

## ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



### Lesson 328

#### **I choose the second place to gain the first.**

##### **Sarah's Commentary:**

In this Lesson, we are asked to see that the ego always wants to be first in everything. This includes its wish to be above God. It demands autonomy by maintaining separation from God. I remember when my grandchildren were little, often the reason for their tears was that one didn't get to sit in the front seat, someone got a bigger piece of cake, or they felt that they were left in second place one way or the another. The ego is competitive and wants first place in everything, all the time.

I was listening to a lecture on Buddhism a while ago. One of the precepts of the teaching was that one should step back in any activity and let a brother go first. We were at a celebration of Buddha's birthday and given this orientation, everyone waited, not wanting to be the first to get a piece of birthday cake. Everyone wanted to let the brother go first and not be seen as violating this injunction. The Course teaching is not about behavior, but what is held in the mind. It is to recognize that to put a brother first is to gain rather than lose. His gain is our gain. We go together. **"I would but teach you what is yours, so that together we can replace the shabby littleness that binds the host of God to guilt and weakness with the glad awareness of the glory that is in him."** (T.15.III.9.4) (ACIM OE T.15.IV.31)

In the world, second place seems to be a losing position. What about me, we ask? If I don't look after myself, I will lose. This is the principle of one or the other. If I gain, someone must lose. Jesus says that we are deceived if we believe that to gain at a brother's expense is a gain at all. He teaches, God is the Cause and we are the effect, but this is not second place to God because there is only Oneness. Thus, there is no second place. In that sense, second place is first. To take second place is to recognize that God is in first place, and we can't be separate from the only place there is. So when we choose with the Holy Spirit, we gain the first place, which is all there is.

Our decision for autonomy and independence have put us in competition with God. We believe that we have won our autonomy from God because we believe that we have a separate will. When we identify with our separate will, it appears that we have taken over God's throne and kicked Him out. Now there is no God in our experience. He had to be destroyed to put ourselves in the number one position. This is what we experience in the dream. Since we feel we gained at God's expense, we now try to gain at everyone else's expense. Now we are in competition with everyone and with it comes control, manipulation and various strategies to gain power. It is a world of trying to get what we can in order to fill our sense of lack that comes with the choice for the ego and an alien will. It is a place of separation, neediness, and lack, reflected in our special relationships,

whether of special love or special hate. Now we try to gain through bargaining, competition, and strife with each other. Our agenda is always about having our needs met as a priority in our lives.

We think we like our independent position. We think we like to make our own decisions. However, there is no such thing as making decisions alone, since we make them either with the ego or the Holy Spirit. To submit to the Holy Spirit's guidance seems challenging if we believe we will lose something through surrender. How this shows up in our experience is when we challenge those in authority and try to gain through power struggles and manipulative strategies, but what have we really gained? All that is reflected through competition is our original struggle with God. Nothing is gained except the pain of separation and powerlessness.

Jesus says there is a tremendous cost to us in **"sickness, suffering, and loss and death,"** (W.328.1.3) but until we see that this is the cost that we pay when we choose the ego, we will continue to strive to have our way. Yes, we have gained our kingdom, but Jesus says it is a sorry kingdom of nothing but suffering, limitation, powerlessness, loss, sickness, and ultimately death. He tells us, **"The devil deceives by lies, and builds kingdoms in which everything is in direct opposition to God."** (T.3.VII.2.6) (ACIM OE T.3.IX.73) When we see what the results are in suffering, we call out for help and recognize that there must be a better way. When we accept that God is the Cause and we are the effect, then we reclaim first place, which is to claim our Christ Self. In Oneness, there is only love.

When we choose the second place, we choose to become dependent on God, and thus we join with God's Will. **"To join with His is but to find our own."** (W.328.1.5) This puts us in a position where we are no longer in competition with His Will and recognize that we gain our freedom and our happiness by seeing how wrong we have been about everything. This is the beginning of the willingness to be taught. Our own will, that we exert daily, does not even exist. In fact, the self we think we are is just a character in the dream. Indeed, Jesus says, **"This is not what our Father wills for us, nor is there any second will to His."** (W.328.1.4) It is only the illusion of a separate will that we believe in and identify with. The character in the dream with which we identify is just a projection of the mind. The mind is outside of the body.

***"It is Your Will that I be wholly safe, eternally at peace."*** (W.328.2.3) It is a process where we turn more and more to the Guide within. It requires that we give up the "I know" mind and recognize that we can't judge anything on our own. The mind that thinks it knows what it needs and wants and how to get it will not surrender because to surrender seems like loss. It feels like we are giving up what we value. It may feel like some kind of submission, especially to us overly-independent types who have always prided ourselves on our self-reliance. Yet Jesus assures us that the only thing we give up is our fear. The only thing we "sacrifice" is illusion, which has brought nothing but suffering.

Anything I try to do my way, or anytime I think I know what is in my best interests, it always brings more fear. As Jesus says, we really believe that maintaining **"our independence from the rest of God's creation is the way in which salvation is obtained."** (W.328.1.2) We choose to be right rather than happy. We believe that we know best what will make us happy. Yet he again reminds us that the only way we will ever experience happiness is to recognize that there is only one Will. **"To join with His [Will] is but to find our own."** (W.328.1.5) His Will is our own will.

As we confront issues and problems in our lives, it is important to keep asking, "God, what is your Will for me in this situation?" "What would you have me do or say?" "Where would you have me go?" We happily choose to follow. We commit to our brothers and join with them, recognizing our same nature.

A friend told me recently that he has been whining and complaining a lot about his life and his status in the world. He believed that he had not sufficiently gained the things he determined were for his salvation as he defined it---a relationship, more money, a home of his own, and a job he loves. Yet, in a moment of realization, when he stopped defining his own happiness, he saw that none of these things he thought he wanted ever brought him deep peace and joy. He thought he knew his own best interests, and so he did not turn to a higher authority and ask what would best serve him. We get so focused on defining the way things should be for our safety, security, and happiness that we fail to see the perfection in the way they are.

Anytime we want anything, we suffer. When we want things to be different than they are, we are expressing our inner sense of lack and loss. To recognize what does not matter, and nothing does, is the key to happiness. When we hold grievances, we demand that life be different than it is. We even have grievances about the weather when it is not warm enough, cool enough, nor humid enough. It is all about our agenda for how things must be for us to be happy. There is nothing that must happen for us to open to God's Will and His Will is only for our happiness. There is no book that must be written. There is no building that must be built. There is no place we must visit. There is nobody in our lives that must do anything for us. There is nothing that must be different than it is, and there are no demands or expectations we need to hold of anyone. There is only surrender to God's Will by turning to Him for guidance. My experience is that when I let go of my perceived needs and expectations, only then can I recognize the miracle. Indeed, it does not matter what happens, as it all becomes an amazing gift when we get out of our own way.

Eventually, we are all brought to our knees one way or another. If this does not happen dramatically, then it happens in small doses of an ever-increasing sense of malaise. "What is it all for?" we ask. It is not until then that we have some willingness to find another way. The Bible talks about this when the disciples leave everything to follow Jesus. Jesus tells them, the first will be last and the last, first. In other words, he is saying that to follow him and join with him may look like last place, but in fact, it is to gain the first place. "Not my will but Thine" are words of humility. Yet the irony is that His Will is our own true will. Our false will, that wants to exalt itself above God's Will, is an alien will.

We enter the kingdom as little children. We acknowledge that we don't know. We learn to ask in everything. How do we hear the prompts of the Holy Spirit? How do we know which voice we are listening to? It takes great discernment and a willingness to question our motivations. Clearly, we have become confused about where our guidance comes from. Ask in everything and keep acknowledging that you don't know and be willing to surrender. Finally, take time in deep listening, confident that He hears and answers all your prayers, remembering that when you pray for things of the ego, you are actually asking for nothing. Today, we are asked to realize that by choosing second place, which is to choose to follow God's Will, we are actually gaining the first place. This is when we join with the power of His Will, which is our own true will. Why would we continue to fly with the wings of a sparrow when the wings of an eagle are constantly available to us?

**"Those who choose freedom will experience only its results. Their power is of God, and they will give it only to what God has given, to share with them. Nothing but this can touch them, for they see only this, sharing their power according to the Will of God. And thus their freedom is established and maintained. It is upheld through all temptation to imprison and to be imprisoned. It is of them who learned of freedom that you should ask what freedom is. Ask not the sparrow how the eagle soars, for those with little wings have not accepted for themselves the power to share with you." (T.20.IV.4.1-7) (ACIM OE T.20.31)**

**"When this power has once been experienced, it is impossible to trust one's own petty strength again. Who would attempt to fly with the tiny wings of a sparrow when the mighty power of an eagle has been given him? And who would place his faith in the shabby offerings of the ego when the gifts of God are laid before him? What is it that induces them to make the shift? " (Manual for Teachers.4.I.2.1-4) (ACIM OE M.4.4)**

Love and blessings, Sarah  
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