



LESSON 166

I am entrusted with the gifts of God.

Sarah's Commentary:

This Lesson has a wonderful way of carrying the image like a story. It is a rather sad story of how we have chosen to be outcasts, far from home, homeless and afraid, but we don't remember we made this choice. We try desperately to make this faraway domicile as comfortable as possible. Like a homeless person, we make the best of our circumstances. We go nowhere, feeling lost and alone. Perhaps you don't completely identify with this picture, yet this Lesson says, "**No one but has identified with him, for everyone who comes here [to this world] has pursued the path he follows, and has felt defeat and hopelessness as he is feeling them.**" (W.166.6.2)

When we are tempted to feel victimized, Jesus reminds us that we chose it. "**Yet is he really tragic, when you see that he is following the way he chose, and need but realize Who walks with him and open up his treasures to be free?**" (W.166.6.3) Why would we continue to choose this when we can choose the abundance and happiness already given us instead? "**All things are given you. God's trust in you is limitless. He knows His Son. He gives without exception, holding nothing back that can contribute to your happiness.**" (W.166.1.1-4) If we can choose God's gifts at any time we want, can we be tragic figures or are we just mistaken about where to find consistent happiness?

The irony of it all is that while we wander alone, miserable, sad, and seemingly without a home for safety and support, God's gifts of infinite value go with us. We are never alone, for God is always there with us. If this is a fact, why do we deny His ever-present gifts? Jesus says, as long as we have allegiance to our will and what we have made of ourselves and the world, we will reject God's gifts. "**He must deny their presence, contradict the truth, and suffer to preserve the world he made.**" (W.166.3.3) We are instead hanging onto our specialness, uniqueness, individuality, and the world, making ourselves miserable in the process while refusing to look at what God holds out for us. (W.166.5.3) This treasure is ". . . so great that everything the world contains is valueless before its magnitude." (W.166.5.5) In refusing to accept this treasure, we continue in our sorry state. We may not like what we have made, we are still invested in our autonomy. We are committed to it and value it because we made it. But we can change our minds. We can make another decision. Our condition of seeming homelessness is simply a denial of the truth of what we have and what we are.

I recently visited with friends who are coming to the end of their careers and are very frightened by the prospect of what to do with their lives. They are casting about for options of how to spend their time and how to find meaning. The options seem limited to volunteering, traveling, getting future contracts for more work, or entertaining themselves with various pastimes. Their perspective is one of killing time. While there is nothing wrong with any of these activities, there is no joy in them when they serve as a distraction from the joy to be discovered within. These

activities are all distortions of the real thing that we all look for. Meaning is not contained in the forms of this world, but is in the content of the right mind.

Are we devoted to seeking for happiness in the world, which is what the ego counsels, or to awaken from this dream? In other words, do we turn to the ego as our teacher, or choose the Holy Spirit to reinterpret everything for us? The question is, "What is the purpose of what we choose to do?" Jesus counsels us, "**In all these diversionary tactics, however, the one question that is never asked by those who pursue them is, 'What for?'"** (T.4.V.6.7) (ACIM OE T.4.VI.77) Jesus shows us the way out of this futile cycle, where the purpose for the ego is to keep us rooted in the illusory world, constantly looking for peace and happiness where it is not.

Why do we continue to identify with these tragic figures instead of accepting the gifts that await us? Why not laugh at such foolishness? Is there something noble in victimhood? Is there something special about us if we can suffer what we think others can't withstand? Understand that this is not conscious, although we need to consider this question carefully. When we hold this perception of ourselves and take it seriously, we are not seeing the absurdity of it all. "**He would make you laugh at this perception of yourself."** (W.166.8.3) While we live a tragic story, a sad story, or a story of heartbreak, God only wants joy for us. Yet we fear His touch. (W.166.8.1) If we accept the truth about ourselves, we can no longer claim victimhood. Thus, His Presence is a great threat to us, which is why we resist it. We fear our magnitude. We still want to be authors of our own lives, rather than surrender to God. It seems, as Milton wrote, that we would rather rule in hell than serve in Heaven.

Can this be true about us? It seems our misery and poverty are worth it if it means we can be the authors of our own lives. We indulge in our misery, believing no one can understand us, and feel unfairly treated. If we could step back and laugh at the silliness of this notion, Jesus wonders, "**Where is self-pity then?"** (W.166.8.4) We are the dreamers of this dream, and we are invited to examine our decision to stay in misery when we are shown a way out. We have forgotten that the mind and not the world, is the cause of our misery. The power is within us to make another choice. When we see the cause of our distress as outside our own mind, we savagely defend our perceptions. It is how we maintain the independent, separate self. Indulging in self-pity points the responsibility for our lack of happiness outside ourselves.

It may be difficult to accept that we are the ones choosing our own victimhood. Initially, we will probably feel attacked and get defensive at the suggestion that we are choosing to suffer. We get extremely defensive at the idea that the circumstances of our lives are not inflicted on us, but chosen by us. We seem to prefer to proclaim our victimhood because we are attached to our story, and thus, we fear Christ's touch because it would change everything.

Our stories of victimhood are designed to make others responsible for our circumstances. This is because we prefer to see ourselves as innocent, while those who perpetrated the situation, as we see it, can then be punished by God for their "crimes" against us, and we can continue to feel exonerated as their innocent victims.

"You cower fearfully lest you should feel Christ's touch upon your shoulder, and perceive His gentle hand directing you to look upon your gifts. How could you then proclaim your poverty in exile?" (W.166.8.1-2) How indeed? We would then have to see the insanity of our attachment to our separate will, and we could no longer hang onto the tragic story of our lives and wallow in self-pity or thoughts of revenge in defiance of the gifts God has given us. But the seeming rewards of victimhood may trump God's gifts, in our insane perspective.

The insanity of the ego shows up in obvious ways when we are ready and willing to examine our motivations and see our intentions. For every gift of God, the ego seeks to make a counterfeit form. It is a "substitute" gift, yet it is truly a trap. We trade off the gifts God offers for what the ego offers instead, and these "gifts" offer only pain. Until we see that no substitute for God's gifts can bring us what we seek, we will continue to look to the world for happiness. It takes courage and willingness to take responsibility for our lives and everything that seems to happen to us. With it comes the realization that we have done all this to ourselves. We are the ones who are the dreamers of this dream.

We resist this thought, but now Jesus asks that we look at the irony of our position where we cry about our situation, yet we have deliberately chosen it. "**He would make you laugh at this perception of yourself. Where is self-pity then? And what becomes of all the tragedy you sought to make for him whom God intended only joy?**" (W.166.8.3-5) What I take from this is the one thing we might do more which is to laugh at the ego. We can only do this when we realize that we are not the character in the dream but are the dreamer of the dream. It is our script that we are playing out. We have written the role that we play, as well as the one played by the characters in our script, who play the various parts in our drama.

"You even think the miserable self you thought was you may not be your Identity. Perhaps God's Word is truer than your own. Perhaps His gifts to you are real." (W.166.9.3-4) Just maybe, our plan for our lives is starting to fail and our foolishness is slowly, but surely, becoming more apparent to us. Just maybe, we are not who we have believed we were. Just maybe, with Christ's hand touching our shoulder, we feel not quite so alone anymore and start to believe that maybe these gifts of God are real, and His Word is truer than our own.

This puts us between worlds, where we start to see the possibility that we are not the poor, miserable, homeless guy. Now your sight is being replaced by vision "... **which perceives that you are not what you pretend to be.**" (W.166.11.2) We become aware that maybe our pain does not come from outside us, but because of our opposition to the truth. "**One walks with you Who gently answers all your fears with this one merciful reply, 'It is not so'.**" (W.166.11.3) He tells us we are mistaken in our perceptions and can now turn to Him and ask to see everything through His interpretation. It requires willingness to be wrong about ourselves and the world.

After my husband died in 1993, I was experiencing what Jesus is talking about in this Lesson. I was feeling very alone, indulging myself in my story of victimhood, loss, and sadness. As I lay in bed, crying, feeling abandoned by love, a gentle voice within asked quietly, "How much longer do you need to cry?" It startled me because now I had a question in my mind that seemed to require an answer. The answer I gave this Voice was perhaps, "ten more minutes." Yet the absurdity of this answer made me smile, and I simply could no longer feel sorry for myself. It was a recognition that I could make a choice in that moment to believe the ego version of events or see there was perhaps another way of seeing this situation. And as the thoughts of sadness and suffering emerged, with each one I heard the response, "It is not so." I could either choose to believe my own thoughts about this situation or trust Jesus, who reminded me that my thoughts were not the truth. The grief lifted after this experience, and I never experienced it again in the same way. "**For His touch on you has made you like Himself.**" (W.166.12.2)

The Holy Spirit is such a reassuring Presence that is always available to us. We no longer need to continue on this aimless wandering and feeling of aloneness. We can call on His strength in every turmoil and every uncertainty and know that He will always answer. He assures us that we never walk alone. Ask a thousand times a day, "Who walks with me?"

Having been entrusted with His gifts, we are now called to extend them to our brothers so we can be the one to tap them on the shoulder, as Christ has touched us. We can show them that there is another way they can go, since we have been down those same roads and have learned they lead nowhere but to death. "**For you have learned of Christ there is another way for them to walk.**" (W.166.13.4) Yet how do we do this? He says, "**Teach them by showing them the happiness that comes to those who feel the touch of Christ, and recognize God's gifts.**" (W.166.13.5) In other words, we show them, by example, the choice we have made for ourselves and the peace and joy that come with this choice.

"Your sighs will now betray the hopes of those who look to you for their release. Your tears are theirs." (W.166.14.1-2) And when you change your mind, "**Your hand becomes the giver of Christ's touch; your change of mind becomes the proof who accepts God's gifts can never suffer anything. You are entrusted with the world's release from pain.**" (W.166.14.5-6) It is all about choice.

I recall a situation where I was feeling like a martyr and doing a lot of sighing about how much there was to be done as I took on a job for Don, who was struggling to meet his obligations to a volunteer organization. I let him know how difficult it was for me to help him and how he was imposing on my time. In taking a moment to pause I realized how I was exemplifying victimhood and was doing exactly what this Lesson says by showing him he had the power to make me suffer. I had to laugh at my foolishness. Taking a moment to step back and watch my mind helped me realize the choice I was making. I could choose to either open my mind to receive God's gifts or be cast back in the self-made role of the homeless person. The decision was up to me. We all have this power within.

Each time we choose to forgive, we extend a blessing to those who don't yet understand that their suffering is coming from their own choice. Our choice requires that we notice the game we are playing and stay vigilant in mind watching.

We demonstrate another way of being in the world by not being of the world. We increasingly recognize that it is no longer the circumstances of our lives that bring us sorrow but only the interpretations we give to every situation. Jesus says that we can't, in fact, tell our advances from our retreats. (T.18.V.1.5) (ACIM OE T.18.VI.41) This reminds me of a wonderful movie called, "The Ultimate Gift." It clearly demonstrates this fact. I have seen this in my own life, where a seeming setback was necessary to show me the miracle hidden there. A friend, who was staying with us, was very frustrated one day when he was trying to arrange to rent a car. He became very angry with the bureaucracy he experienced while dealing with the car rental companies. Later in the day, he was offered a car by a friend for the duration of his time here. He did not know, at the time, that the miracle was awaiting him. When we take a moment to rest the mind, the worries and concerns get dismissed. It is all about trust and acceptance that everything that seems to be happening is for our good.

In our morning and evening practice, for a minimum of five minutes and up to thirty or more minutes, we spend time bringing our attention to our thoughts, our fears, our investments in our ego, and hearing the response from God, "**It is not so.**" (T.14.II.5.8) (ACIM OE T.13.VII.60) Jesus pleads with us not to choose what the ego has to offer over the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He means that we must let go of what we hold onto so tightly. He means that we must admit that we are wrong about the way we are seeing and interpreting everything. Jesus reminds us that the meaning we give to everything is not the truth. What we are experiencing is what we have chosen. It is our dream.

We remember today that our interests are not separate from those of our brothers. We are One. What I do to you, I am doing to myself. My happiness cannot be bought at your expense. We are being called to become a living demonstration of His love, seeing our interests as the same as that of every brother. Our shared reality is outside of this dream. Our reality is Oneness.

And today, I am thankful Christ's touch is on my shoulder, and this is not my home.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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