The Journey of Grief p.14

Explore Providence:
See God’s presence in your life—
even in difficult times p.20

“Despite my anger, I knew
God was looking after me.”
A personal story of loss
and acceptance p.6
GRIEF and ACCEPTANCE

The Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.
—Deuteronomy 31: 6

Welcome

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
General Church Outreach

What’s next?

Look for these upcoming issues:

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cover photo by: JARED ALDEN
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.

**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.

**Q** **Is grieving okay?**

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?

**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.**

**Q** **What is anger such a common manifestation of grief?**

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 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.

**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 in support should not try to dampen or control the anger of the bereaved.**

**Q** **When will I feel better?**

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.

**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.**

**Q** **Where can I learn about what my loved one is going through?**

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.)

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**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.**

**Q** **Will I be reunited with my loved one when I die?**

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.

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**After death we can meet all our friends and acquaintances of this life, especially spouses and siblings, whenever we want to be near them.**

**Q** **I still feel connected to the person who died. Is that possible?**

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.

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**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.**

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

-Matthew 11:28
A
n 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. 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.

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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 truly looking after me. Church services were answered. I ed) and my prayer mentally exhaust- 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.

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 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 communi- cate 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 imagi- nation 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.
Reconciling Anger at God

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 told Julia that it is normal for people to go through spiritual trials as a result of a loss. "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

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

—Psalm 51:10
Readers from around the world respond to the question

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

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

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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 foundation?... 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 provision and not expect to understand or have an overview of everything that happens. I am not God, I must accept that He takes care of things.
–Sweden

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 Providence, 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 between 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

...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 separation from a loved one.
–USA

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–Sweden
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...
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 solace 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.
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.”

Going Deeper Insight

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 angels, 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.

Going Deeper Insight

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

Recognizing and Embracing GOD

Be still and know that I am God.

— Psalm 46:10

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

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**WEEK 1**

**What is Providence?**

- Work to unite your daily life with your goals and priorities. Observe the ways you can see providence in the process.

*Readings: pgs. 8-29*

**Spiritual Laws**

- Look back and reflect on the role of providence in your life.

*Readings: pgs. 30-59*

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**WEEK 2**

**Eternity in Mind**

- Do your best in the present; let go of control.

*Readings: pgs. 60-71*

**God Is Accepting**

- Spend time in prayer showing gratitude for God’s loving presence and inviting Him to work in your life.

*Readings: pgs. 72-93*

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**WEEK 3**

**A Daily Choice**

- Choose to accept the goodness that is constantly available to you.

*Readings: pgs. 94-111*

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**WEEK 4**

**What is Providence?**

- 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?

**Spiritual Laws**

- 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?

**Eternity in Mind**

- 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.

**God Is Accepting**

- 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?

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**WEEK 5**

**A Daily Choice**

- In what ways have you experienced being a vessel?
- What ways can you feel the Lord leading your life?

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM REFLECTIONS ON PROVIDENCE READING TASK THEME**

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!
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.
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