

GRIEF AND ACCEPTANCE

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*“Despite my anger, I knew
God was looking after me.”*

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and acceptance p.6



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.

WELCOME

Invite trusted companions to hold you up when you no longer have the strength yourself.

There are times when the pain of grief is far more intense than any physical pain. I urge each of you, if you are in the throes of grief, to find support in God's Word and in other people. Invite trusted companions to hold you up when you no longer have the strength yourself. We may feel alone on our journey in life, but this is not true. The Lord and His angels are always with us and are manifest in the presence of friends, family, pastors, and sometimes even strangers.

In this issue we explore the very real process of grief and acceptance. Let the story of Julie Conaron lift you up and remind you to hold the big (eternal) picture in mind when facing loss (p. 6). Find strength and hope in the insightful and compassionate perspective Clark Echols shares on *The Journey of Grief* (p. 14). Gather some friends together, and explore a small book with a big message: *Reflections on Providence* by Frank Rose (p. 20).

I hope that you find comfort in the messages presented here. Draw courage and strength for the journey ahead, knowing that God is providing for you and that you are not alone.

Bronwen Henry

Bronwen Henry
General Church Outreach



The Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.

—DEUTERONOMY 31: 6

SEEKING ANSWERS

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When we are faced with loss, many questions surface. *Rev. Mark Allais* addresses some common questions regarding grief and the journey to acceptance.

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Why do bad things happen? Use this study guide (individually or with a group), based on a book by *Rev. Frank Rose*, to explore providence and witness God's presence in your life—even in difficult times.

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What's next?

Look for these upcoming issues:

- Addiction and Recovery
- Make Space for God
- Navigating Family Relationships



Grief and loss cannot be avoided in this life. **Rev. Mark Allais** responds to common questions that arise as a person navigates the stormy waters of grief.

Life is full of QUESTIONS

Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

—MATTHEW 11:28



photo by JARED ALLEN

Q IS GRIEVING OKAY?

a Grieving is a normal process we must all go through. Grief is our reaction to the overwhelming thoughts and feelings which swamp us when we experience a loss. When we think about grief we most commonly associate it with the death of a loved one, but we also experience grief in other ways. For example, we can experience real loss during a divorce, the end of an engagement, or other breakdowns in our relationships. How does one grieve in a healthy way?

Grief is healthy when it leads people to acknowledge, understand and accept their loss. The grieving process is hard work and filled with a lot of pain.

Q WHY IS ANGER SUCH A COMMON MANIFESTATION OF GRIEF?

a Bereaved people often express anger because they feel a need to blame someone for what has happened. In losing a loved one or relationship, they have also lost a portion of their life. Those of us standing by in support

should not try to dampen or control the anger of the bereaved. Allow them to let the anger out into the fresh air where it can dissipate.

Q WHEN WILL I FEEL BETTER?

a Grieving cannot take place unless we identify what we have lost. Following this, we need a mourning period in order to integrate the loss and emerge once more into life. There is no way to predict, collapse or shorten the grieving process. It must proceed at its own pace and in its own time.

Q I STILL FEEL CONNECTED TO THE PERSON WHO DIED. IS THAT POSSIBLE?

a Yes, this is possible! A human being inhabits the spiritual world and the natural world at the same time. Death does not separate married partners who have worked toward a true love of marriage. We remain connected to our partner in spirit until we can be reunited again after death. For this reason, married partners who loved each other tenderly often still feel connected after the death of one spouse. However, not everyone experiences the presence of his or her loved one. Whether we feel the presence of our loved one or not is no indication of how much we loved him or her. The Lord governs all things, and He knows what will be useful for our eternal happiness.

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

Q WILL I BE REUNITED WITH MY LOVED ONE WHEN I DIE?

a The New Church has powerful teachings about how we are united with others after we die. After death we can meet all our friends and acquaintances of this life, especially spouses and siblings, whenever we want to be near them. When we meet again, we will love each other more than we did in this world.

Q WHERE CAN I LEARN ABOUT WHAT MY LOVED ONE IS GOING THROUGH?

a The New Church draws its insight into heaven and its wonders from the theological work *Heaven and Hell* by Emanuel Swedenborg.

"They who dwell in heaven are continually advancing to the springtime of life and to a spring more and more delightful and happy the more thousands of years they live; and this to eternity, with increase according to the progress and degrees of love, charity, and faith.... In a word, to grow old in heaven is to grow young. Those who have lived in love to the Lord and in charity towards the neighbor become of such beautiful form in the other life." —*Heaven and Hell* 415

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR TO ORDER THIS BOOK, VISIT www.newchurch.org.)



Rev. Mark Allais is an Assistant to the Pastor at the Glenview New Church. For more information go to www.glenviewnewchurch.org.

With a journey marked by courage and deep faith, Julie Conaron shares her experience of loss and her confidence in God's plan for her future with her husband.



article photos from JULIE CONARON

An avid New Church woman all my life, my faith was sorely tested when my beloved husband was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS) in 2001. A friend wept when hearing the news, remarking, "You two are inseparable. How will you manage?" I had no idea. Twelve years earlier in Wales my dear mother-in-law had died of the disease, so I knew its fatal nature.

Unable to sleep for three nights, I kept crying to David, "But I don't want you to die!" His calm response was, "I don't think you have any control over it," which belies his sadness after realizing he would only have a short time left here, unable to physically see any but his first son married or to see his future grandchildren. David loved kids.

As I look back on the two years David had after those dreadful words, "You have ALS," I realize I lived a nightmare. I lived one day at a time, celebrating David's good days, but noticing the gradual removal of the things he loved and the relentless progress of the disease, despite heroic efforts at an alternative

medical clinic. The disease gradually kills the neurons that control the muscles. It has no known cause or cure. Eventually it targets the respiratory system, leading to death without a ventilator. Those initially choosing the ventilator often have it removed as it's really not living, and David knew that immediately.

David became unable to do the things we take for granted. He progressed from a cane to a walker, then to quadriplegia. His ability to swallow deteriorated until he could only drink thickened liquids. Even food became too difficult to eat. By the spring/summer of 2002 he had to stop attending church—the beloved contemporary service in Bryn Athyn in which he'd played such an active part.

David, an "atheist" when we met in college, had eventually become an ardent New Churchman, growing to love the teachings. The hardest thing about ALS was David's being unable to communicate. His last weekend in this world he was unintelligible so we had to use intuition, the final insult to a man who loved talking with others. Another ALS patient I started visiting a year after David died felt the same way. The last Christmas we all had together with David (2002) was spent in his room: bitter-

sweet, with many tears. We knew this was his last; he had been put on hospice care that fall.

THE SOLUTION

"Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He will strengthen your heart, wait I say on the Lord" (Psalm 27: 14).

This scripture passage inspired us both for 20 years, yet how was I going to be courageous? As David's natural body deteriorated, his spirituality increased amazingly. "I am a cheerful spirit in a dying body,"



he said, and he was. As he approached each new hurdle he was sad but then accepted it. He wept when he heard our third son was being married the next year, knowing he would not be there. But he recovered when I said, "Of course you will! You'll be with me!"

Yet with all this sadness, there was a lot of joy. The love the church community showed has stayed with me ever since: their shopping for us, bringing dinners, visiting David. Initially these friends came to help David, but, inspired by his spirituality, they found David helping them. These dear folks were showing charity in action: living their faith. In January of 2003 David's window of life here was

My husband's natural body deteriorated while his spirituality increased in the most amazing fashion.

I feel called to move out of my comfort zone and take risks to help others spiritually: to really live my religion.

getting smaller until it was restricted to just our bedroom. Everything else ceased to exist for him; I know he loved his family and friends and often thought of his parents who predeceased him. He felt his mother's presence whenever he had good thoughts.

As David's body deteriorated, I didn't want him to stay here. A couple of weeks before he died I begged the Lord to take him—otherwise I would die too (I was physically and mentally exhausted) and my prayer was answered. I wanted him to be free, even if it meant letting him go. Despite my anger I knew the Lord was really looking after me. Church services often unlocked my grief, which enabled others to comfort me: a most amazing nurturing.



that now. I told him his parents were waiting, but he was still anxious. So I told him how much I loved him, how much I would miss him, but how I wanted him to go. Each member of our family spent time alone with him. As he was dying our room became alive with caregivers, friends and family: a veritable sea of people who wanted to be with him. He died surrounded by loved ones sitting next to him holding his hands, even after his spirit had left.

I felt light—no more care-giving—and I was surrounded by loved ones. How did I deal with the “crash” after they left? I still grieve for my natural loss, but love feeling him with me. David and I had many wonderful years prior to his death. Before he died I asked him to “haunt” me after he left, to which he laughingly agreed. As his body deteriorated and our natural marriage was severed I felt as though something soft and gentle was holding us together; perhaps this was a new spiritual connection not apparent before.

We knew we wanted to be together forever, working hard trying to communicate better and following what the Lord taught. Through ten to fifteen years of marriage enrichment groups and many church summer camps, we enjoyed each other's company and loved going to church together. I always knew David

would be the first to die; I just didn't expect him to be quite so young (54). I wondered what the “spirit of the one who had died dwelling with the one still on this earth” could/would be like (*Married Love* 321). I didn't have long to wait.

THE OUTCOME

At the crematorium, watching David's earthly remains loaded into the furnace, wistfully thinking he was no longer there, I felt him stand behind me. I remember thinking “Oh, David's here!” then realizing just what that meant, which made me cry. He had not been able to hold me for months, had not stood for almost a year, but here he was standing “holding” my arms. Was this my imagination or real?



My answer now is real! I have felt him with me ever since and so have some of my kids. Sometimes it's as if I can reach out and touch him. Other times he seems more distant. Thoughts come into my mind that I sense are from him, and I get insights I didn't have before. I am convinced my desire to help others spiritually is from David. He had considered the ministry two years before he became ill.

My life is quite different from before. I am more sure of where I am going, even

in this new direction. I feel called to move out of my comfort zone and take risks to help others spiritually, to really live my religion. I believe David is my spiritual supporter in ways I can only imagine. I know the Lord needed David to be fully present in the spiritual world, even though it was so devastating, and since then I feel much more connected to that world. It's as though I have “one foot already there,” as a fellow widow described it. I feel I am getting closer to the spirit of the following verse from one of my favorite hymns:

“Humbly, Lord, we ask Thy blessing; keep us, Father, in Thy care. Let Thy grace descend upon us, as we turn to Thee in prayer.” ●

As his body deteriorated and our natural marriage was being severed I felt as though there was something soft and gentle holding us together; perhaps this was a new spiritual connection not apparent before.

David has been in the spiritual world for seven years: his natural body is dead, his spirit lives on in heaven.

The weekend before David died was one of contrasts: one day sleepy, the other restless. His last morning here was amazing. He asked to have all his sons with him then told me he was afraid to die (it took a long time to decipher all this). I know I quoted the 23rd Psalm to him even though I can't do

WHAT IS YOUR STORY?
How has your life been impacted by living New Christian spirituality?
Email: newchurchconnection@newchurch.org

Reconciling Anger at God

realchallenges

Many people feel angry at God after losing a loved one. How does a loved one overcome this anger?

realsupport

When Julia's son died in an accident, she felt devastated. She couldn't believe what had happened. She bargained and pleaded with God. She hoped each night that she would wake up and discover it was all a bad dream. Then one morning she awoke knowing he was gone, and waves of anger replaced the pleading thoughts. She was angry with everyone, but especially with God. "I don't deserve this!" she raged. "How could you do this to me?"

Her anger frightened her. How dare she be angry with God? She felt ashamed. She knew that in her church people believed God was loving, all-wise and powerful. He would not permit anything truly bad to happen. Who was she to question His goodness? She tried to tell herself to accept her loss and to move on, but the feelings of anger didn't go away.

She tried to tell herself to accept her loss and to move on, but the feelings of anger didn't go away.

People often respond to loss with anger, particularly anger at God.

Rev. Glenn Alden shares the journey of a woman working through her anger at God following the death of her son.

She began to shut down emotionally and withdraw into herself. She resigned from coordinating costumes for the Christmas tableaux, and she couldn't bring herself to go to church. Her friends noticed, and one of them offered to take her to the bereavement group that met at the church on Tuesday evenings.

She wasn't planning to say anything that night, but as she listened to others speak about their losses, she decided

she could talk about the loss of her son. As she spoke, all the anger came to the surface, and with tears she explained she felt betrayed by God and incredibly angry at Him.

The facilitator, Janna, put her hand on Julia's shoulder. "It's okay to be angry at God," she said. "He loves you and your son, and He understands your grief. He expects you to be angry, especially in the beginning." Janna went on to tell Julia that in states of loss, people often speak



photo by JARED ALDEN

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

—PSALM 51:10

angrily at God or say hurtful things to others. The Writings for the New Church explain that the angels do not notice it when we speak out in anger toward God during states of trial. They understand that the person is stretched to the limit, and those words and feelings do no harm (*Secrets of Heaven* 8165).

"And remember," Janna said, "how Jesus himself, in the throes of temptation, cried out, 'My God, Why have you forsaken me?' If even Jesus would speak against the Father in trials, would He not understand and forgive our anger when we are faced with terrible loss?"

Janna told Julia that it is normal for people to go through spiritual trials as a result of a loss, to question their faith, and to go through denial or anger toward God. She had seen many people become much stronger in their faith after they had worked through the loss. She said,

"I think it is part of the process. The Lord didn't will the death of our loved ones, but He is able to use these life-shaking events to help us grow spiritually."

When she went home that night, Julia promised herself that she would honor the journey she was on. She knew her tears were good for her; they helped her to connect with her deep love for her son and her sense of loss. She also decided to accept the anger, just as she accepted the tears, and to allow the feelings to come. She told herself that the angry words

and thoughts actually came from her love of her son and her love of God. They testified to her need to understand and accept, and God would give her that in time. She believed God would forgive her, and she prayed to be able to forgive herself. ●

The Lord regards nothing else in a person's prayers than his heart.

—*Secrets of Heaven* 10143



Rev. Glenn Alden is the Pastor at the Sunrise Chapel in Tucson, Arizona. For more information go to www.sunrisechapel.org.

Readers from around the world
respond to the question

“What words from scripture have brought you comfort in a difficult time?”



Nothing is permitted unless
some good may come of it.

–*Secrets of Heaven* 6489

*The Lord is in control of everything. If I
give over control to Him and allow myself
to be carried along in the stream of Provi-
dence, I will see how the Lord is providing
for me and my happiness.*

–USA

So long as a person is in the
world, he is in the middle be-
tween heaven and hell.

–*Doctrine of Life* 19

*When I'm anxious, this teaching helps me
to sort out my thoughts and emotions.
On reflection it sometimes is very obvious
which thoughts are not from heaven, and
this helps me to recognize and reject the
lies and distortions of the hells.*

–USA

Trust in the Lord, and do
good; dwell in the land, and
feed on His faithfulness.

–*Psalms* 37: 3

*This verse has helped me see a way
forward when it has been hard to move
on from grief and loss. The first part is
to trust that the Lord will be with you
through your loss. The practical advice to
“do good” is especially healing—when I
engage in an activity which helps others
it helps me realize that I still have a use to
perform, and it definitely feeds my soul.*

–South Africa

God is unceasingly present.

–*True Christianity* 743

*The Lord is always with me, in dark times
and in happy ones.*

–USA

Peace I leave with you; my
peace I give you. I do not give
to you as the world gives. Do
not let your hearts be troubled
and do not be afraid.

–*John* 14:27

*How close the Lord is to us, really pow-
erful in times of self-doubt and inner
turmoil.*

–USA

....Even though I walk through
the valley of the shadow of
death, I will fear no evil, for
you are with me, your rod and
staff, they comfort me.

–*The 23rd Psalm*

*Some of the most comforting words of
peace and promise at the time of separa-
tion from a loved one.*

–USA

Then the Lord answered Job
out of the storm. He said:
Who is this that darkens my
counsel with words without
knowledge?... Where were you
when I laid the earth's founda-
tion?... Can you bring forth the
constellations in their seasons
or lead out the bear with its
cubs....

–*Job* 38

*The whole book of Job is worth reading
but I especially like chapter 38 when God
answers Job. It gave me a way to accept
and cope with my sorrow. It made me
realize that I must trust the Lord's provi-
dence and not expect to understand or
have an overview of everything that hap-
pens. I am not God, I must accept that He
takes care of things.*

–Sweden

The Journey of Grief

Everyone's experience of loss is unique.

Reverend Clark Echols explores the journey of grief and provides compassionate insight into this difficult process.

The teachings for the New Church explain that a belief in a God of love will carry a person through loss to a life that is not diminished, even if there is something missing.

Grief is a person's spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical reaction to loss, which can begin before the loss actually occurs and persists until the grief reaction is no longer noticed. People in the helping

professions know that a person's experience of grief is short or long, mild or disruptive, mental or physical, depending on both obvious and subtle influences. You have experienced grief. Perhaps a favorite piece of clothing wore out, you moved away from friends, or a parent died. Perhaps you experienced panic, or depression, or despair, or sadness, or nostalgia, or anger, or something else. Maybe you experienced foggy thinking, an absence of emotions, uncontrolled emotions, a loss of appetite, joint pain, or any number of other sensations.

Your experience of grief will be unique, even though it may include states others experience. That you experience your own grief is wonderful, actually, because the Lord is accommodating His divine love and wisdom to you in a way specific to your spiritual and physical needs. This is

the first observation from New Church ideas that can help you. The Lord actively leads you through a process which is governed by His rules of love. This will progress to completion, and He will return you to a balanced state in which you can again experience joy.

As the New Church teaches, love creates and maintains a spiritual connection; the tighter the connection, the more the loss affects us and impacts our spiritual and natural worlds.

Perhaps you have experienced a sudden loss: a pet died accidentally, or you were fired without warning. The experience shocks you, spiritually and physically, disrupting thought and even movement. These effects of the shock of the loss are so significant that researchers found they can be measured in the brain. Perhaps the Lord wants you to stop everything for a moment rather than do something damaging to your process of recovery. Typically, a grieving person either does almost nothing for some time, or merely "goes through the motions" on emotional

autopilot. During this static stage, your identity is protected, allowing you to continue through the process without requiring permanent changes to your personality in order to cope. The Lord preserves your eternal welfare, even though you have lost something integral to your spiritual life.

Grieving includes using coping mechanisms to deal with your loss. Not everyone cries, but everyone needs the sphere of love around them. Like many, you may turn inward, reflecting on a picture bigger than you have ever considered before. The Word explains that this happens because what is mortal is put right next to what you want to be immortal in your mind and heart. You sense your own mortality as a new reality. If you experience sudden loss, you may feel a new fear of the future—a worry that you could

Not everyone cries, but everyone needs the sphere of love around them.

The Lord preserves your eternal welfare, even though you have lost something integral to your spiritual life.

die tomorrow. You may feel anxiety that you have not become a good person or that you have not achieved your life's goals.

This tension creates an emotional rollercoaster that comes from resisting the Lord's care, His providence, which leaves us unsatisfied and weary. The ride only slows and levels out as you acknowledge the reality of the loss and give yourself permission to experience sadness, loneliness or helplessness. Your intellect may find it hard to believe, but the fact is that when you let go and grieve—an act of will—you let God carry you through the process to the end of the ride, when you can walk on your own in the joy of being on solid ground.

Many who grieve notice that the story of the loss runs around in their minds in bits and pieces. Perhaps you have experienced this. Some of the bits are accurate memories of what happened, and you can feel badly, even responsible, for the loss. Some of the memories are inaccurate and cause you unnecessary distress. One way to discover the difference, and to be able to put the story "to bed," is to tell the story. Of course, there will be more analysis, and perhaps regrets and resentment. But when these are put in the context of your eternal life and the eternal life of your loved one (if that is what you are grieving), the Lord puts the pieces together in a way that helps you overcome any distress. Given time and

cooperation, the Lord will finish the puzzle of your life, and you can enjoy a whole picture.

Forgiveness is an important stage of grief for most people. When you forgive another, you let go of a burden. When you experience a loss, it is common to have trouble forgiving both others and oneself. Jesus teaches that forgiving is a spiritual act. But He points out again and again that to the degree that you spiritually let go of any thought or feeling that keeps you from forgiving, to that degree you find security and joy. When you grieve, you can become immersed in the pain of anger, resentment, regret and recrimination. These are all tied to merely natural thoughts and feelings. It is important to face what you really think and feel—what you label good and label bad. When you do, you welcome the Lord's forgiveness and can then find the strength of heart and clarity of mind to forgive yourself and others.

By letting go and forgiving, you can begin to rebuild your life. Your work now becomes finding your own meaning for your life. Many have a change in faith. Many lose the religious faith that they had held. Many find a new confidence in their faith. The teachings for the New Church explain that a belief in a God of love will carry a person through a loss to a life that is not diminished, even if there is something missing. People who have an inaccurate idea of God (for instance,

that He punishes us for our wrongdoings) will not have this resource and will find other ways of processing their grief. Of course, many of these means will work to some extent. But many of them, like abusing alcohol, are not only self-destructive, but do not allow the process of grief to proceed.

You can take any number of actions to find meaning in your life. Many people begin new hobbies or return to old ones. Others take on opportunities to be of service. Some become better at their vocation, confirming their delight in doing something they love to do. In this way a person participates in redefining life. Thankfully, the Lord has provided that your loss does not diminish who you are: your personality and your place in His kingdom. However, YOUR world HAS changed! Your place in it has changed. Like an intricate mobile that has lost one

of its weights, you experience a jangling, jarring tossing until the new balance is found, and slowly the bouncing settles down. There is balance, but it is a new configuration.

The Lord designed your spirit to seek and eventually achieve this balance. His loving care is always lifting you, countering the depressing effects of your loss. The warmth of His love continually radiates in your spirit. The process of grief is designed to bring your consciousness out of the cold and dark of loss into His presence again. You again take on the responsibility to live your life to its fullest potential.

The stages of grief are predictable but not uniform. They vary among circumstances and people. You have at hand a number of resources. The New Church faith may help you understand what is going on and explain why you feel the anger, despair, sadness, emptiness and pain. The Lord, especially through His Word, allows you to experience the feelings even as He alleviates them. The angels in your life, the loved ones who walk with you, hold you up when your knees buckle. There are many books and pieces of music that salve our wounds. Use them all, and your particular and unique grief process will proceed to a conclusion the Lord has designed just for you in the time He has provided. ●

By letting go and forgiving, you can begin to rebuild your life.



Rev. Clark Echols is a counselor and pastor of the Glendale New Church. Learn more at www.newchurch-cincy.org.

Bible Story

John 20: 11-18

"But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her."

Recognizing and Embracing GOD

Photo by CATHY SCHMARR



Be still
and know
that I am God.

– PSALM 46:10

Photo by VICTORIA KUINE

Going Deeper Insight

—By Rev. Jeremy Simons

The Easter story is recounted in slightly different ways in the four gospels of the New Testament. Jesus' words to Mary in this account fit with other details of the story and hold a message about your relationship with the Lord.

In the Matthew account, for example, Mary Magdalene is accompanied by "the other Mary" when they come to the tomb at dawn. They experience an earthquake, they see an angel descend from heaven, they watch him roll back the stone, they see the reaction of the guards, and they receive a relatively full explanation from the angel. Their fear and grief is replaced with joy, and they run from the tomb to tell others. As they are running they meet Jesus. They recognize Him and hold Him by the feet, worshiping Him.

The account in John is different. Mary comes to the sepulcher alone while it is still dark and discovers the stone rolled away. After fetching John and Peter, who investigate the scene, she lingers behind. She does not experience the earthquake, see the angel come down, or see him roll back the stone. She weeps and looks into the tomb. Only then does she see the an-

gels, but they don't explain anything to her, they only ask her questions. When she does see the Lord she does not recognize Him, and He asks her not to touch Him.

Both stories illustrate Mary's deep love for Jesus. But in the John account Mary is in the dark, she is alone, she does not understand, she lingers at the tomb looking into it, and she does not recognize Jesus, despite her love. In Matthew she is not alone, it is dawn, she sees what happens and understands, she does not linger at the tomb but runs to tell others, and she immediately recognizes Jesus and holds Him.

What is the message? In life we often feel alone and in the dark, and our focus can tend toward the things represented by the tomb in this story—*anxious, self-centered, and worldly concerns*. These hold us back from recognizing and embracing the God we adore. But if we can gain an understanding of what life is about, and focus on others, Jesus meets us on the way. ●

Every person is allotted a place in the heavens in accordance with his idea of God. For that idea is like a touchstone used to test gold and silver, that is, it tests the quality of good and truth in a person.

—True Christianity 163



Jeremy Simons is Pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church in Pennsylvania. For more information go to www.brynthynchurch.org.

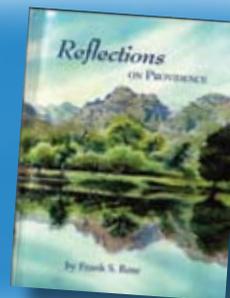
Explore PROVIDENCE

Use this five week overview as a guide for individual or group study.

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Order *Reflections on Providence* online today at store.newchurch.org or call 267-502-4980.



Divine providence focuses on eternal matters, and focuses on temporal matters only as they coincide with eternal ones.

-Divine Providence 214

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.
- > 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.

At the beginning of your meeting have participants write questions on scraps of paper. Put these in a bowl, and draw from them to get the discussion going!

	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5
THEME	What is Providence?	Spiritual Laws	Eternity in Mind	God Is Accepting	A Daily Choice
TASK	Work to unite your daily life with your goals and priorities. Observe the ways you can see providence in the process.	Look back and reflect on the role of providence in your life.	Do your best in the present; let go of control.	Spend time in prayer showing gratitude for God's loving presence and inviting Him to work in your life.	Choose to accept the goodness that is constantly available to you.
READING	pgs. 8-29	pgs. 30-59	pgs. 60-71	pgs. 72-93	pgs. 94-111
FROM REFLECTIONS ON PROVIDENCE	"The Lord runs the universe from love, using wisdom, and this government is what is called 'providence.'" p. 10	"It is so refreshing to think that there is order in the universe, and that the painful and difficult things of life can be understood once we gain some idea of the spiritual laws of creation." p. 32	"All I have to do is to use my mind and heart to the best of my ability, resist negativity and lies, and let providence do its work." p. 63	"God permits your mistakes, and also provides for your spiritual growth. These are the two sides of the divine providence." p. 82 "People who live according to the order of creation receive more from life, and from God. But whatever you do the providence of God will always be with you." p. 93	"For if we remember that we are only vessels, we can say: 'I choose to receive only what is good.'" p. 99 "Even though God has created a place for each one of us in heaven, it is up to us to accept that gift or reject it. This gives each one of us a task in life—the task of choosing heaven." p. 102
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	Can you see the ways that God is leading you to happiness? What map(s) do you respect as a guide in life? Do you follow it/them?	Does our freedom as humans give you a stronger belief in God, or make you question His existence? Has reading the Bible affected your life? In what way? Do you feel able to look at your past and see ways that providence was working in your life?	What are some ways that you get caught up in material matters and how can you bring your focus back to things with long term significance? What are your top priorities in life? Success? Wealth? Share ways that you need to work on shifting or balancing your priorities.	Do you feel a fear of failure is preventing you from working on your spiritual life? Have you ever felt that God was not leading you? Do you believe there are things you could do that would cause God to abandon you?	In what ways have you experienced being a vessel? What ways can you feel the Lord leading your life?



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.

The New Church (General Church of the New Jerusalem) has congregations around the world. All people are welcome to join in worship and participate in the life and community of the church.

FOCUS ON THE NEW CHURCH IN Glendale, Ohio USA

The Glendale New Church serves the Cincinnati, Ohio area. In a beautiful sanctuary, people receive life-changing truths which inspire and refresh them. The church offers services to congregants and the greater community which bring people together and connect them to heaven.

photo by CLARK ECHOLS



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...and Get Connected!

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: *True Christianity*, *Heaven and Hell*, *Married Love*, *Secrets of Heaven*, *Doctrine of Life* and *Divine Providence*.

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They who are in the stream of providence are all the time carried along toward everything that is happy, whatever may be the appearance of the means; and that those are in the stream of providence who put their trust in the Divine and attribute all things to Him.

—*Secrets of Heaven* 8478



Photo by LUCAS MERGEN

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