

DOUBT, DISBELIEF, AND DESPAIR

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Questions
Jesus Asks Us

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3 TRUTHS
to Lean on

“When you despair,
hope anyway.”

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What does it mean
to take up your cross?

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New Church Connection makes the connection between religion and life. Every issue features content that highlights the personal nature of spirituality, providing applicable ideas to support your journey with insights from the New Church (Swedenborgian) faith.

in this issue: DOUBT, DISBELIEF, AND DESPAIR

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spirituality

for everyday life

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“Lord I believe, help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). There are times when I find myself in this moment of belief and unbelief. The Bible is filled with such contradiction, paradox, uncertainty. And so is life.

“God is everywhere, yet not in space” (Divine Love and Wisdom 130). Recently I have realized that any time I try to summarize or ‘box in’ who God is, I end up feeling frustrated, empty, and confused. When I open my heart up to the idea that God’s love and presence are bigger than I can understand, unexpectedly I feel I stand on firm ground with a great sense of peace. Easter is the perfect time to reflect on God’s presence in our lives, especially in times of darkness and confusion.

Everyone doubts. Our spiritual lives are richer for those times of doubt, despair, and disbelief. The Rev. Mac Frazier offers support for those times when we feel like we are drowning in despair, encouraging us to “Hope Anyway” (p.8). The Rev. Coleman Glenn describes ways we can deal with our doubts while walking our spiritual paths (p.4). I invite you contemplate not only the questions you have for God, but also the questions He asks of you. Gather friends or set aside some time alone to work through the Small Group Study on “Questions Jesus Asks Us” (p.20).

I encourage you to wrestle with your doubt. Learn from it. Be honest and stay open. I hope that the content provided here acknowledges and honors the parts of you in doubt, despair, and disbelief. May it lift you up so you have more and more moments where you know and feel the Lord’s presence.

With gratitude for the journey,



Bronwen Henry

Bronwen Henry, General Church Outreach

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

—Matthew 11:28

Dealing with Doubt

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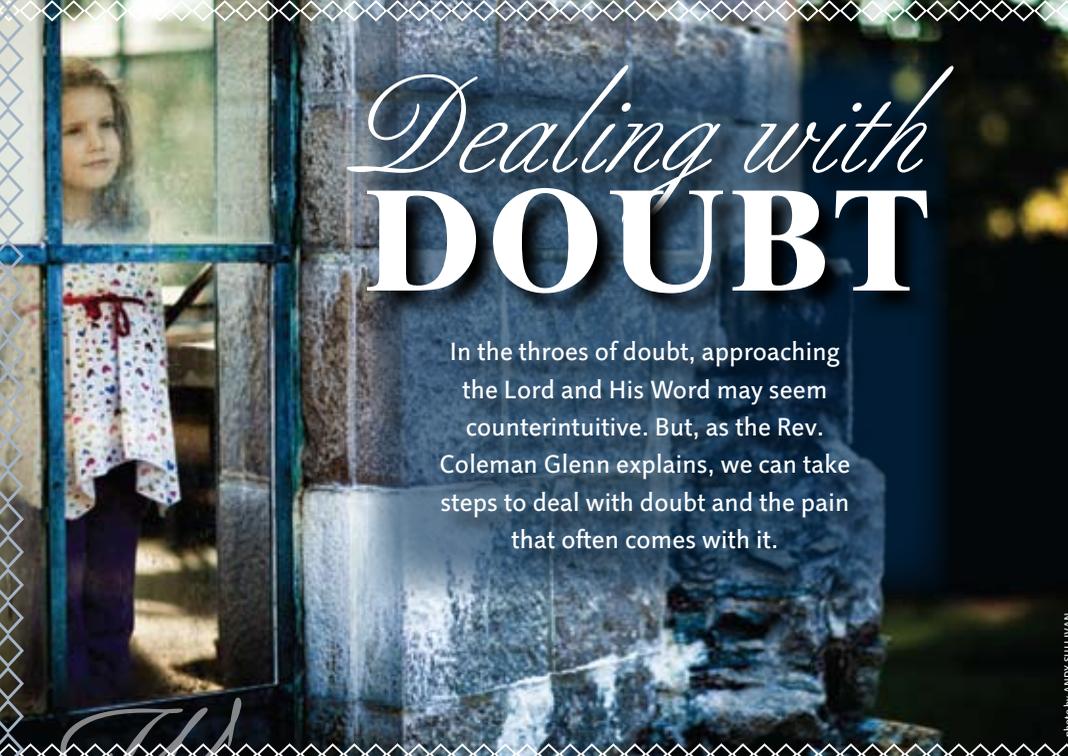
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ANDY SULLIVAN



Dealing with DOUBT

In the throes of doubt, approaching the Lord and His Word may seem counterintuitive. But, as the Rev. Coleman Glenn explains, we can take steps to deal with doubt and the pain that often comes with it.

photo by ANDY SULLIVAN

When we are experiencing doubt about our faith, it's hard to know what to do or where to turn. Turning to the Lord is difficult and painful when we feel like He's not there. But there are things we can do.

◆ Pray to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Mark includes a story about a father and his demon-possessed son. The father desperately wanted his son to be healed, and he asked Jesus to have compassion and

help him. Jesus responded, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." The father cried out and replied with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:23, 24).

In our times of doubt, there is often part of us that still believes, even if it feels like it is tiny and growing smaller by the day. We can pray that same prayer: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

Praying to the Lord opens us up to His return into our lives. But sometimes our prayers don't seem to be

answered, even in our darkest hours. We need to realize this, too: if our prayers seem unanswered, it does not mean the Lord isn't there or doesn't care. It means He knows that for some reason we need to continue to fight as if of ourselves against the doubts that are assailing us.

In His darkest hour in Gethsemane, the Lord Himself prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me!" He did not want to have to go through with the final temptation on the cross. But we know that the cup did not pass from Him. Was His prayer answered? It was, because His prayer continued, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (MATTHEW 26:39). If we pray that the Lord's will be done, we can acknowledge, even if it's painful, that the Lord knows what is best, and that He is guiding everything toward a good end.

◆ Know that doubt is an unavoidable part of a growing faith.

When we are going through times of doubt, we can feel like we have failed as people of faith. This is not the case. In fact, a growing faith always will bring about some degree of doubt.

The Writings for the New Church tell us that a growing faith will be attended by periods of "temptation." We often think about temptation as an urge to do something we know is wrong. Actually the word simply means a test, and the primary thing that tests us in temptation is doubt, which can take us almost to the point of despair (*Secrets of Heaven* 1820).

Shun evils as sins,
and approach the
Lord, and you will
have as much as
you desire.

—*Doctrine of Faith* 12

When the Lord was in the world, in His soul He was constantly assured that He would succeed. But the lower levels of His mind were constantly invaded by doubts, almost to the point of despair. When He was on the cross, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

The fact that we are doubting does not mean there is something wrong with us. It is part of the process of regeneration, the process of being reborn as a heavenly person. It is not a pleasant part of the process, and it can last for a long time, but knowing that it is part of the process can help us get through it.

◆ Keep an affirmative attitude toward the Lord's Word.

As said above, doubt is an unavoid-

able part of the process of regeneration. And this is because doubt is actually useful. It is useful to question things that we are taught. A passage from the work *Secrets of Heaven* says, "It is according to the laws of order that no one ought to be persuaded about truth in a moment, that is to say, that truth should be so confirmed in a moment as to leave no doubt whatever about it" (7289). That passage goes on to say that this kind of truth becomes hard and unyielding, and does not have goodness within it.

Does this mean that we should actively encourage doubt in our-

selves? Not entirely. Doubt is harmful if we refuse to believe anything unless we're convinced by physical proof that it is so. People who have this attitude cannot believe in anything beyond the physical world. The teachings of the New Church call this "the negative principle" (see *Secrets of Heaven* 2568). On the other hand, if a person believes that the Word is true because it is from the Lord, then it is not harmful to see how rational and physical things support the truth. This is called "the affirmative principle." In

fact, if a person holds onto the belief that the Word is from the Lord, then it is harmful to take the attitude that they shouldn't examine their faith rationally (*Secrets of Heaven* 2568).

But many of us do not fall squarely into either one of these categories. New Church teachings talk about those who doubt before coming to the affirmative principle, and those who doubt before coming into the nega-

tive principle. Which attitude they end up taking depends on how they live: "But with those who are not in the negative nor as yet in the affirmative, but are in doubt before they deny or affirm..., they who incline to

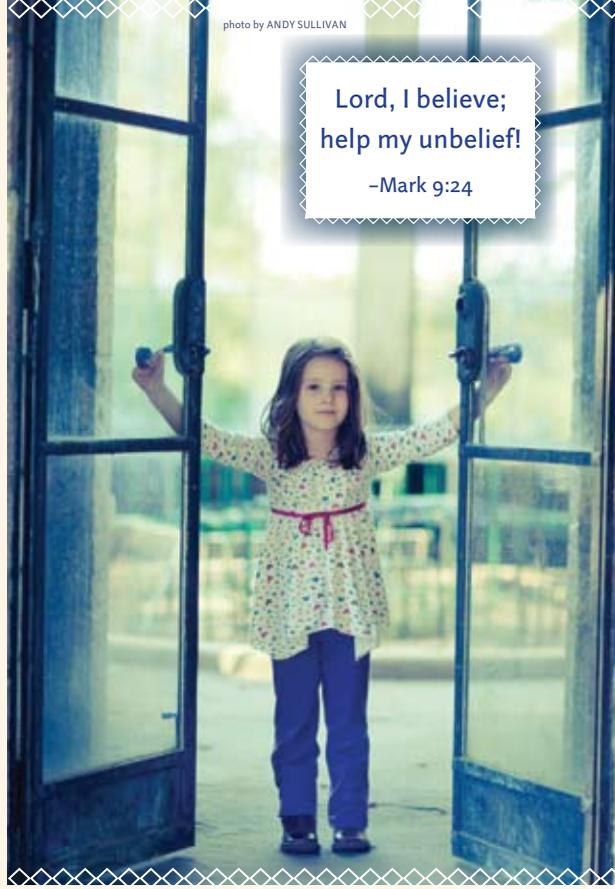
a life of evil fall into the negative, but they who incline to a life of good are brought into the affirmative" (*Secrets of Heaven* 2568)

◆ **Keep living your faith.**

If we think of having faith as simply believing, then we can't help but feel like we are sinning against God when we have doubts. But faith does not just mean intellectually believing something to be true. It also means faithfulness, a willingness to follow what the Lord teaches. And in this

The fact that we are doubting does not mean there is something wrong with us. It is part of the process of regeneration....

Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!
-Mark 9:24



live by what we know. The book *Doctrine of Faith* defines faith as an "internal acknowledgment of truth" (1). And the Lord knows that we might feel that we can never have this internal acknowledgment of truth, so He shows us the way to have it.

A passage from that book says, "If anyone thinks within himself, or says to another, 'Who can have that internal acknowledgment of truth which is faith? I cannot,' I will tell him how he may have it: Shun evils as sins, and approach the Lord, and you will have as much as you desire" (12). Shunning evils as sins and worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ as God opens us up to that internal acknowledgment. It doesn't happen overnight—we still go through temptations and doubts—but this is the path

that leads to faith. ○

sense, we can continue to have faith even if we are going through doubts. We can still choose to live by what the Lord teaches in His Word, even if it feels like we're only going through the motions.

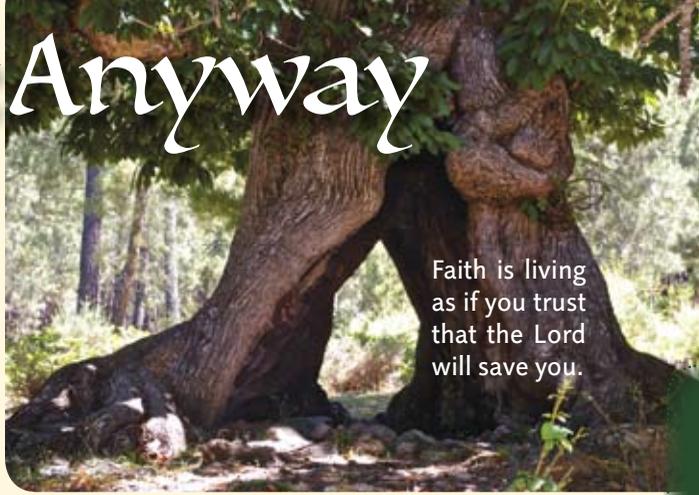
The reality is that if we continue to be faithful, the Lord gives us a new sight of truth, which is a truer and deeper faith than we can have if we didn't



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Hope Anyway

Despair is a powerful feeling. It can cause pain and anxiety and can influence our choices in harmful ways. The Rev. Mac Frazier explains why despair is so challenging and offers hope for those fighting against it.



Faith is living as if you trust that the Lord will save you.

In despair, things that once seemed certain—the existence of God, the love of friends, the value of life—fall to doubt and even rejection.

sire to do good. You just have to accept it. You have to give it a place in your heart to land. True, you cannot overcome your spiritual temptations, but if you let Him, the Lord can.

When someone is drowning, that person will instinctively act in ways that make it hard to be saved. A drowning person is dangerous. Ask a lifeguard. When you are in spiritual despair, your instincts are all wrong. Stop flailing. Surrender. Ask the Lord to save you from your despair, and then wait. He will save you, if you give Him permission. And He promises that after despair comes comfort; that after struggle comes rest; after combat, victory. Read the Psalms and see.

Moreover, when you are in despair, you are on the threshold of something good!

Don't let despair get you. Spiritual despair tells you that you are no good. It's a nasty trick, because it takes the very true idea that all goodness comes from the Lord and turns it on its ear. The Lord said, "I am the vine, you are the branches....Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Despair says there is no God, so there is no good. Or if there is a God,

He wouldn't help you, because you are no good.

That's a lie. The Lord is forever flowing into every person's heart, inspiring in every person a de-

Spiritual rebirth is a result of spiritual struggle. Hell wouldn't need to attack so fiercely if heaven wasn't just around the corner.

God Himself has felt despair. He knows what we go through. He's been there, and He's defeated it. If you let Him, He'll defeat it for you, too. In *Secrets of Heaven 1787*, it says this:

"All temptation is attended with some appearance of despair; otherwise it is not temptation.... They who are being tempted are brought into anxieties, which induce a state of despair concerning the end: the very combat of temptation is nothing else.... As the Lord endured the most direful and cruel of temptations of all, He, also, could not but be driven into despairs, which He dispelled and overcame by His own power."

Faith saves. But faith isn't saying a certain prayer or making a certain statement. Faith is living as if you trust that the Lord will save you. To be able to have that trust, you need to make an effort. Fight on a little longer. Do something for someone else, no matter how you feel about yourself. Take another breath. Trust in the Lord, and He will keep His promises.

I could say, "Don't despair." But despair happens without our choosing. Rather, when you despair, hope anyway. ○



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There are many reasons that people feel despair: life circumstances, daily happenings, chemical imbalances resulting in depression, and many more. But despair can come from other causes too. There is also spiritual despair.

Spiritual despair occurs when you face the impossibility of your own redemption—when you look at your own dysfunctional behavior and at evil you discover in your own heart and cannot see any hope of change. Despair is often the final stage of the spiritual trials we call temptations. Spiritual despair causes you to feel like you're drowning, like you've been punched in the gut, like you're trapped under the ice, like you can't draw a breath and soon will suffocate if you can't manage somehow to escape the flood and suck in some air. In despair, things that once seemed certain—the existence of God, the love of friends, the value of life—fall to doubt and even rejection.

Despair is evil. It is not evil to despair, but it is evil that causes it. We are spiritual beings, surrounded by an unseen world that nonetheless influences us. There is a heaven and there is a hell, and hell doesn't like you very much. Despair is a powerful tool hell uses.

Despair can cause you not only to kill yourself physically, but to attempt spiritual suicide as well. You decide, "Well, I'm not the sort of person who belongs in a church." You might say to yourself, "What difference does it make what decision I make? It's not like I'm ever going to heaven, anyway." You declare, "There is no God, so it doesn't matter which decision I make." Despair sets you up for the next temptation, shatters your resolve so that you backslide into behaviors you had been trying to break free from. Like going on an eating binge just because you slipped once in your diet, despair can trigger a series of decisions that themselves lead to even more despair.

What Does it Mean to Take Up Our Cross Daily?

By a life of repentance we take up our cross daily and follow the Lord.

Illustration by CAROLINE KLINE

Easter can be a time to reflect on the Lord's death on the cross and its meaning in our lives. The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose discusses the relationship between the cross and our salvation. If you've ever been puzzled about how Jesus' death on the cross could save us from our sins, read on.

Bible Study talk by Jonathan Rose; Edited by Chelsea Odhner

Many biblical passages are cited to support the common idea that the image of the cross refers solely to Jesus' death on the cross and that this event took away our sins.

In Matthew, an angel appears to Joseph and tells him he must name the baby in Mary's womb Jesus "for He will save His people from their sins" (1:21). In John 1:29, John the Baptist sees Jesus and exclaims, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." In John 3, Jesus likens Himself to the brass serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness which cured anyone who looked at it: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). He goes on to say, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (3:16). Some could interpret these and other passages to mean that Jesus took away our sins through His death on the cross.

But in actuality, Scripture speaks of more than one type of cross. In Luke

9:22, Jesus tells His disciples what's going to happen to Him at the end of His life: "The Son of Man must suffer many things,...and be killed, and be raised the third day." Note that he says "killed," not crucified. Jesus continues, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (9:23).

This interaction took place before Jesus' death and resurrection. In this conversation, Jesus never told His disciples He was going to be crucified. Crucifixion was reserved for only the worst criminals. There is not a chance the disciples would believe that Jesus was going to be crucified. So what is this cross? Jesus invites us to follow Him in bearing it. He must not be referring to a physical cross, because the disciples had never seen him carrying one. And Jesus says we are to take up our cross daily. How many times can you be crucified physically? Not more than once. So what does it mean to take up our cross daily?

We must allow for two crosses: the physical cross that Jesus died on at the end of His life and some nonphysical "cross"

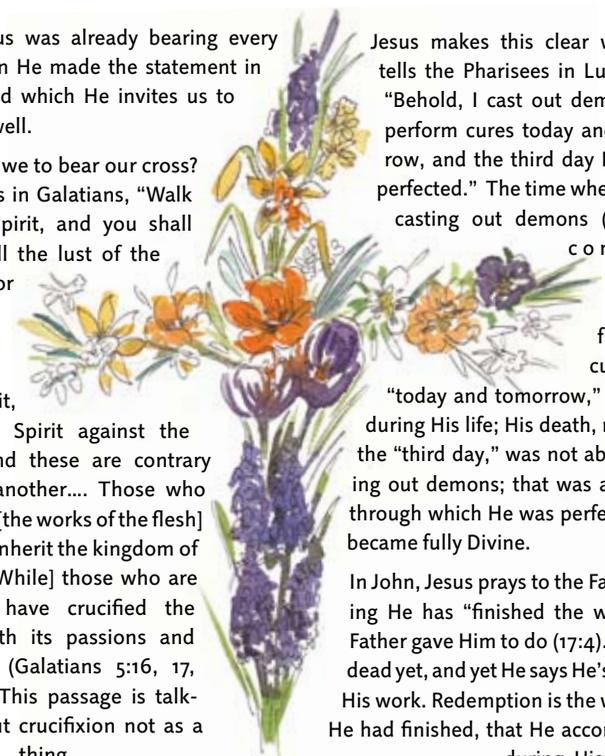
that Jesus was already bearing every day when He made the statement in Luke, and which He invites us to bear as well.

How are we to bear our cross? Paul says in Galatians, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another.... Those who practice [the works of the flesh] will not inherit the kingdom of God.... [While] those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:16, 17, 21, 24). This passage is talking about crucifixion not as a physical thing but as a spiritual thing, and not as something that Jesus alone went through, but something we have to go through if we are to follow Him. Bearing the cross is the pain of dealing with the burden of our lower nature and warring against its passions. We need Jesus, because we have no power against hell on our own. And yet we have to repent and cooperate in bringing our lower nature into order. That we can do daily.

Jesus' death was not about redemption; rather, it was *His life* that redeemed us.

Jesus makes this clear when He tells the Pharisees in Luke 13:32, "Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." The time when he was casting out demons (meaning conquering sin) and performing cures was "today and tomorrow," meaning during His life; His death, meant by the "third day," was not about casting out demons; that was a process through which He was perfected and became fully Divine.

In John, Jesus prays to the Father saying He has "finished the work" the Father gave Him to do (17:4). He's not dead yet, and yet He says He's finished His work. Redemption is the work that He had finished, that He accomplished during His life. His work of redemption was conquering the hells through bearing His spiritual cross. It was the inner work He did every day of His life. This work gave Jesus the power to take away the sins of the world. We draw on that power when we practice repentance. By a life of repentance we take up our cross daily and follow the Lord. ○



If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

—Luke 9:23



The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose is a minister in Bryn Athyn, PA. He is the series editor and a translator for the New Century Edition of the Theological Works of Emanuel Swedenborg. For more information: jsrose@digitalwave.com.

Whether you are in a state of doubt and despair or one of confidence in the Lord's identity and His presence in your life, explore these three ideas that are at the heart of a faith in Him.

3 Truths to Lean On

There are three essential components of the church: acknowledgment of the Lord's Divinity; acknowledgment of the holiness of the Word; and living the life called charity. Everyone has faith according as he lives a life of charity; from the Word he has a concept of what that life must be.

—Divine Providence 259:3



Jesus Is Divine

And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."

—EXODUS 3:14

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

—DEUTERONOMY 6:4

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment.

—MATTHEW 22:37-38

"I and My Father are one."

—JOHN 10:30

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us....

—JOHN 1: 1, 14



The Word Is Holy

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.... Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

—MATTHEW 5:17, 19

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

—MATTHEW 22:37-40

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me."

—JOHN 14:21

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart.... You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

—LEVITICUS 19:17-18

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

—MICAH 6:8

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you....; You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."

—JOHN 15: 11-12, 14

Live a Life According to His Word

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

—DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7



"No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

—MATTHEW 19:17



Hannah describes her journey out of addiction and toward a new life of service. Her experiences at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church and in Thailand, as well as her contact with the New Church religion, sparked an evolution in her own faith.

Interview by Taryn Frazier

I was born in Texas, the third child of a Southern Baptist minister. I lived in five states before the age of 14 and ended up just north of Atlanta for high school. When I was 17, my oldest brother was murdered, and six months after that, my other brother was diagnosed with a rare form of brain cancer. He survived, thankfully. Six months after that, my dad lost his preaching job. The church asked him to leave.

I went to Piedmont College in north Georgia in 2002. I picked up my first drink, and I don't remember my first month of college. I was a blackout drunk from the first drink. I sought help a year later and stayed sober for about 100 days. I decided that I was OK and that I could make it through. Four years later, though, I was living in Raleigh, North Carolina, and I was heavily addicted to cocaine, crack, alcohol, and a lot of other substances.

The end of that era in my life came in 2007. I had moved to California and ended up on the street for a day. I called my father from a pay phone, and my parents came out and put me in rehab.

That's really where the story begins. I've been clean and sober since January 3, 2007. Before then, I had never really lived without a substance or trauma. I moved in with my brother and his wife in Pennsylvania and got a job working at a mental health facility. I moved out on my own when I had been clean six months. After about a year and a half, I lost my overtime at work and a relationship I'd been in ended. I started looking for a new way to live.

Around that time, I heard a missionary speak about work in Myanmar, and I decided I wanted to go to Thailand. The only way I could figure out how to get there was through the Peace Corp, and for that, I'd need a college degree.

I found two schools that looked interesting. Bryn Athyn College of the New Church was one of them. I came to look at the school, and I immediately felt at home. I sat in on a religion class and I asked about fifty questions. The teacher answered all of them

with grace. I realized I could ask questions at this school, and I would still be accepted. I never looked at the second school.

Two months later I moved into the dorm. I started hearing about Swedenborg. At first, I wasn't sure about the religion. At that point, I knew I had a God as my understanding. However, I didn't like the view of salvation I was raised with: that if people aren't "saved," they're going to hell. So all I knew was, I liked Jesus, I liked the Bible, and I liked church. I just didn't have a religion that fit my theological needs.

A week after I got to college, I found out that an organization called Charity in Action was offering a service trip to Thailand that coming summer—the reason I'd come to school in the first place. Suddenly, the wish that I had to go to Thailand came to fruition.

I attended winter and spring terms at the college, then went to Thailand in the summer with a diverse group: high school students, college students, and older adults. When I got on the plane to



To feel the joy of another as joy in oneself, that is loving.
—Divine Love and Wisdom 47

come home, all I could think about was how I was going to get on a plane to get back.

I went back to Thailand six months later during Christmas break. I

participated in a project called Clinic in the Clouds. There are a few remote tribes in the northern mountains. If people are sick or injured, they have no way to get medical help. I helped build a sustainable healthcare unit in a town called Ban Ary.

When I left Thailand the first time, I wasn't done, and even after my second trip, there's a part of me that still isn't. However, I returned to Bryn Athyn College last fall for my second year. At that point, I'd come to love the religion of the New Church. It made sense, but I didn't want to part with a lot of my old concepts of faith which I was raised with. Faith was big for me, and to be told that religion wasn't about faith alone—it didn't make any sense to me.

But in the last year, my views have evolved. The thought that a person had to have charity and faith didn't really ring with me at first. But with the Heavenly Doctrines, sometimes it's not always

one plus two equals three. Sometimes it's two plus one equals three. I get it in a different order, but the result of my faith and my charity is the same result as another's charity and faith. That's

"It's OK that I don't know. I can accept that this reality is good. It's beautiful, and I want it."



why I love it: because I can believe that.

I'm not really sure if Swedenborg talked with the angels, but his theological works, for whatever reason, seem pretty divine to me. I'm not God. I don't pretend to be, but I think the moment I decide I know what truth and reality are—what 100% absolute truth is—I am in trouble. It's OK that I don't know.

I also don't have to have this old misconception of salvation from my childhood: that in order to go to heaven, you have to be "saved." I can't believe it, because I know so many good people who, quite frankly, saved my life and who will never believe in Jesus. But they have good and truth in their lives, and they did good by loving me until I could love myself. Those people made me realize that God is so much

bigger than a literal meaning of a book written millennia ago.

I feel a call to minister to people: to help people one-on-one, whether it's problems with a boyfriend in Pennsylvania or growing rice in northern Thailand. Charity, to me, is simply giving of myself to someone else. To me, that's also the definition of love. They are one and the same: to love is to be charitable, and to be charitable is to love. I want to love people for a living, and I just need to figure out what that looks like.



No matter who you are, whether you're a junkie on the street or a member of a church community, have a compassionate understanding of who you are and where you came from. To separate ourselves based on where we came from or how much money we make is the opposite of charity. If we have this community to offer to the world, it is the opposite of charity not to offer it. There are growing pains and conflicts sometimes, but remember to try to offer this community—this religion—to people. I've decided to defer my acceptance into graduate school and volunteer with Warm Heart Worldwide for 13 months. I still feel that I haven't fulfilled that call I heard three years ago when I heard that missionary from Myanmar speak. ○

Charity, to me, is simply giving of myself to someone else.

For more information about Bryn Athyn College of the New Church, visit www.brynathyn.edu.

What Is Your Story? How has your life been impacted by living New Christian spirituality? Send us your story. newchurchconnection @newchurch.org

Life is full of QUESTIONS

The Easter story is one of great turmoil but, at the same time, of amazing miracles. Similarly, unsettling doubts and wonderful spiritual transformation can exist side-by-side in our own lives. The Rev. Dr. Andy Dibb offers profound, powerful responses to questions about doubt, the Easter story, and our spiritual journey.

Q DOES GOD CARE ABOUT ME?

God made people so that He could unite with them, love them and make them happy. He cares deeply for every single person, and is present and active in the most minute details of every person's life. His presence is the source of every good feeling and true thought that we have, and He never stops working to bring people into heaven.

Q DO I HAVE TO BELIEVE CERTAIN THINGS TO GET TO HEAVEN?

Getting to heaven has to do with what we do as well as what we believe. There are two key beliefs that, when brought into action, impact our eternal destination: the first is a belief in God. The person who believes in God looks outside of him or herself for guidance, as self-guidance often springs from

selfishness. The second is a belief that one must turn from evil and embrace goodness. We often do our greatest good by controlling our natural evil instincts. The Lord's Word can aid us. The more we know about Him, the easier it is to believe in Him. In the same way, the more we know about the nature of evil and the quality of goodness, the easier it becomes to reject evil and embrace goodness.

Q HOW DO I RECONCILE MY DOUBT WITH MY DESIRE TO BELIEVE?

Few people just "believe." Rather, believing is a process. Doubt is a natural part of our spiritual development and plays an important role in the process of converting knowledge to belief. When we doubt something, we have to test it, and by testing it, we can come to the conviction that it is indeed true. What is important is what we do with our doubts. We can say to ourselves, "I don't understand so I won't believe." This kind of doubt closes the understanding and destroys belief. Or we can say, "I don't understand, but I'll suspend my judgment until I do," and then keep on searching until the matter becomes clear.

Q CAN I GO TO CHURCH WHEN I'M DOUBTING?

This is probably the best time to go to church. Sometimes when people doubt, they fall into a negative doubt,

thinking, "I don't understand, so I won't believe." These thoughts can lead people into a downward spiral ending in denial. But the purpose of going to church is to inspire us; we may see a topic from an angle we had not thought of before. Going to church may not cure all doubts, but people with an affirmative attitude may find insights that help them resolve their doubts.

"If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

—John 8:31

SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE.
Email questions@newchurch.org.
Mention "New Church Connection".



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Throughout the gospels, Jesus poses important, compelling questions.

• Why me? • What should I do in this situation? • When will things get better? • How can I get where I'm trying to go? • Where were you when I needed you?

We may, at times, ask these sorts of questions of God. But how often do we reflect on the questions He asks us?

QUESTIONS JESUS ASKS US...

	* ABOUT HIMSELF	* ABOUT WHAT WE WANT	* ABOUT OUR SPIRITUAL AWARENESS	* ABOUT TRUST	* ABOUT OUR ACTIONS
QUOTATIONS	<p>"Who do you say that I am?" -Matthew 16:13-15</p> <p>"Why were you searching for Me?" -Luke 2:49</p>	<p>"Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" -John 20:15</p> <p>"Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign?" -Mark 8:12</p> <p>"What do you want Me to do for you?" -Matthew 20:32, Mark 10:51</p>	<p>"Why are you sleeping?" -Luke 22:46</p>	<p>"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" -Luke 12:25</p> <p>"And why do you worry about clothes?" -Matthew 6:28</p>	<p>"You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" -Matthew 8:26</p> <p>"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?" -Luke 24:38</p> <p>"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your eye?" -Matthew 7:3</p> <p>"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" -Luke 6:46</p> <p>"What were you arguing about on the road?" -Mark 9:33</p>
FURTHER READING	<p>"Because revelation has been granted, a person is able to go to meet God and be acted upon by Him, and so from being natural become spiritual." -True Christianity 11</p>	<p>"The Lord's miracles are but lightly esteemed if we think merely that some blind persons received their sight, some deaf their hearing, and so on; for they all signify and involve Divine things, namely the heavenly state of His Kingdom and His church. This is a mystery hitherto unknown." -Miracles and Signs 3</p>	<p>"There is spiritual sleep when truth is obscure, and spiritual wakefulness when truth is clear." -Secrets of Heaven 5210</p>	<p>"Trust is an attribute of love expressed through faith; consequently trust...in the Lord, does not exist except with those in whom love is present, that is to say, love to the Lord and toward the neighbor; for faith does not reside with any others." -Secrets of Heaven 8240</p>	<p>"It is the essence of love to love others outside of oneself, to desire to be one with them, and to render them blessed from oneself." -True Christianity 43</p> <p>"Acknowledgment of the Lord from love comes from living by what that belief system teaches.... If [people] reject only the life but not the beliefs...they are like acquaintances who talk with each other but have no love for each other...." -Divine Providence 91</p>
DISCUSSION IDEAS	<p>Who do you say that Jesus is? Have you searched for the Lord? Why? Or why not?</p>	<p>What do you want the Lord to do for you? What do you need most in your life? Do you think it would take a miracle? If so, what would it take for the miracle to occur? Do you think our current generation wants a miraculous sign? If so, why?</p>	<p>In what areas of your life might you be sleeping? Have you ever had a feeling of wakefulness, when the truth seemed clear? What was that experience like? How can you return to that "wakeful state" more often?</p>	<p>What have you been worried about? What do you think Jesus might say if He heard your answer? What can you do to strengthen your faith?</p>	<p>Why do people tend to look for the faults in others? How can you get better at loving others? What are some things you appreciate about some of the people around you?</p>

By yourself, or with a small group, reflect on some of these questions and their relevance in your life today.



Congregations around the world

The New Church is a new Christianity that provides a clear path to eternal happiness and addresses your questions about God, love, and life after death. The teachings are immediately practical and deeply spiritual. The New Church is based on the teachings of the Bible as illuminated in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

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photo by BARRIE RIDGEWAY

About Swedenborg and Works Cited

Emanuel Swedenborg was an 18th-century scientist and philosopher who continually studied the Word. Late in Swedenborg's life, the Lord called him to receive revelation for a new church. The New Church teaches that these Writings are divinely inspired revelation for the modern age: heavenly doctrines touching on many aspects of religion with a rational and merciful approach.

In this issue the following works of Swedenborg are referenced: *Divine Providence*, *Secrets of Heaven (Arcana Coelestia)*, *True Christianity*, *Doctrine of Faith*, and *Miracles and Signs*.

New Church TEACHINGS

The perspectives in this magazine are based on the teachings of the New Church found in the Old and New Testaments and the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Core teachings of the New Church:

- There is one loving, personal God, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ. His providence is powerful and unending. God guides each person's spiritual path, from the smallest things up to the biggest things, and His angels are with us every moment.
- The Old and New Testaments have a deeper meaning, revealed in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, which help people lead happy and useful lives to eternity.
- Spiritual growth is a process. Through recognizing our sins, praying, shunning evils, and living a new life, we are transformed and united more closely with God.
- All religions have goodness in them. People of every faith are saved if they live sincerely according to their religion.
- Each of us continues life as a complete person immediately after the death of the body.
- While people are free to choose to live in hell, God wants everyone to live with Him in heaven to eternity.
- Marriage can last forever, for God blesses people with a special love in marriage that goes on after death, even to eternity.

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The Lord
is closer
than we can
possibly
believe.

—*Secrets of Heaven* 840



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