

OVERCOMING STRESS, FINDING BALANCE

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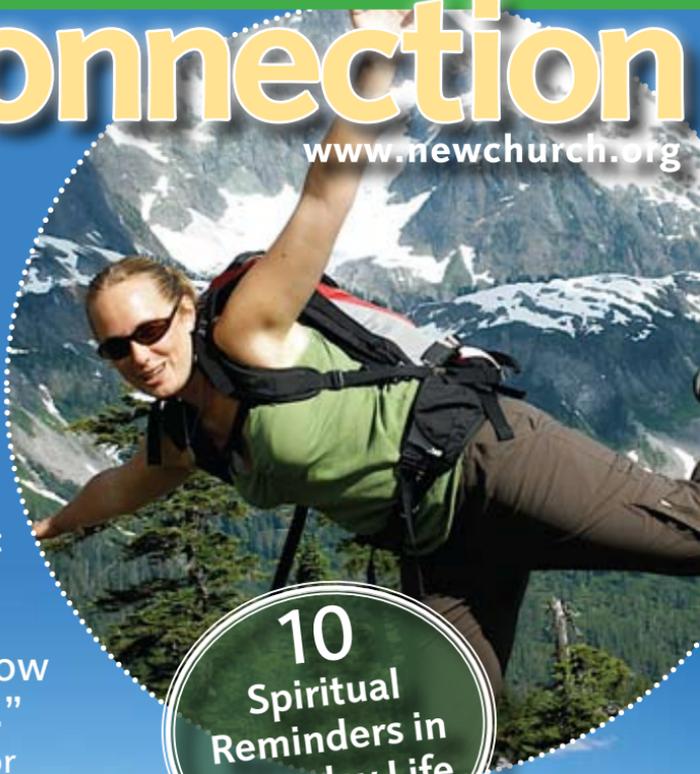
DEALING *with* STRESS

It doesn't have
to rule your life
p.14

Two Remedies to Worrying About the Future p.10

"I just didn't know
where to find it."

One man's quest for
the truth he knew in his
heart p.6



10
Spiritual
Reminders in
Everyday Life



Connecting you with a New Christian spirituality for everyday life

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

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WELCOME

It is in the sum
of ordinary moments,
and the conscious
handling of them, that
add up to deep peace
and connection with
our Creator.

A fresh, blank calendar on the wall can inspire us to make new changes in our lives. This year, instead of focusing exclusively on the physical goals of shedding some pounds, or de-cluttering closets, why not consider shedding some emotional burdens, or de-cluttering our spiritual life?

Sometimes the ordinary stresses of daily life are barriers to living the vibrant, joyful spiritual lives God intended for us. Even the word "spiritual" might evoke only the grandest, most elevated thoughts and actions. . . but perhaps it is the sum of ordinary moments, and the conscious handling of them, that add up to deep peace and connection with our Creator.

In this issue we explore ways to overcome stress and make the small changes that can invigorate our spiritual life. Witness the journey (p.6) of one man who gave up his comfortable lifestyle and traveled thousands of miles to follow the Lord. When reading this story, we might take a moment to ask ourselves what we could give up today to follow the Lord more closely. Find spiritual reminders in everyday actions (p.12). And finally, overcoming stress does not have to be a solitary path, so get some friends together and explore this topic in the Bible with New Church insights using the guide on p.20.

Consider what small actions you might take today that would sweep some dust out of your mind, and unload some of the burdens you may have been carrying. When you're done reading, please share any insights you have (and this magazine) with a friend.

Bronwen Henry

Bronwen Henry
General Church Outreach



in this issue: Overcoming Stress, Finding Balance

SEEKING ANSWERS

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How do I integrate spirituality into everyday life? Is guilt healthy? Should I go to church? Rev. Alan Lewin addresses these questions and more.

CHANGING LIVES

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Wayne McCleafe shares his unexpected journey to the New Church in his quest for the Truth.

REAL CHALLENGES

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Worrying about the future can cause a lot of stress. Rev. Matthew Genzlinger shares two approaches that can help.

DEALING WITH STRESS

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Find insight and guidance as Rev. Erik Buss explores how to overcome stress and achieve balance.

USE THIS BIBLE STUDY

20

(as an individual or in a small group) to order your priorities, overcome barriers, and achieve your goals.

The
Lord's presence
is unceasing with
every person, both the
evil and the good, for
without His presence
no person lives.

-True Christianity 774

What's next?

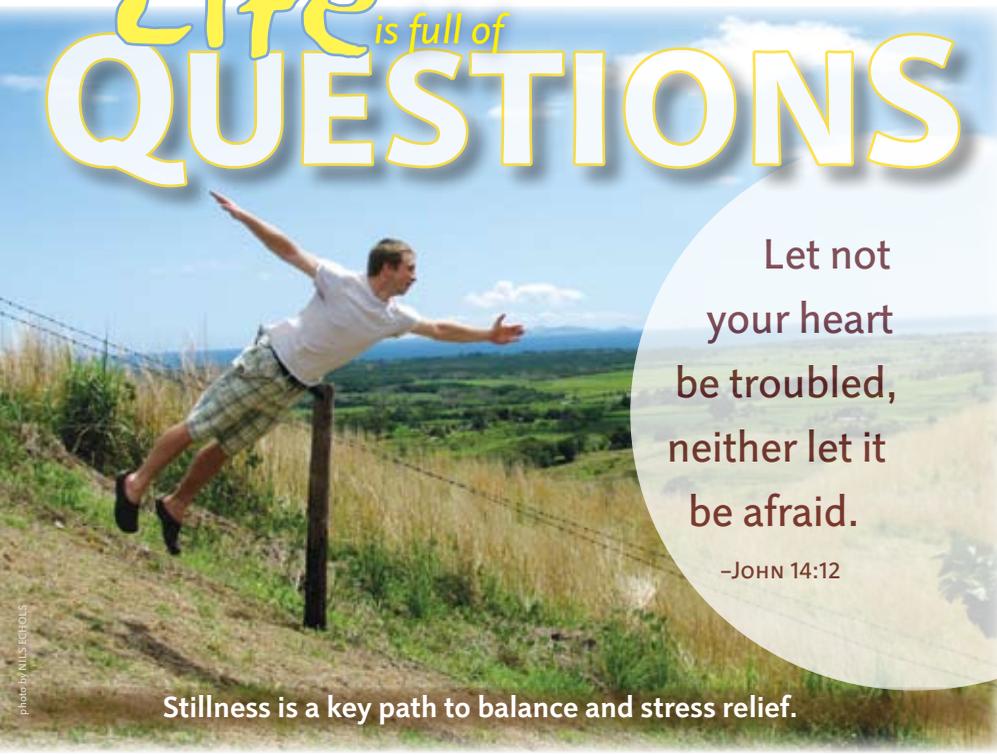
Look for these
upcoming issues:

- Grief and Acceptance
- Addiction and Recovery
- Living Spiritually
- Family and Parenting



Rev. Alan Lewin shares insights on questions about the relationship of stress and spirituality.

Life is full of QUESTIONS



Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

—JOHN 14:12

Stillness is a key path to balance and stress relief.

photo by NINA REPHOLS

Q HOW DO I INTEGRATE SPIRITUALITY INTO EVERYDAY LIFE?

a You do this by living a decent, honest and kind life, inspired by the truths which speak to you about the Lord, the neighbor and life. Take time out sometimes to reflect on your life and to go to the Word for guidance.

Q WHY SHOULD I GO TO CHURCH? DOES IT MATTER HOW FREQUENTLY I GO?

a In church, you approach the Lord in a different way than you would in your everyday life. You are with others whose journeys are inspired by beliefs similar to your own. Church also provides a good opportunity for the Lord to

give you new perspectives on your life as you hear his Word and listen to it being explained. Hopefully, you will want to go to church as often as you can! Don't forget: you too will have something special to contribute to the life of the church.

Q WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GUILT? CAN IT BE A HEALTHY THING?

a It is useful to feel bad about something you have done wrong if you then take the opportunity to do something about it. Take some time out to read the Word and pray. Admit to the Lord the wrong you did, and (most importantly) ask Him for the strength to resist that wrong thing when it comes up again. Then try hard to live a better life. This whole process is spiritually healthy and—very probably—naturally healthy as well.

Q HOW CAN SPIRITUALITY HELP RELIEVE STRESS?

a A lot of stressful situations come from our many interactions with the world and people in this world. As we gain a growing knowledge about what the Lord tells us about the spiritual world and life, we receive a wider and deeper perspective. This new perspective helps us cope with our daily life in this world. It also allows the Lord to gradually draw us closer to Him, which helps us to lead a better life. While we will still experi-

ence stress, we will become more able to work through it.

Q WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO MEDITATE ON GOD'S WORD?

a I believe this means to read and think about the Word in the light of the truths you know and love. As you reflect, the Lord can inspire you with new insights to take into everyday life. Quietly and reflectively saying the Lord's prayer at these times is spiritually beneficial.

QUESTIONS WANTED

SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT SPIRITUALITY AND LIFE.

Email
questions@newchurch.org
 and mention
 "New Church Connection".



Rev. Alan Lewin is pastor at the Michael Church in London. To learn more about this church go to www.newchurchuk.org.



From a young age Wayne McCleaff cared about religion and was willing to go to extra effort to learn more about it. This interest continued throughout his life, but he was unwilling to rest until he found a religion that made sense to him.

READ WAYNE'S POWERFUL STORY OF FINDING THE NEW CHURCH.

My name is Wayne McCleaff. I am married and have seven children and ten grandchildren. I was born and raised in the suburbs of South Philadelphia. My mom and dad didn't attend church, but starting at about the age of seven I walked down the hill to the local church alone. I attended Protestant churches as a child and developed a love and reverence for the character of Jesus Christ.

I continued to study His life searching for truth wherever I could find it. I searched throughout a long military career. I spent many adult years as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons). I graduated from Brigham Young University with a bachelor's in Social Work. I even became a high priest in the LDS church. Yet some things in their doctrines did not seem to ring true, so eventually I left Mormonism.

One evening while living in Chester County, PA, I was talking to my wife about how Divine truth had to be "out there somewhere, but I just don't know where to find it." She responded to my frustration, "well honey, maybe we aren't supposed to have the answers until the next life." I explained to her my belief that these Divine truths had been revealed, but I just didn't know where to find them. I'm sure she doubted my opinion.

One morning about two weeks later, while working as a nurse in a local nursing home, I went in to give morning medications to one of my patients. This lady was 100 years old and a Quaker. While giving her all of her medications I noticed a book on her nightstand. The book's title was *Window to Eternity* by Bruce Hen-

derson. I asked this little lady if it was a theology book and explained how much I loved theology. She replied that it was indeed a theology book and that a friend had given it to her before she died. She told me that I could borrow it and to give it back to her when I was finished.

I took this book home, read it, and became obsessed with what I had learned. In the back of the book was a newspaper clipping with a picture of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. I told my wife that I had found God's truths and she looked at me with a look like, "What are you into now?" As I explained the basic tenants of the New Church to her, she exclaimed, "Well, this is a religion that makes sense."

After explaining that there was a church that actually taught these truths, Karin and I took off to find Brigadoon, Bryn Athyn, Shangri La, or whatever this magical place was. Arriving at the Cathedral, I burst through the door, scaring the poor receptionist to death by questioning, "Do you know what you have here?" She replied, "Ah, ah, let me have you talk to someone." Reverend Jeremy Simons was kind enough to come to the Cathedral where, in the bookroom, he introduced me to the Writings for the New Church. I felt like a "kid in a candy

"I had the opportunity not only to serve but to teach people about the spiritual life they could experience after death."

"I thank the Lord for calling me to this sacred work."

store." I deliriously read the Writings exclaiming out loud, "Wow, wow!!" constantly.

It was too far for us to drive to the cathedral for services, so we briefly attended Temenos, not realizing that there were different denominations in the New Church. During this time, I was communicating with Reverend Mike Gladish online, taking his *Heaven and Hell* course.



I am very thankful to my wife Karin, who was willing to get rid of all of our material belongings, sell our home, and move from Phoenix, AZ, to undertake an adventure in Bryn Athyn, PA. We will be returning to Phoenix soon, where I will continue to serve as a hospice nurse. I will continue to tell people in my care the good news about heaven. I thank the Lord for calling me to this sacred work and Emanuel Swedenborg for being such a worthy servant of the Lord, enlightening us about this modern revelation, the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. ●

WHAT IS YOUR STORY?
How has your life been impacted by living New Christian spirituality? Is there a spiritual practice or message that has transformed your relationships, work, or sense of peace and happiness? Share your story. Email newchurchconnection@newchurch.org.

Eventually, due to a death in the family, we moved back to my wife's home state of Arizona. When we arrived there I was hired as a hospice nurse. This was a job that I loved and was well suited for. I had the opportunity not only to serve but to teach people about the spiritual life they could experience after death. We looked up the New Church of Phoenix society and attended as often as my job would allow. We made some wonderful friends there.

Heaven and Hell is a best-selling book by Emanuel Swedenborg.



This book features a description of a merciful God who permits humans to choose heaven or hell according to their desires and natures.

Get a copy today from the New Church Bookstore at store.newchurch.org or call 267-502-4980.

It is not so difficult to live the life of heaven as some believe.

-Heaven and Hell 533

Worrying about the future can cause a lot of stress in life.

realchallenges

I have a lot of anxiety about the future. . . how can I learn to live in the present?

“Will I ever get married?” “What is going to happen with my job?” “Am I going to get through this illness?” Peace and real happiness come when we learn to live in the present.

Rev. Matthew Genzlinger explores two ways to live in the present.

“The more interior and perfect angels are the less do they care about things of the past or think about those of the future; this is also the origin of their happiness. They have said that the Lord provides them every moment with what to think, accompanied by blessing and happiness, and that this being so they have no cares and no worries”
-Secrets of Heaven 2493

“If you want to learn to live more in the present, try looking for ways that you can better serve the Lord and your neighbor.”



photo by KELLY WOODFIN

realsupport

GRATITUDE

Look for the Lord's daily bread:

I often find that when I am overly concerned about the future part of the problem is that I'm not recognizing the gifts that the Lord is giving me right now. If you think about it, when we're worrying about the future we're focusing on things that we don't have or things that we think we may lose. The Lord wants us to focus on what we do have knowing that He provides us with everything that we need to get through each day—even the more difficult ones. Next time you are overly worried about the future, try taking a deep breath and looking for

the present gifts that are all around you: friends, your children, the beauty of nature, your church, revelation, life, etc. You may be surprised at how much the present day has to offer. The Lord knows that it can be difficult for us to recognize the precious gifts that are all around us! It's not by accident that He chose to put these words in His prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread” –Matthew 6:11.

SERVICE

Focus on serving the Lord and others:

Another thing to think about is the fact that worrying about the future is often

a selfish thing. If you want to learn to live more in the present, try looking for ways that you can better serve the Lord and your neighbor. One thing that has always impressed me is that if I can learn to stop thinking about my own worries and concerns there is never a lack of useful things that I can do in the present for other people. The New Church teaches that the happiness of angels comes solely from their life of service. If we too can focus on this we will find that our concern for the future is quickly taken away and replaced with a much greater happiness in serving others.

here, right now, in the moment that we call the present: “The more interior and perfect angels are the less do they care about things of the past or think about those of the future; this is also the origin of their happiness. They have said that the Lord provides them every moment with what to think, accompanied by blessing and happiness, and that this being so they have no cares and no worries” –Secrets of Heaven 2493.

Remember that the Lord doesn't exist in the past or in the future. He exists right



Rev. Matthew Genzlinger is pastor of the New Church in Concord, Massachusetts. Learn more at www.newchurchconcord.org.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. 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 6:4-9

10 SPIRITUAL REMINDERS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Simple actions—like going through a door, walking on the road, going to bed and getting up—can remind us of God’s presence in our lives.

Rev. John Odhner explains how we can give these everyday actions greater meaning.

1 WAKE UP TO GOD’S PRESENCE

TASK: Each morning when you wake up, awaken your mind to the presence of the Lord.

People who care only about themselves and their possessions are asleep. In a deeper sense, waking up means becoming aware of the Lord’s presence and conscious of the needs of people around you.

PRAYER: When you wake up in the morning, pray, “Lord, help me be conscious of Your presence today.”



2 PREPARE FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

TASK: As you are driving a car, riding a bike, or walking, let your mind gradually come into a different state.

Physical journeys which take us from place to place provide an opportunity to think about our spiritual journeys, which take us from one state of mind to another.

PRAYER: When you begin to travel, pray, “Lord, as I go to my destination, bring my mind into a state to accomplish something useful there.”



3 PURSUE CLEANLINESS: INSIDE AND OUT

TASK: When you wash your hands or body, ask the Lord to cleanse your mind of impure thoughts and desires.



4 CLOTHE YOURSELF WITH JOY

TASK: When you put on your clothes each day, clothe your mind with positive, happy thoughts.

5 RECEIVE YOUR DAILY BREAD

TASK: When you eat and drink, feed your mind by accepting and sharing God’s Love and Wisdom.

6 MAKE A PLACE FOR GOD

TASK: When you enter your home, let it also be a home for God.

7 SEEK THE KINGDOM OF GOD

TASK: When you go shopping, think of the good qualities and true ideas you would like to make your own.



8 OPEN THE DOOR FOR GOD

TASK: When you open the door to leave your house, open your mind to the opportunity to serve.



9 MAKE TIME FOR HIGHER THOUGHTS

TASK: Whenever you check the clock, also notice your state of mind.

10 REST IN THE LORD

TASK: Each evening when you go to sleep, put your mind at rest with trust in God’s Providence.

Trusting in the Lord’s Providence will put your mind at ease. When you go to sleep, the Lord cares for you while you are unconscious. There are many things in your life that you are unconscious of that the Lord is providing for.

PRAYER: When you go to bed at night, pray: “Lord, I am turning my whole life over to You.”

Life is full of stress, and yet stress doesn't have to rule your life. *Rev. Erik Buss* provides insight and guidance on how to rise above stress and achieve greater balance.

Dealing with Stress

Choices
PEACE
OUR DAILY BREAD
Living in the Moment
Priorities
PRAYER



When many people are demanding too many things from you, where do you wish you were? I picture myself on a beach on a South Pacific island with just my wife and no one else in sight. Just thinking about it now I can feel myself starting to relax; I can feel the release of lying for days on end in a hammock slung between two palm trees.

Maybe I get my dream vacation, but then what? It's back to reality, to demands and deadlines and disappointed people. Now I can't wait until my next vacation when I can finally enjoy life again!

We know that this is not the way life is supposed to work. You are supposed to enjoy the time between vacations, and even the time between weekends. But how do you cope with the stress of daily living without quitting your job and becoming a yogi at the top of a mountain?

HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER:

It's what, not if

When we are stressed, we think about ways we could get out of it. "If only I was somewhere else; if I won the lottery; if my boss was fired and I got a nice one; if my children would just learn to behave like I had to when I was growing up." As if those things would make life stress free.

All situations carry stress with them, and in many cases stress is good. You have to choose which stress you want in your life. Which is more stressful, being overweight and unfit or exercising regularly? Working long hours or having no job? Struggling to stand up to a demanding person or simmering in anger after caving in to her demands? The guilty conscience of a lie or the short-term consequence of the truth coming out? Even lying in that

hammock in the South Pacific would be stressful when the food ran out or when boredom set in.

Examine your life to see where you are taking on unproductive stress that you could easily trade for good stress. It still takes work to deal with good stress, but it's work that is worth the effort. And if you can think of the work as trading one stress for another, it's easier to rise to the challenge of doing the right thing.

If you can start to choose your stress rather than evade it, the stress in your life will become much more manageable. But coping with stress takes more than trading stressors.

First things first

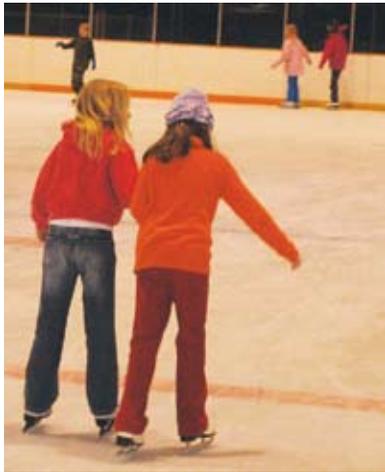
Stress often comes when we don't get to things that are important. You might feel agitated when you are caught in traffic and arrive late. But why were you late? Perhaps you got caught up in some unimportant busy work. You would not be nearly as stressed if a genuine crisis put you behind schedule.

A lot of the stress in our life comes because our priorities are out of order. We want time for our relationships, but we get too busy. In hard economic times we spend our time thinking about how to make ends meet. Jesus said, "Therefore



photo by JONATHAN KLINE

Live in the Present, focus on the next step right in front of you.



“All situations carry stress with them, and in many cases stress is good.”

chapter of Scripture to start your day, you have put first things first. If you schedule a date with your child this weekend, you've put first things first. If you do one thing today because it is the Lord's will, you put first things first. Doing these things will not make other stresses go away. They will help you deal with stress better because of the peace that comes from having your priorities in order.

Exercise integrity in the moment.

We've all been under stress and made poor decisions. These decisions cause even more tension as we frantically try to undo the mess we've made. Next time you face a hard decision, stop and ask yourself, "If the Lord were standing right next to me, what would He say I should decide?" Often you'll know right away what the correct answer is.

Living in the moment

Jesus said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34). "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Interesting words. They mean that you

do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'. . . But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:31, 33)

What does that mean in today's environment? Ask yourself whether your lifestyle is beyond what you need to be happy. How much is enough? When can you focus more on enjoying and less on earning? Perhaps a little "downward mobility" would help you become a better, more spiritual person.

"First things first" means you can start out each day putting the most important things in place. If you make fifteen minutes of quiet time to pray and read a

Innocence is being led by the Lord and not by ourselves.
—Heaven and Hell 280

A Buddhist monk once said, "When you wash a dish, wash it as if you were doing nothing else."

have enough trouble today without adding worrying about tomorrow. What if you could focus right now only on what you are doing and seek to find the enjoyment in it? A Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh once said, "When you wash a dish, wash it as if you were doing nothing else. Notice the smooth texture of the dish as the soapy water slides over the dish. Notice the squeaky feeling once you have rinsed it."

Living in the present is living in the presence of God. In Scripture we're told, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). You can't know God when you are rushing around but rather when you are inwardly still. When God is present, you can handle anything.

In the Lord's prayer we say, "Give us this day our daily bread." That means, "Give me the spiritual food I need today; give me the strength and love I need to carry on through this day." We don't ask for food for tomorrow or the next day, but for today. What do I need to do right now to do what's right? Do I have the strength to do what I need to do right now?

Imagine someone running a marathon who is continually counting the steps he or she has to take before finishing. Even a fast marathoner takes over 30,000 steps.



photo by ABRIGAIL SMITH

If you have taken 5,000 and are still looking at 25,000 to go, you'll want to quit! But if you focus on running for the next minute at a relaxed pace, you'll do fine.

Life is stressful. Some of the stress is good for us and helps us grow. We need to embrace that, even if it means a bit of pain now. Other stress is unproductive, and we need to learn the discipline to make choices. Sometimes it means saying no to things, and that's hard. At others it means setting priorities so we get what is important done. In the end, it means giving our lives over to a loving God and asking for His help in leading us.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled. Neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27) ●



Rev. Erik Buss is Pastor of the New Church Westville. For more information go to www.newchurchwestville.co.za.

Bible Story

Excerpted from 1 Samuel 14:2, 6-7, 11-15

And Saul was sitting in the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred armed men.... Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few." So his armor bearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart...." So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, "Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden." Then the men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his armor bearer, and said, "Come up to us, and we will show you something."

Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "Come up after me, for the Lord has delivered them into the hand of Israel." And Jonathan climbed up on his hands and knees with his armor bearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan. And as he came after him, his armor bearer killed them. That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor bearer made was about twenty men within about half an acre of land. And there was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and the raiders also trembled; and the earth quaked....

CHOOSING our Response

by the Rev. Eric H. Carswell

The events of our lives do not define us, but rather the way we respond to these events. The Lord gives each of us the gift of spiritual freedom, allowing us to choose how to respond to a difficult situation. Rev. Eric Carswell explores this idea in a story from the Book of Samuel.

Rev. Eric Carswell explores this idea in a story from the Book of Samuel.

"Every person is in freedom either to look upward to God or downward to hell."

—True Christianity 69:3

Going Deeper *Insight*

—By Rev. Eric Carswell

Consider Saul's position in this story: he saw himself as a victim, driven by forces beyond his control. The Philistines had overwhelmed the land of Israel, scattering the people and leaving Saul with a tiny group of soldiers and only two swords. Saul appears to have resigned himself to the hopelessness of the situation. We can picture him brooding over the events that had led to this unfortunate position. Perhaps he was waiting for the Lord to do something, or perhaps he had forgotten the Lord altogether in his discouragement. In either case, he wasn't doing anything.

In contrast, Saul's son Jonathan did not wait for circumstances to change. He decided to go with his armor bearer and take on a Philistine garrison with a single sword. His trust was not in his own power or luck, but in the Lord. By choosing to take the initiative,

Jonathan began a complete rout of the Philistines and won a great victory for Israel. While Saul saw himself as a helpless victim, Jonathan felt capable of doing what needed to be done. His confidence in the Lord brought him great success.

Part of your mind is like Saul and part is like Jonathan. Part would have you give up on your job, marriage, friendship and keep your bad habits. But another part of your mind would have you do what needs to be done so you can enjoy the Lord's blessings.

Human beings are free. We don't have to give up with the apparent helplessness of King Saul. If we turn to the Lord and His Word, we will recognize the alternatives to difficult situations. We are free to choose which part of our minds we will listen to. We can pursue the possibilities like the one Jonathan sensed. With this freedom comes a sense of hope and confidence that no person or event can take away. ●



Rev. Eric Carswell is the Bishop's representative for Education and Vice Chancellor of the Academy of the New Church in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. For more information go to www.academyofthenewchurch.org.

Use the outline below and a Bible as a starting point for individual or small group study.

Find insight and guidance from the GOSPEL of JOHN

as you strive to order your priorities, overcome barriers, and achieve your goals.

TO START A SMALL GROUP

- > Gather 6-8 friends.
- > Decide on host, time, and refreshments.
- > Get a copy of New Church Connection for each person. (E-mail outreach@newchurch.org or call 267-502-4911 for additional copies.)

WEEKLY MEETING STRUCTURE:

- > Open with a prayer.

GREAT FOR USE IN A SMALL GROUP, WITH A PARTNER, OR INDIVIDUALLY.

- > Have each person share how he or she is doing and then how the task/focus went that week.

- > Discuss the week's reading.

- > Do the activity with the group or individually.

- > Have each person share a brief closing thought.

- > Close with a prayer.

WEEK 1

THEME WHAT DO YOU SEEK?

READING John 1

QUOTE ON THEME

"To seek after any honor on earth, or among people on earth, is not heavenly."

—*Spiritual Experiences* 780

"The Word contains Divine truth united to Divine good, and this also is the Lord. This is precisely what is meant by the Word which was with God and which was God, from which people have life and light, and which became flesh (John 1:1-14)."

—*Married Love* 129

INSIGHTS / DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Consider your values, goals, and intentions. Ask yourself, "What do I seek?"

ACTIVITY

Create a brief timeline of important events in your life. To what extent does the timeline reflect the answer to the question, "What do I seek?"

This overview was originally developed by Rev. Chuck Blair and adapted with permission.

WEEK 2

THEME WATER TURNED TO WINE

READING John 2

QUOTE ON THEME

"All the miracles done by the Lord, as well as all the miracles by Him spoken of in the Old Testament, signified, that is, contained within them, such things as belong to heaven and the church, and that His miracles were Divine."

—*Apocalypse Explained* 376

INSIGHTS / DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The story of the water turned into wine is a story of how an initial blessing, the first wine at the wedding, runs out. The Lord can then create a blessing out of ordinary water and turn it into wine.

When has the Lord created a blessing from something that ordinary to you?

ACTIVITY

Expand your timeline from last week to include the future. Add five significant events you hope to experience or create.

WEEK 3

THEME REBIRTH

READING John 3

QUOTE ON THEME

"Regeneration is rebirth as a spiritual person."

—*Heaven and Hell* 279

INSIGHTS / DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Lord provides a model for attaining our goals: we must examine our lives, repent of the wrong things we've done, and resist the temptation to do those things again.

What was John the Baptist's temptation, described in John 3: 22-36? How did he overcome it? What challenges or temptations have you faced when pursuing your goals?

ACTIVITY

Consider your timeline from the first week. Circle areas which are in need of renewal or rebirth in order for the five future events (added in the second week) to occur.

WEEK 4

THEME OVERCOMING ASSUMPTIONS

READING John 4

QUOTE ON THEME

"Thought from the eye closes the understanding, but thought from the understanding opens the eye."

—*Divine Love and Wisdom* 46

INSIGHTS / DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In the story of the Samaritan woman, the Lord provides an example of re-thinking assumptions. Jesus was raised a Jew. Jews at that time looked down on Samaritans, another ethnic group inhabiting the Holy Land, despite their shared religious traditions.

How does this story encourage you to re-consider assumptions?

ACTIVITY

Write down your reflections on the following questions. What assumptions do you carry about your own history, ethnicity, class, or relationships which limit your ability to find the "living water" the Lord offers? Do you make similar assumptions about others?

WEEK 5

THEME THE PARALYTIC WALKS

READING John 5

QUOTE ON THEME

"By the "healing of the sick" is signified the purifying of people from evils and the falsities of evil; by a "bed" is signified doctrine; and by "walking" is signified life."

—*Secrets of Heaven* 10360

INSIGHTS / DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What insights do the tasks from the third and fourth weeks give you concerning your own paralysis? How does the Lord's question, "What do you seek?" connect with His question "Do you want to be made well?"

ACTIVITY

Imagine your life without a particular bad habit or negative emotion that has paralyzed you. Write three pairs of sentences. The first in each pair should begin with, "What if I ...?" The second in each pair should begin with, "Then I can"

For example: "What if I walk through my fear of public speaking? Then I can share my story and make an impact."

WEEK 6

THEME THE BLIND SEE

READING John 9

QUOTE ON THEME

"Since spiritual sight (the sight of the intellect and therefore the mind) and physical sight (the sight of the eye and therefore the body) correspond to each other, every state of faith is comparable to a state of the eye and its sight. The states of true faith are comparable to all the healthy states of eyesight. The states of false faith are comparable to all the unhealthy states of eyesight."

—*True Christianity* 346

INSIGHTS / DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After the Lord rubbed mud on his eyes, the blind man had to walk a distance to wash at the pool of Siloam. That task could not have been done without a guide.

Who in your life has been a guide in a time of uncertainty and blindness?

ACTIVITY

Write a letter of gratitude to a person who helped you move forward on your life's path.

Afterward, review these questions: 1. What do I seek? 2. How can I get there? 3. From whom do I need help? 4. Whom might I be able to help?



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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.

Here are the 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.

About Swedenborg and Works Cited

Emanuel Swedenborg was an 18th century scientist and philosopher who continually studied the Word, later devoting his life to the revelation of the New Church. In the New Church we believe his later works are a divinely inspired revelation for the modern age, touching on all the different aspects of religion with a rational and common-sense approach. In this issue, the following works of Swedenborg are referenced: *Secrets of Heaven*, *Heaven and Hell*, *True Christianity*, *Spiritual Experiences*, *Married Love*, *Apocalypse Explained*, and *Divine Love and Wisdom*.

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The Lord's kingdom
consists in mutual love,
in which alone
peace resides.

—*Secrets of Heaven* 1038:2

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