:

You can ask for another and receive the Answer for him. But you can, and indeed you must, help him by offering your love and support that his asking be holy and his true need recognized.

True prayer

What, then, is the true prayer to which we should aspire, the kind that lies at the upper levels of the ladder? I think of it as having three parts.

First, you may well come to God with specific needs and concerns, but then you “overlook” them and “let them go into God’s Hands” (1.I.4:3). This act is framed as a gift to God, for it tells Him “that you would have no gods before Him; no Love but His” (1.I.4:4). It says that He matters more to you than solving these specific problems.

Yet it says something else, too, for placing your concerns in “God’s Hands” means placing them in His “care, supervision, or direction” (a dictionary definition of “in the hands of”). As a result, you cease to define the problem. You cease to point out to God exactly what elements need solving. Instead, you are saying to Him, “I trust You to take care of this need as You see fit.” To put it differently, you are saying, “All I want is Your will” (1.IV.3:1).

Second, having stepped aside from all your concerns, you then enter “a quiet time of listening and loving” (1.I.5:1). You enter a state of pure receptivity, free of normal thinking and verbalizing. Rather than asking for God to fill your emptiness with worldly gifts, you realize you are “fully entitled to everything Love has to offer” (S-1.I.5:3) and you quietly and confidently point your desire in God’s direction. Just as you gave up your concerns and offered them into His hands, now you do the same thing with *yourself*: “Prayer is an offering; a giving up of yourself to be at one with Love” (1.I.5:5). It is an act of true humility, in which you give up everything in you that stubbornly holds itself apart. You surrender every last atom of separateness so that your mind is as transparent to God’s love as air is to sunlight. And as His love blazes into your mind, all difference between the two will disappear.

Third, as you receive the song of God’s love, the echoes that you needed—the specific answers to your current concerns—may well come into your mind. Or, if

you are praying in this way in a group, they may come into more minds than just yours, “if you are genuinely attuned to one another” (1.I.7:9). Now you have received both song and echoes. As Jesus says, “You have sought first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all else has indeed been given you” (1.I.3:6).

This is the kind of prayer that we enter into increasingly as we near the top of the ladder. And this is the kind of prayer that we join in with others. (Indeed, this is what Jesus seems to have envisioned for Helen, Bill, Ken, and Judy.) This is how our prayer lifts off the things of earth and aims itself heavenward. When this constitutes the sum total of both our formal prayer life and the informal prayer of our heart, then we are ready to rejoin the song of Heaven.

The ladder ends with this, for learning is no longer needed. Now you stand before the gate of Heaven, and your brother stands beside you there. The lawns are deep and still, for here the place appointed for the time when you should come has waited long for you. Here will time end forever. At this gate eternity itself will join with you. (1.V.4:1-5)



Humility brings peace because it does not claim that you must rule the universe, nor judge all things as you would have them be.

SOP 1.V.1:4

Exercise in true prayer

Close your eyes and relax.

Think of all the specific needs that are on your mind, about which you would like to receive God's guidance or help.

Realize these needs have become your gods, your replacements for Him.

So make a decision to overlook them.

"Let them go into God's Hands" (S-1.1.4:3).

Trust Him to handle them, and to tell you what you should do as part of His handling of them.

Make them your gifts to Him, "for they tell Him that you would have no gods before Him; no Love but His." (S-1.1.4:4).

Having surrendered them into His Hands, you can completely forget about them.

Have a sense of stepping aside from all your concerns.

And enter into "a quiet time of listening and loving" (S-1.1.5:1).

Having placed your concerns in God's Hands, place *yourself* in His Hands as well.

Have a sense of offering yourself up to God.

Give yourself up "to be at one with Love" (S-1.1.5:5).

There is no need to implore Him, for you are "fully entitled to everything Love has to offer" (S-1.1.5:3).

Having everything, you ask for nothing.

"That nothingness becomes the altar of God. It disappears in Him" (S-1.1.5:7-8).

And now *you* disappear in Him.

You rest in perfect oneness with Love Itself.

Maintain this rest, and whenever your mind wanders, surrender yourself once again into His Hands.

In this state of rest, a "specific form of resolution for a specific problem" (S-1.1.7:8) may enter your mind.

If so, let it come freely.

But if not, merely rest in the song of His Love, while He takes care of all little things.

Chapter 2: Forgiveness

In the second chapter, Jesus adds the topic of forgiveness into his picture. This chapter opens with a beautiful image in which forgiveness is prayer's "sister" (2.In.1:3), such that both work together in our ascent. As our prayer attempts to rise up the ladder, forgiveness is there to give it "wings," making "its rising easy and its progress swift" (In.1:1). The opening paragraph also makes clear that forgiveness is not a beginner's lesson that we master on the bottom rungs of the ladder. As long as you are on the ladder at all, forgiveness "has a purpose beyond which you cannot go" (In.1:9). Simply put, if we still see your body, you still need to learn forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a pure "gift of Heaven" (I.1:1), a shaft of light shining onto earth from a higher realm. And yet, as Jesus says, "No gift of Heaven has been more misunderstood than has forgiveness" (I.1:1). It has been distorted by "those who have not yet chosen to begin the steps of prayer" (2.I.1:3). This has turned it into "a curse where it was meant to bless" (2.I.1:2). Jesus calls this counterfeit version "forgiveness-to-destroy," implying that while forgiveness is meant to heal, we have reengineered it to kill.

It is important, therefore, that we understand this counterfeit version and how it differs from forgiveness as it really is. Indeed, this is so important that "The level of your prayer depends on this" (2.I.10:5).

Forgiveness-to-destroy

How does this counterfeit version of forgiveness seem to bless while actually destroying? The answer is surprisingly simple: It puts all its focus on *what is being forgiven*. You can see that in this important passage:

Forgiveness-to-destroy will overlook no sin, no crime, no guilt that it can seek and find and "love." Dear to its heart is error, and mistakes loom large and grow and swell within its sight. It carefully picks out all evil things, and overlooks the loving as a plague. (I.2:2-4)

Doesn't this capture something about our normal efforts to forgive? We look for the mistakes, magnify them, go over and over them in our minds, tell the story in full color to our friends, all the while overlooking the person's good efforts...and then we attempt to forgive. The majority of our focus, in other words, is on what they did wrong. It's as if we write them a 400-page story of their sins and the hurt they caused, and then in an appendix say, "But I forgive you." This voluminous focus on their sins can't help but send a clear message: "You're a sinner."

Jesus then says that "Forgiveness-to-destroy has many forms" (2.II.1:1) and takes us on a tour through four examples, which give us a vivid picture of just how this version of forgiveness operates.

1 Deigning to save a "baser" person from what he truly is

Here, "a 'better' person deigns to stoop to save a 'baser' one from what he truly is" (2.II.2:1). This "forgiveness" thus purports to roll downhill with "gracious lordliness" (2.II.2:2) from a superior person to an inferior one. We say out loud "You're forgiven," while clearly conveying "You don't deserve it."

2 Forgiving the sinner because you are a sinner too

This form says, "How can I judge you, brother, when I'm a sinner too? I deserve God's wrath just as much as you do." This sounds Christian, yet I think this is not confined to religious contexts. How often do we say, "Look, I've done it too; we all have"? This has the advantage of asserting equality, but then it includes the depressing message that we are all guilty.

3 Forgiving as the silently suffering martyr

In this form, you "seek the role of martyr at another's hand" (2.II.4:2), bearing "with patience and with saintliness" the attacks of others, while not showing "the bitter pain you feel" (2.II.4:5). This one is so common that we talk about the role of the martyr in families and about people having a "martyr complex." We seek this role out, because, by taking all of their callous treatment without complaint, we establish ourselves as the good one and them as the rotten ones.

4 Forgiveness as a bargain

Jesus sums up this form neatly: "I will forgive you if you meet my needs, for in your slavery is my release" (6:2). We've all been here, right? "I will forgive you if you...change your ways, take out the trash, give me sex, stop being irritable, apologize, show remorse, promise to never do it again, forgive *me*, etc." In other words, you must pay to get your forgiveness. And only sinners need to pay.

These different forms of “forgiveness” are all distinct, yet they share a common essence. All of them assert that the one being forgiven is a sinner and then all of demanding payment. Thus, in the guise of freeing them, this forgiveness simply adds on more chains. Here, then, we have the opposite of forgiveness dressed up as the real thing.

These four forms are so ubiquitous that it's safe to say forgiveness-to-destroy is what we call forgiveness in this world. It is pretty much all we know.



All forms forgiveness takes that do not lead away from anger, condemnation and comparisons of every kind are death. For that is the purpose they have set. Be not deceived by them, but lay them by as worthless in their tragic offerings.

SOP 2.II.8:1-3

Forgiveness-for-salvation

What, then, is forgiveness as “it is meant to be” (3.III.4:4)? How can it truly save—others and ourselves—rather than kill? Jesus captures the answer in these key sentences:

Do not see error. Do not make it real. Select the loving and forgive the sin by choosing in its place the face of Christ. (2.I.3:3-5)

These sentences clearly express a process, which we can see as having three elements:

a. “Do not see error. Do not make it real.”

This doesn’t mean you don’t acknowledge that an error has occurred. It just means that, while it may have happened in this world, you don’t see it as a real part of that person and as having real power over you. It’s just a thin puff of smoke, irrelevant to the real picture.

b. Focus on their loving efforts.

When we need to forgive someone, is our first move to look for that person’s loving thoughts and acts? Not usually, but it could be. We could search out the loving as the only real evidence of who that person really is.

c. See right past their errors to the face of Christ in them.

Rather than looking upon our brother’s mistakes, we can choose to see past the smoke to our brother’s true face, the face of Christ (Christ being our shared Self). Yet we need Christ’s help to do this. Physical eyes cannot see the nonphysical, and so we need to borrow His eyes. “Christ’s vision does not use your eyes, but you can look through His and learn to see like Him” (1.6:4).

As you can see, this is far loftier than forgiveness as we know it. As Jesus says, it “lies far beyond your understanding and your simple grasp” (1:8). Therefore, to hike ourselves up to its level, we need to invite in a larger Presence and “Let Him take charge of how you would forgive” (3:4). That Presence in this chapter is usually Christ, our collective true Self, though in places it is God or the Holy Spirit.

Letting Him take charge of our forgiveness process seems to involve three overall steps (which are different than the three steps covered above):

1. Listen within to Christ teaching you about the real nature of forgiveness

"[God's] Voice will teach you what forgiveness is" (2:2)—what it *really* is. We need His help to understand what remains beyond our little brains. Our part, then, is just to listen, as He speaks to us "About salvation and the gift of peace. About the end of sin and guilt and death. About the role forgiveness has in Him" (6:2-4). His teaching within us will guide us away from forgiveness-to-destroy, into the true nature of forgiveness, so that it can "become again the holy gift of God" (6:7).

2. When faced with an attack, lift your mind to Christ, Who will look through you and see nothing but His Own face.

When we are attacked, we "need not judge" the form that the attack takes (5:2), seeing it merely as a harmless call for help (2:5). Instead, we let our forgiveness "arise to Christ, Who welcomes it as gift to Him" (7:4). We are then lifted up "to where the eyes of Christ become" our own sight (2:3). Now, instead of the petty figure we saw, we gaze in rapture on Christ's holy face.

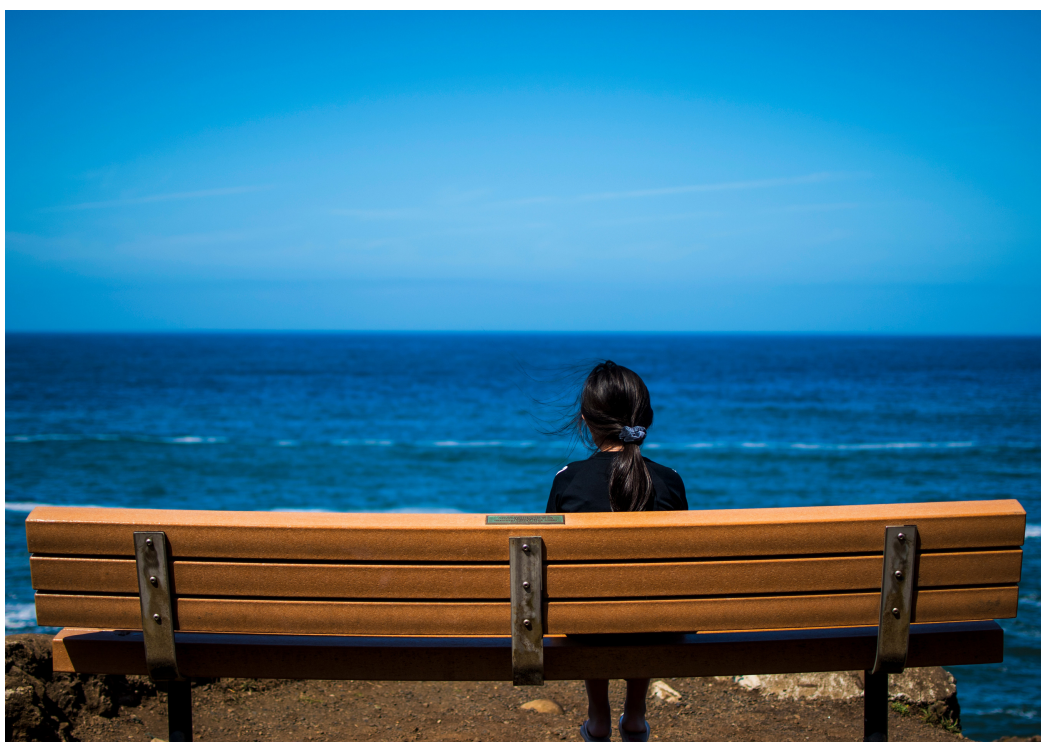
3. Ask God "What should I do for him, Your holy Son?" Let inner guidance dictate the form in which you express forgiveness to the other person.

Yet even when we feel a sense of forgiveness, how do we convey that to the other person in such a way that it goes in? The answer, which we referred to earlier, is that we ask God for help, saying, "What should I do for him, Your holy Son?" (2.III.5:1). We look to guidance to tell us what to do and what to say: "He will say exactly what to do, in words that you can understand and you can also use" (2.III.5:7).

Can you sense how lofty, how heavenly, forgiveness really is? And that's the point. Since forgiveness is a gift from Heaven, to properly use the gift, we need heavenly help.

Why we must forgive *others*

As Course students, we are always wondering if we focus our forgiveness efforts on ourselves or others. This chapter comes down firmly on the latter. Why? Because we are not aware of the sense of sinfulness that we shelter deep inside. We can't bear to see it in ourselves and so we project it onto others—where we quite enjoy seeing it. It's truly astonishing to think that all the sinfulness we see in others is our own, merely seen *as if* it were theirs. The simple fact, then, is that it's our own "sin" we are seeing in them. Thus, as we forgive them, we are quite literally forgiving ourselves. That is why forgiveness is not a noble sacrifice, but rather a gift to ourselves. As I quoted earlier, "*Only in someone else can you forgive yourself, for you have called him guilty of your sins, and in him must your innocence now be found*" (2.1.4:6; *emphasis mine*).



*Your wings are free, and prayer will lift you up and bring
you home where God would have you be.*

SOP 2.11.8:8

Exercise in forgiveness-for-salvation

Choose someone who has recently done something you are upset about.

“Do not allow your mind to dwell on what you think he did, for this is self-deception” (W-134.9:2).

Do not get caught up in evaluating the errors you want to overlook.

All you need to know is that this error is a call for help.

You need not judge the form that this call has taken.

“Look, then, beyond error, and do not let your perception rest upon it” (T-9.IV.1:2).

“Do not see error. Do not make it real” (S-2.I.3:3-4).

Rather than trying to understand forgiveness, “let it be a way to draw you up to where the eyes of Christ become the sight you choose. Give up all else, for there is nothing else” (S-2.III.2:3-4).

Let your forgiveness “arise to Christ, Who welcomes it as a gift to Him” (S-2.III.7:4).

“Say to [Him] only, ‘Decide for me,’ and it is done” (T-14.IV.8:1).

Now you look through His eyes.

Your brother’s mistakes “are tiny shadows, quickly gone, that for an instant only seem to hide the face of Christ” (S-2.I.6:5).

Now as you look upon your brother, you see “only the face of Christ shining in front of [you], correcting all mistakes and healing all perception” (M-22.4:5).

With this vision held firmly in mind, ask God, “What should I do for him, Your holy Son?” (S-2.III.5:1).

This means “How can I answer his call for help in a way he can hear?”

In response, God “will say exactly what to do, in words that you can understand and you can also use” (S-2.III.5:7).

Chapter 3: Healing

The final chapter is on healing—the healing of the body through spiritual means. What part does healing play in our ascent up the ladder of prayer? Jesus openly says that healing’s “importance should not be too strongly emphasized” (1:3), because healing is a mere *effect* of forgiveness and prayer (3.In.1:3).

Yet if healing is only an effect, how does it help to raise us up the ladder? The answer seems to be that healing is a *witness* to “forgiveness’ strength” (3.In.1:3). It is physical proof that forgiveness works; it gets you there; it heals. And if forgiveness “offers wings to prayer” (2.In.1:1), then healing shows that those wings must be powerful indeed. They must be eagle’s wings that will lift us all the way up the ladder. And when you know that the tools you have will get you to the top, you climb faster.

Healing the cause

The key to understanding this chapter’s message about spiritual healing lies in its emphasis on healing the cause, not the effect. We all know that you can’t really solve a problem unless you get rid of its cause. If you solve the surface manifestation but leave the cause intact, then that cause will continue to produce a never-ending series of new fires for you to put out.

What, then, is the cause of sickness? It is the same cause as that of the body itself: “The body’s cause is unforgiveness of the Son of God” (3.I.2:1). Deep in our minds is an ancient hatred toward our brothers and all things. This hatred instills in us a profound sense of guilt, which forever whispers to us that we must be punished.

Is it so hard to believe that this is at the root of the body? For the body is inherently saddled with pain, frailty, sickness, aging, and death, giving it the appearance of being continually punished. It spends its life on death row, enduring little punishments while awaiting the big one. Does it not make sense, then, that all of this is “external proof of inner ‘sins’” (3.I.1:3)?

True healing, then, must be aimed at that buried engine—our sense of sinfulness and guilt—that forever hums in the subterranean caverns of our mind, turning

out its endless surface manifestations. This month it's a cold. Next month it's a bad knee. The following month it's anybody's guess. Until that engine is dismantled and dissolved, there will always be more manifestations.

This emphasis on healing the cause (the cause being a false belief in sinfulness and guilt) is different than most healing in this world. Jesus therefore considers it essential that we understand the difference between his way and the more usual approach. "Distinctions therefore must be made," he says, "between true healing and its faulty counterpart" (3.I.5:1).

False healing

There are two distinguishing features of false healing as described in this chapter, and after looking at them, we will look at their results.

1. False healing is aimed at the symptom level, not the underlying cause.

Jesus says this kind of healing "can occur at lower forms of prayer, combining with forgiveness kindly meant but not completely understood as yet" (3.II.1:2). "Lower forms of prayer" means prayer for physical things—in this case, for physical healing. "Forgiveness...not completely understood as yet" refers to forgiveness that sees sin as real and then tries to forgive it anyway. In this kind of healing, then, I pray for the healing of your body, acknowledging that your illness has its source in presumed sinfulness, but praying nonetheless that you can be forgiven.

This sounds like Christian faith healing to me, but false healing is not limited to this. The term would apply to any form of healing that aims its prayerful intent or its healing energies at the body and not at the deeper cause—the mind's belief in its sinfulness.

2. The healer privately feels superior to the patient.

The false healer observes that he has more learning (3.III.2:8), more training (3.III.2:4), more power (3.III.1:6), more talent (3.III.2:4), more art (3.III.2:8), more skill (3.III.3:2), more knowledge (3.III.3:1), more wisdom (3.III.3:2), and more of a gift (3.III.4:5). Based on all this, he concludes that he has more *value and importance*, that he is simply better. He believes in "inequality" (3.III.2:2, 3:4) and thinks it slants in his favor.

Jesus calls this “healing-to-separate” (3.III.2:1), for isn’t inequality one of the chief forms of separation? The problem with this is that separation is another way of talking about the underlying cause of sickness. Jesus mentions the patient’s “separate sense” and then says “and it is this that made him sick” (3.III.4:7). Therefore, if separation is the cause of sickness and the healer reinforces that separation (by seeing himself as above), then isn’t he *strengthening* the cause, rather than dispelling it?

False healing can heal the body, but not the underlying cause

The term “false healing” should not lead us to assume that it doesn’t work in the conventional sense. Jesus repeatedly makes clear that it *can* heal physical symptoms. He says that physical healing “can occur at lower forms of prayer” (3.II.1:2). In speaking of healing-to-separate, he says, “These forms may heal the body” (3.III.2:3).

Our response to this may well be “Well, then, what’s wrong with that? Job done!” But there is a bigger picture. The body never has just one ailment. At any given moment, it has multiple ones. Then there all the ones it will have in the future. And then there is the ultimate ailment that stares back at us from the end. How significant is it, then, that we get rid of just one of them? Jesus says, “False healing can indeed remove a form of pain and sickness. But the cause remains, and will not lack effects” (3.II.1:4-5). This is why it is called false healing. The cause is still there “and will not lack effects.”



This is what death should be; a quiet choice, made joyfully and with a sense of peace, because the body has been kindly used to help the Son of God along the way he goes to God.

SOP 3.II.2:1

True healing

False healing covers most healing in this world, from conventional medicine to alternative medicine to most spiritual healing. In the previous section, I summarized false healing by looking at its two distinguishing features and also its results. Now I'll do the same with true healing.

1. You use forgiveness to “overlook all shadows on the holy face of Christ,” including sickness (3.1.3:3).

Once you understand the cause of sickness, forgiveness becomes the logical remedy. For the cause is a deep-seated—yet entirely false—belief in one's sinfulness and guilt. What is the traditional way of relieving the anguish of guilt? Forgiveness, of course.

This forgiveness, however, must only bless. It can't be forgiveness-to-destroy. “Forgiveness must be given by a mind which understands that it must overlook all shadows on the holy face of Christ, among which sickness should be seen as one” (3.1.3:3). As the healer, then, we overlook their sickness. We overlook their body. We overlook their flaws. We overlook their “sins.” We see past all such shadows on their true face, the face of Christ. This is how we heal the cause, and the effects will surely follow.

2. You heal by recognizing your oneness with the patient.

In contrast to the arrogant healer, who believes he is superior to the patient, the true healer sees himself as so equal to the patient that the two of them are one. Here is how Jesus puts it:

You do not make yourself the bearer of the special gift that brings the healing. You but recognize your oneness with the one who calls for help. For in this oneness is his separate sense dispelled, and it is this that made him sick. (4:5-7)

We heal, then, not through holding ourselves above the patient, but through being so on his or her level that there is not a shred of distance between us.

True healing heals the body in every way

If forgiveness actually has power to remove the underlying cause of sickness, which is also the cause of the body itself, think what that would mean? This is such a radical idea that we may not be able to quickly guess its implications, but Jesus spells them out for us.

a. True healing doesn't just heal part of the body—does not just heal a single ailment; it heals the body “as a whole” (3.III.1:1).

b. It removes the cause of future illnesses, so that sickness will not “be free to strike again” (3.II.1:3).

c. It frees the body from death, so that the body keeps functioning flawlessly until the time when we consciously lay it down in order to graduate to “a higher prayer”(3.II.4:1), where Christ’s “vision is more sustained in us” (3.II.3:5). (This is known as mahasamadhi in the East.)

d. Because the body’s cause is gone, the body “cannot come again in different form” (3.III.6:4)—an apparent reference to ending the cycle of reincarnation.

What a hallowed service it would be to give this gift to someone else. No wonder Jesus asks, “Can anything be holier than this?” (3.IV.3:2). And could anything have greater power? If this reveals the true power of forgiveness, if it shows that forgiveness can literally raise the dead, then how could we not be confident that forgiveness will raise us all the way up the ladder?



The song of prayer is silent without you.

The universe is waiting your release because it is its own.

SOP 3.IV.10:2-3

Exercise in true healing

Let's begin by choosing someone we know who needs healing.
Say to this person in your mind,

*I overlook all shadows on the holy face of Christ, your sickness being one.
I call on the Holy Spirit to help me overlook.*

Feel your sight moving past the person's sickness to the shining face of Christ,
the face of who this person really is.

Feel the Holy Spirit giving you the strength to do this.

*I overlook all shadows on the holy face of Christ, your body being another.
I call on the Holy Spirit to help me overlook.*

Again, feel your sight moving past the body to the face of Christ, the true identity
of this person.

And again feel the Holy Spirit giving you the strength to do this.

Now say silently to this person:

I do not see myself as being in any way above you.

You are my perfect equal.

You are exactly like myself.

I but recognize my oneness with you.

For in this oneness is your separate sense dispelled, and it is this that made you sick.

Let me know both of us only as the Christ.

Feel yourself gazing in joy upon the radiant face of Christ, Who encompasses
both you and the patient.

See the rays from that face shining away all shadows, including every trace of
sickness.

Gaze in joy on that blazing light, knowing that in it all healing is done.

Prayer, forgiveness, and healing

Now that we have surveyed all three chapters, what is the big picture? The big picture for me starts with the fact that these three topics—prayer, forgiveness, and healing—are not things we tend to associate with higher spirituality. Just read the list. Does that list call to mind a radical, nondual approach to total spiritual awakening?

No, it doesn't. Instead of yogis in ashrams, it calls to mind images of worshippers in a charismatic Christian church. You picture them praying fervently for earthly blessings, forgiving each other for grievous sins, and throwing their crutches away after being "slain in the spirit."

Such images are not that divorced from the supplement itself. One of the beginning forms of prayer involves asking God for earthly gifts, positive character traits, and forgiveness of sin (1.II.3:4). One of the forms of forgiveness-to-destroy says, "Here is one whose sinfulness" I share, "since [we] both have been unworthy and deserve the retribution of the wrath of God" (2.II.3:3). And the description of false healing, as I noted above, feels like Christian faith healing, where the healer asks God to forgive someone's sin and thereby heal that person's body. The lower forms of prayer, forgiveness, and healing, in other words, all had a clear Christian flavor to them.

As further evidence of my point, look at the fate of these three topics in the Course community. We tend to push prayer away, seeing the Workbook prayers (140 of them!) as mere metaphor. We also typically steer clear of spiritual healing, since wanting to heal an illusory body seems like proof that you just don't get it. The only one of the three we have retained is forgiveness, and even there we tend to detach it from its traditional nature of forgiving the misbehavior of other people.

Indeed, as noted before, the supplement itself was born out of similar sentiments. Its genesis was Ken Wapnick suggesting that praying for guidance was out of keeping with the Course's lofty focus.

Let's admit, then, that this trio of topics—prayer, forgiveness, and healing—does not seem to strike the right note in our community. It smacks of the traditional religiosity that, if we are in the Course, we are probably trying to get away from. Our instincts would most likely tell us that we need to transcend these three things. I have heard Course students and teachers say “Who would I pray to?” I have heard them say “At some point we have to go beyond forgiveness.” And I have heard them say, “Why heal the body when there is no body?”

But that is not what this supplement says. Its teaching is not that we should transcend prayer, forgiveness, and healing, but that we should elevate them. Indeed, each chapter is built on the contrast between the lower forms of one of these three and the higher form, so that we can consciously move away from the former and toward the latter. Chapter 1 is built on the contrast between the lower forms of prayer, which ask for things of the earth, and “true prayer,” which asks for the song of God’s love. Chapter 2 is centered on the contrast between forgiveness-to-destroy and forgiveness-for-salvation. And Chapter 3, of course, features the contrast between false healing and true healing. We can see all of this summarized in the table below:

	Common understanding	Elevated version
Prayer <i>Praying to God</i>	<i>Praying for things of this world</i> <i>...in the belief you are lacking and they will complete you</i>	<i>Praying for the song of God’s love</i> <i>...in the trust that it belongs to you and that it will give you the specific answers you need</i>
Forgiveness <i>Forgiving others</i>	<i>Forgiveness-to-destroy</i> <i>Focus on what is being forgiven</i> <i>Affirm the reality of sin</i> <i>Subtly attack the one being forgiven</i>	<i>Forgiveness-for-salvation</i> <i>Focus on their loving efforts</i> <i>Do not see their errors as real</i> <i>Let the eyes of Christ look through you</i> <i>See past their errors to the face of Christ</i>
Healing <i>Healing sickness</i>	<i>False healing</i> <i>Aim your prayers at bodily healing</i> <i>See yourself as better than the patient</i>	<i>True healing</i> <i>Aim at healing the cause in the mind</i> <i>Overlook the body and its sickness</i> <i>Feel equal to and one with the patient</i>

Rather than asking us to move beyond prayer, forgiveness, and healing, then, *The Song of Prayer* holds out to us an egoless version of each of them, and along with them, an egoless version of ourselves. The person at the top of the ladder of prayer has come to embody “true humility” (1.V.1:1), in which she no longer raises herself above others and above God. The person who has learned forgiveness-for-salvation has gotten there by realizing that his tiny mind is inadequate for the job, that it must be infused with the love and wisdom of the Mind of Christ. And the person who has learned true healing sees herself as a mere channel for God’s gifts (3.IV.1:4-5), a channel who is absolutely equal to every one of her patients. There is a beautiful egolessness that runs through all of these gifts, an unmistakable feeling of holiness, an “odor of sanctity,” to borrow a Catholic term.

And there is something appropriate about borrowing a Catholic term, in that the person this supplement asks us to become looks less like a nondual master and more like a kind of enlightened Catholic saint, or even better, like Jesus. For did he not pray to his Father, forgive even his executioners, and heal all who came to him? How wrong can we go by emulating him?

Let’s therefore embrace all three of these gifts from Heaven and make them our own. Let’s not be too spiritual to pray to God, to forgive other people, and to offer healing to those who are sick. Let’s simply do each one in as elevated and egoless way as we can, and then watch them evolve and take higher forms in us as we ourselves evolve. Let’s see them as basic pillars of our journey home, for as Jesus says repeatedly in this supplement, they work together to raise us to our goal. Forgiveness “offers wings to prayer” (2.In.1:1) and healing is an “aid to prayer” (3.In.1:2). When all three are present, we virtually fly up the ladder. There at the top, we will at last return to where we began. We will take our place once more in the song of prayer, “the ceaseless song that all creation sings unto its God” (2.I.8:6).



The Circle of Atonement

From our origin in 1993, the purpose of the Circle of Atonement has been to be a bridge into the profound and unparalleled wisdom of *A Course in Miracles*. We clarify the Course's sometimes difficult language in order to make possible a deeper understanding of its teachings. We then help you put those teachings into practice, explaining how to apply them in your everyday life. Our work grows out of our commitment to be as faithful as possible to what *A Course in Miracles* says. It also grows out of our years of dedication to walking this path ourselves and our desire to see the Course's purpose realized in the lives of students and in the world.

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