

# New Church

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## Living and Growing Spiritually

**50**  
spiritual  
growth  
ideas

page 12

**A New Outlook  
on Growth  
in Marriage** page 18

**Seeking Answers**

Is there an unforgiveable sin?  
Can evolution and faith coexist?  
What is spiritual growth? page 6

**Realize  
Your  
Spiritual  
Freedom**

page 15

www.newchurch.org



# New Church Teachings



## Living and Growing Spiritually

- The New Church is based on the Word of God, as revealed in the Old and New Testaments and the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.
- There is one loving, personal God, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The life of religion is to follow the Ten Commandments, and to act honestly and faithfully in our daily occupations.
- The Word of God (the Bible) has a deeper level of meaning, teaching about the Lord's essential nature and a person's spiritual development.
- Each of us continues life as a complete person immediately after the death of the body.
- God does not judge us, but we judge ourselves by what we love and how we live.
- People of every faith are saved if they live sincerely according to their religion.

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## New Church Connection

Exists to inspire, inform, and connect people who are interested in the New Church. Every issue will have background information on New Church teachings; inspirational content from personal testimonies and quotes from the Word; and information about the organized New Church (the General Church of the New Jerusalem), and how to get connected. Each issue will have a theme that helps enrich your spiritual journey.

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# In This Issue

## 6 Seeking Answers

A New Church perspective on spiritual growth, evolution, and forgiveness.

## 8 Changing Lives

Sparrow Gabriel shares her story of embracing the New Church.

## 12 50 Spiritual Growth Ideas

Not sure where to begin to work on living and growing spiritually? These fifty ideas will get you started.

## 15 Realize Your Spiritual Freedom

How can you move out of captivity and into spiritual freedom? Tom Kline explores how a biblical story sheds light on each of our spiritual journeys.

## 18 The Journey of Marriage

Contrary to the images depicted in fairytales of marriage as a carefree state of unending bliss, marriage is a journey that requires hard work and commitment.

## 23 Summary of Beliefs

An overview of New Church teachings



In *Observing Spirit* Peter Rhodes presents a practical guide to spiritual progress that stresses personal responsibility and utilizes tools from the philosopher G.I. Gurdjieff's spiritual method called "The Work" as well as theology from Emanuel Swedenborg. Each chapter contains weekly tasks and meditations for group or individual use. Available online today at [store.newchurch.org](http://store.newchurch.org).

# Welcome

## Living and Growing Spiritually

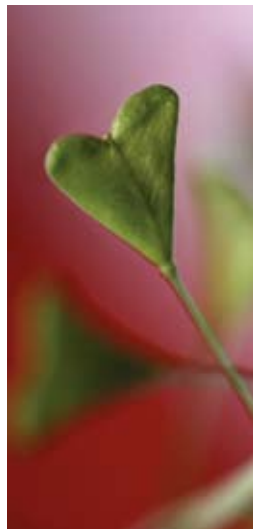
Many people around the world are looking for ways to make positive change; in their country, environment, community and family. As Ghandi said “we must be the change we want to see in the world.”

In this issue, we are focused on supporting you in your individual spiritual growth, with hopes that this will transform your relationships, family, community, environment, country and ultimately the world.

Are you looking for ways to make positive change today? See the idea list on p. 12 for places to get started. Are you feeling stuck? Explore the article on “Realizing Your Spiritual Freedom” on p. 15. Feeling discouraged that change is not possible? Find hope and direction in Thane Glenn’s article on p. 20. Feeling alone on your journey? Read Sparrow Gabriel’s story of finding support and community through spiritual growth on p. 8.

Spiritual growth can feel overwhelming, even on a good day. Fortunately, you are not alone. Take steps today to find support to help you live and grow spiritually.

Bronwen Henry  
General Church Outreach



Within each of us there is great potential for good. Take steps today to bring the good (the angel in you) out.



“You were born to be an angel.”

*Last Judgment 20*

# Quotes on Spiritual Growth

Your ultimate aims and intentions in this life determine where you are in the next life. *Heavenly Secrets* 3570

The reason why nobody can come into the kingdom of God unless they have been born again is that people... are born into evils of every kind, with the faculty of becoming spiritual by the removal of these evils; and unless they become spiritual they cannot come into heaven. *Divine Providence* 83

**Through  
regeneration a  
person receives life  
itself from the Lord.**  
*Heavenly Secrets* 933

You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. Deuteronomy 8:2

I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. John 11:25-26

*Who  
said it?*

**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 very rational and common sense approach.  
See [www.newchurch.org/about/swedenborg](http://www.newchurch.org/about/swedenborg) for more information.

# Seeking Answers

Questions about Spiritual Growth, Salvation and More

**Q.** What is spiritual growth?

**A.** Spiritual growth is the process by which we become better people and, ultimately, angels. Spiritual growth begins at birth and continues throughout life to eternity. We grow spiritually through self-examination, shunning evils, and looking to the Lord for help.

**Q.** I'm trying to be a better person, but fall into bad habits. What can help?

**A.** Many people struggle with falling into old habits and wanting to move out of them. Try to create an environment in which you can be successful: find reminders to help you avoid old habits; spend time in prayer; most importantly find a spiritual community that can support you to make positive and healthy changes. In the New Church we strive to create spiritual communities that help individuals to take steps forward in personal and spiritual growth.

**Q.** How can the Bible help me?

**A.** Every time we read the Bible, meditate on it, and try to apply its principles, we are connected to angelic wisdom. If we go to the Bible with a humble heart, looking to be led by the Lord, He will use the words we read to help us see the path to heaven and happiness.

**Q.** Is the Bible relevant to life?

**A.** Yes! The New Church teaches that the Bible was given because each story contains an inner spiritual lesson that mirrors our every struggle and every triumph. This inner meaning was revealed in the 18th century to Emanuel Swedenborg, and it is taught every Sunday in New Church congregations around the world.

Science and religion: in harmony or conflict?



**Q.** Is believing in the natural history of the world and evolution, as science describes it, compatible with faith in the New Church?

**A.** Many New Church people think of evolution as a plausible explanation for how providence achieved the development of the physical world. Swedenborg does not mention evolution directly—he lived and died before the theory of evolution was first articulated. Swedenborg does clearly state that the Bible's creation story is not intended

as a literal account of physical creation; what Genesis says is true, and its truth is spiritual rather than physical in nature. It tells of the gradual steps of our “regeneration” or rebirth as spiritual and angelic people. A compelling aspect of New Church faith to many people is that it harmonizes with a scientific viewpoint.

### Q. What is repentance?

A. “Repentance is...confessing one’s sins and with a humble heart praying that they may be forgiven, desisting from doing them, and leading a new life in accordance with the commandments of charity and faith” (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 161).

**Q. In Matthew 12:32 it says, “whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” Is the doubt I sometimes feel a case of this unforgivable sin?**

A. We all have doubts sometimes. Swedenborg reports that he himself experienced doubts about the value of his own Writings when certain negative spirits were influencing his mind. Swedenborg teaches that there are two kinds of doubt: negative and affirmative. Negative doubt is tearing something apart, mocking it, never giving it a fair chance. Affirmative doubt is

when we ponder something that doesn’t make sense to us yet, but we give it the benefit of the doubt, or when we have new, challenging questions in our minds about things we used to take for granted. During affirmative doubt our ideas and beliefs are stretched and made more living and useful; it is a normal, if uncomfortable, part of spiritual growth.

As for the challenging biblical passage from Matthew, it has quite a different inner meaning than the literal surface meaning. A clue to the inner meaning lies two verses later: “Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things?” What is referred to there as an unforgivable sin is not doubt; it is being a viper at heart, malicious, cold, and deadly, but pretending to be holy in order to take advantage of people. The Lord is tender love, pure mercy, and unending forgiveness. He is able to forgive any and all sin. The lack of forgiveness is our issue. If we become a cold-hearted viper in “sheep’s clothing”, to mix metaphors, that is a particularly nasty spiritual condition. In that state we cut ourselves off from what is good and true and refuse to accept Divine forgiveness that showers us at every moment and seeks to bring us to a better state.

### Q. Who is saved?

A. Everyone is saved who has lived well according to the precepts of their religious beliefs.

# Changing Lives

In each issue we include stories of lives changed by the teachings of the New Church. In this issue Sparrow Gabriel shares the ways that she has found a spiritual home in the New Church, as told to Abigail Echols

**P**eople come to find the New Church from all different backgrounds and church experiences. Sporadically attending an Episcopal church as a child, Sparrow never felt that the religion resonated with her. Although she went through confirmation classes, Sparrow realized that “it didn’t speak to me at all.” When it came to the actual confirmation service she told her pastor that she didn’t want to go through it. He was surprised, but she was adamant and knew that this religion was not something she was ready to commit to believing in.

After getting married and having kids of her own, Sparrow decided that she wanted to find a church. “I have some good friends who go to The New Church of Boulder Valley,” Sparrow said. They invited her to come, and immediately she felt a difference. After visiting many churches of a variety of denominations, Sparrow enjoyed the comfortable and welcoming feeling at The New Church. Sparrow and her family were able to participate in the service and understood what to expect even though they were new.


After her initial interest, Sparrow decided to continue attending The New Church of Boulder Valley and found the support for spiritual growth she had been lacking. She found a community of people interested in real spiritual growth—in examining themselves thoroughly and realistically, and learning how to improve. “Sometimes it can be really daunting to think ‘Ok, now I’m going to spiritually grow,’” Sparrow said. But the people in the New Church “helped guide me and helped me stay on track. The sense of community is very strong in our church.”

Sparrow Gabriel and her family



# Life Faith Action

Quotations from the teachings of the  
New Church and thoughts on  
how to bring these ideas into life.



Divine Providence regards eternal things,  
and not worldly things except so far as they  
make one with eternal things.

*Divine Providence 214*

When faced with a challenging situation  
consider its role in eternity. Is it still a big  
deal? What concerns in life are distracting  
you from a more eternal focus; consider  
how you can simplify and regain a spiritual  
focus.

Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow  
will worry about its own things.  
Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.  
Matthew 6:34

Every time a worrying thought enters your  
mind, take a deep breathe and hand it over  
to God. Pray to the Lord. Thank Him for  
caring for you every moment, now and  
forever.

So far as you approach and draw near to God, so far does God approach and draw near to you.

*True Christian Religion 80*

Create a space for God in your life. Take a step toward Him. Look for His presence in your life. If you are having trouble letting God in, ask Him for help.



Regeneration without truths that teach and lead, would be like navigation on the great ocean without a rudder, or without a mariner's compass and charts.

*True Christian Religion 620*

What areas in your life are in need of more direction and navigational tools? Make time today to read from the Bible, even one verse. Invite God to reveal insights and tools to you through His Word.

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel. Mark 1:15

We have the opportunity right now to start making positive changes in our lives: "Actual repentance is to examine oneself, to recognize one's sins, to confess them before God, and thus begin a new life" (*True Christian Religion 561*).



## Continued from page 8

Something that adds to the sense of community for Sparrow is that “everyone is learning. Even the man there preaching is learning.” There is no pretence that the pastor is separate from or different than the people in his congregation, and to Sparrow this was a new experience compared to the other churches she had visited. “We’re all trying to figure [life] out—we’re all working really hard,” Sparrow said. “There is an honesty here about what it’s like to try to live a better life and improve our relationships with each other and with God.”

This atmosphere of growth within the church community is especially important to Sparrow’s spiritual growth because of her experiences as a child: “growing up I used to know who was really religious. I used to look at those people and think ‘I don’t look anything like them. They’re lucky to have God in their lives. I guess their lives aren’t possible for me.’” Growing up Sparrow felt that she “was not deserving of a spiritual life” in the same way that they were. But, since attending services at The New Church of Boulder Valley, Sparrow said that she has “been able to shed the image of what I thought I would have to look like in order to have God in my life.”

**“There is an honesty here about what it’s like to try to live a better life and improve our relationships with each other and with God.”**

This last year and a half of changes and spiritual growth started for Sparrow when she attended a special Passover service at the church, where they enacted the story of the Last Supper, including the process of foot washing. This experience was profound and humbling to Sparrow in a way that allowed her to connect very personally to religion. “The humble nature of washing someone else’s feet. That’s what Jesus did,” Sparrow said. “I had never seen Jesus in that way. I realized just how important Jesus’ teachings are and how important it is to stay connected.” Many profound connections were made during this service, as Sparrow looked at the life of Jesus Christ and realized the ways that their lives were similar—even Jesus had to grow and change.

Many changes have taken place for Sparrow over the last year and a half, and she has found a church that makes sense in her life. It helps her to grow personally and spiritually, and provides a community that supports her in doing this. After experiencing such amazing changes and finally finding a church, Sparrow said that she feels sure that “this is where I belong.” ■

# 50 Spiritual Growth Ideas



Spiritual growth can seem like a lot of work, or it can seem kind of ambiguous. You might be thinking “Where do I even begin?” Here are a few simple ideas to get you started.

1. Open a Bible, read the first verse you see, and reflect on its application to life.
2. Count your blessings.
3. Volunteer with children.
- 4. Plan to participate in a special ceremony (baptism, holy supper, confirmation, blessing on marriage, etc.) to renew your commitment to the Lord.**
5. Spend time on your knees.
6. Share your beliefs.
7. Reflect on a life struggle and how you want to move forward. Share these thoughts with a trusted friend.
8. Attend worship in a New Church.
9. Meditate on God’s Word.
10. Ask a friend to hold you accountable and encourage you on your journey.
11. Set a goal (to exercise, eat healthy, give up sugar, etc.) and observe the spiritual work needed to keep this goal.
12. Start a small group to discuss and work on living spiritually.
13. Take the Holy Supper.

14. Ask for feedback from friends and family on how you can be a better friend, sibling, parent, etc.
15. Start a garden, and consider the bad habits you need to weed out of your life.
16. Think of ways to serve an age group or state different than your own (teens, newlymarrieds, the elderly, etc.).
17. At the end of the day, examine the events that took place and your motivations. Consider what went well and how you could have made better choices.
18. Leave your comfort zone and compel yourself to do something good for someone else even if it is scary.
- 19. Think of a chore you dislike and do it without being asked or complaining.**
20. Purchase a Bible that you can read regularly and take notes in, etc.



21. Schedule time to do a kind act for someone in need.
22. Volunteer at your local church.
23. Set an intention to not complain for a day, week, month, etc., and keep it.
24. Find or lead a spiritual growth group that supports you in becoming a better person.
25. Read a gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John in the New Testament) and reflect on how it applies to your life.



50.

Spend quiet time in prayer:

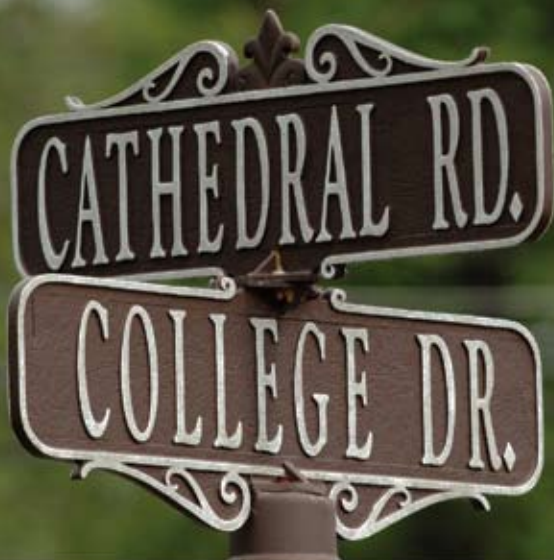
- 1) Acknowledge all of your blessings from the Lord
- 2) Identify areas to grow and improve
- 3) Ask the Lord for help

26. Donate to a worthy cause.
27. Think of a way to honor your mother and father (even if they are no longer living) and do it!
28. Start a book club with a spiritually oriented book.
29. Forgive.
30. Avoid sarcasm.
- 31. Memorize scripture with a friend, set goals and deadlines. Try starting with a favorite verse.**
32. Visit with family/spouse/friends in the evening. Inquire about the highs and lows in their day and share your own.
33. When feeling impatient take a breathe and appreciate the present.
34. Start or join a Bible study group.

35. Read from the Old Testament (perhaps one Psalm a day)—what lessons are there for your life?
36. Purposefully appreciate someone with whom you have had conflict.
37. In conflict, count to ten before acting.
38. Keep a journal reflecting on your personal and spiritual growth.

39. Read a book that addresses spiritual questions.
40. Get involved in a local church.
41. Focus on a commandment each day.
42. Read sacred scripture from different religions to broaden your outlook on approaches to spiritual growth.
43. Defer to another's preferences on what to do for fun.
44. Read from the Writings for the New Church.
45. Pick a bad habit and commit to stopping it altogether.
- 46. Attend a place of worship of a different faith than your own.**
47. Resist negativity when traveling or driving your car.
48. Work hard at your job and find ways to be happy in your service.
49. Ask for help when you need it.

-EKL, ARE, and BMH



# BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE

Welcome to Bryn Athyn College where  
Spirituality intersects with Academia.

At Bryn Athyn College we will help you develop a rock-solid belief system, based on the core values of the world's great religions. But more importantly we will encourage you to live according to your beliefs—to be a person of integrity, honor and courage. The true test of who you are is not a matter of theology; nor is it a matter of your cultural background or religious affiliation. Rather it is a matter of how you apply your beliefs to life.

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[www.brynathyn.edu](http://www.brynathyn.edu)

## Simply Profound

*New Church Foundations* is a workbook designed to serve people who are exploring questions about God, life after death, the Bible, and spiritual growth, and who are interested in the New Church perspective on these ideas.

All can benefit from exploring the themed articles and quotations and from practicing spiritual growth by participating in the activities included in the workbook. Order today, New Church Bookstore: email [bookstore@newchurch.org](mailto:bookstore@newchurch.org); call 267-502-4980.

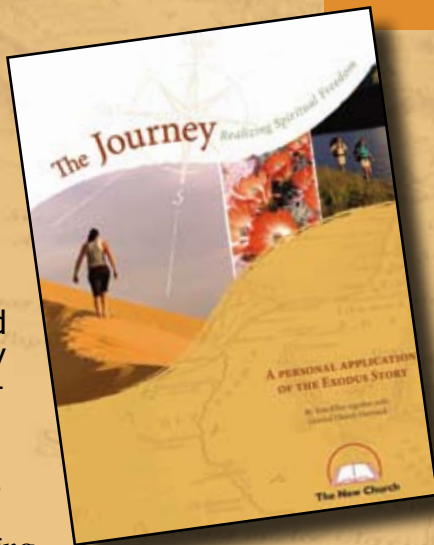


# Realize Your Spiritual Freedom

Have you ever been held captive by your own ego, an addiction, or a negative attitude, and experienced the darkness and hurt of that life?

The Exodus story is about your own escape from negativity and pain, and your personal journey to a new life of freedom, happiness, and peace.

Rt. Rev. Tom Kline explores this journey in his recently republished book, *The Journey: Realizing Spiritual Freedom*, excerpted below.



**W**e are exploring the journey out of spiritual captivity toward realizing our spiritual freedom. Spiritual captivity is that time in our lives when the Lord is calling us to go forward and make progress, and we find that we cannot follow His call. In captivity, we find ourselves spiritually stuck or tired from trying. The message from the Lord is this: there is a way out of spiritual captivity; there is a path that we can follow which will bring us back to the dreams and goals He sets before us. This path, this journey, is shown to us in the ancient story of the Exodus. It is the story of the people of Israel and their journey from captivity in Egypt to their promised homeland in Canaan. In

these ancient words of the Bible there is a beautiful allegory, the personal story of the Lord's healing and restoration of our lives.

We have all experienced spiritual captivity. It is the statement, "I don't know how to deal with my anger any more. I just can't control it." Spiritual captivity can be a state of cynicism: "Yes, I used to believe in those dreams, those ideals, but now I know the hard reality of life." Spiritual captivity can be a time of hopelessness and despair: "I have tried to follow the will of the Lord, and each time I fail. What is the use of trying any more?"

This state of mind is illustrated by the story of the people of Israel in the opening verses of the book of Exodus. They were being held captive in a foreign land; they had become slaves in Egypt. The former promises and memories of their homeland, Canaan, were but a distant dream. In the Word, we read that their lives in Egypt were made “bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field” (Exodus 1:14).

Canaan portrays the ideals of love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. It is the love of family, the love of marriage, the dream of a life of use and service to others. Canaan portrays the spiritual promises the Lord leads us to in the truths of His Word. The Lord calls us to go to Canaan, just as He called the people of Israel to go there in the opening chapters of the Word. The Lord calls us to fulfill spiritual goals and dreams in our lives; He calls us to become spiritually reborn.

Egypt portrays the things of the world. The meaning of Egypt is not merely physical possessions and material objects, but also worldly knowledge and skills that can serve and express the higher, spiritual ideals of Canaan. For example, a farmer can have the higher, “Canaan” love of feeding the masses, but he also needs the “Egypt” knowledge of planting crops and harvesting

the soil. A doctor can have the higher love of healing the sick, but that love rests on the foundation of her worldly knowledge of the science of medicine.

The Egypt of our lives, worldly knowledge and physical possessions, can turn into a place of captivity, but this is not its created purpose. Worldly things and

**The message from the Lord is this: there is a way out of spiritual captivity; there is a path that we can follow which will bring us back to the dreams and goals He sets before us.**

knowledge in themselves are not evil; they are not innately contrary to the will of God. The Lord gives us the physical things of the world so that we can tangibly express the higher values of heaven here on earth. Egypt can be a place of great wealth. It is for this reason that several stories of the Bible speak of

a journey from Canaan to Egypt for the purpose of gathering wealth in Egypt. In the book of Genesis, it is recorded that Abram went down to Egypt to gather food and wealth when there was famine in Canaan. In the same way, the Lord sent Joseph to Egypt to gather storehouses of food so that his family could survive famine in Canaan.

Moving from Canaan to Egypt—it is a journey we often make in our lives. The Lord touches our hearts with a dream, and we hunger for the fulfillment of that dream. We journey southward from our state of inspiration in Canaan to a state of learning and preparation in Egypt. Egypt is a cognitive state of mind, a time of learning and preparation. Often the heat of inspiration we felt in Canaan

is temporarily left behind as we set our minds to the relatively cool pursuits of study and learning in Egypt. The medical student with his Canaan vision of healing the sick may find that love distant as he sojourns in the technical Egypt of medical school. A married couple may find times when they need to stand back and look at their marriage objectively, even taking the time to learn practical skills that will serve the marriage. But our hope is to return to Canaan after gathering wealth during a temporary stay in Egypt. In returning to the promised land of Canaan—to our spiritual ideals—with the wealth and provisions of Egypt, our lives are made whole.

## Reflection Questions

The Journey: Realizing Spiritual Freedom *includes reflection questions, small group activities, and weekly tasks.*

*Sample Reflections:*

- Sometimes in life we are our own most difficult taskmasters. Can you see ways in your own life that you enslave yourself?
- Can you see why you may be choosing to stay stuck in this behavior? What do you gain by staying stuck? What is lost?
- Do you feel enslaved by situations or people around you? What holds you back from standing up for yourself?



# Worldwide Spiritual Growth Effort

New Church Congregations around the world are focusing on spiritual growth and realizing spiritual freedom.

This interactive program is created for individual or group study. It includes daily readings, weekly tasks, reflection questions, sermon series and small group opportunities. If you are interested in participating in this international program here are a few easy ways:

## 3 Ways You Can Get Involved

1. Congregations: Connect to churches running this program at [www.newchurch.org](http://www.newchurch.org).
2. Online Community: Sign up for an online version of the program that includes email updates, discussion boards, and more. Go to [www.newchurch.org](http://www.newchurch.org).
3. Individual or Group Study: If you are interested in reading this book on your own or with a group of friends, you can order a copy from the New Church Bookstore: email [bookstore@newchurch.org](mailto:bookstore@newchurch.org) or call 267-502-4980.

# The Journey of Marriage



The following is an excerpt from Tom Kline's book *The Journey: Realizing Spiritual Freedom*, exploring the Exodus story of the Children of Israel and how it applies it to marriage.

Marriage is a journey. This is one of the most important concepts for a married couple to accept. Marriage is not static; it is a process of growth.

Most couples look toward certain ideals for their marriage: closeness, joy, romance, intimacy, spirituality, a giving and sharing. And yet, when they look at the reality of their marriage, often they find themselves lacking. They might ask, "How do we get from here, where we are today, to there, those ideals?" Sometimes there is a period of discouragement, when a

couple wakes up to the fact that their expectations about marriage are not being realized.

There is the false concept of marriage as a static place, the idea that suddenly and automatically a couple will be happy simply because they have taken the marriage vows. In some cultures it is said "If you are lonely, marriage will solve that loneliness; if you feel insecure about yourself, marriage will take away that insecurity; just open the door of marriage, enter in, and life's problems will be solved."

Marriage is a journey. Like most journeys, marriage is going to have its good moments and its bad moments.

Marriage will have all the varieties of mental and emotional states we find in life. It has times of joy and happiness, and yet faces moments of strife and pain. It is intense at times, calm at others. It is romantic, and it is even boring. As the couple accepts the fluctuating life of marriage, they find they can face the journey without fear. Good times are to be enjoyed and nurtured; difficult times are to be tackled head

on and worked through. The ups and downs of the states of a marriage are not a sign of weakness, but rather a reality of growth. Marriage, like life, reflects the biblical journey from Egypt to Canaan.

The journey from Canaan to Egypt and back again is a central theme in the bible and marriage. There is a dream of Canaan: the couple stands at the altar with the glorious dreams of a perfect union. They have a glimpse of the joy of heaven in the love they feel. And, yet, that love needs a foundation; it needs expression in life. After the honeymoon, as the couple settles into the routine of married life, they begin to form the “Egypt”—the “how to”—that is a necessary foundation for expressing those loves. This “Egypt” takes on many practical forms. Maintaining jobs, purchasing and keeping up a home, taking care of the needs of the children—these

are all external forms which serve as a foundation and expression for the abstract ideals of the heavenly “Canaan.” Egypt in the marriage is only a means toward the higher ends, but often, far too often, Egypt becomes an end in itself, and the

**Marriage will have all the varieties of mental and emotional states we find in life. It has times of joy and happiness, and yet faces moments of strife and pain.**

heavenly ideals of a return to Canaan are forgotten. So much attention and emphasis is placed on the external forms of the marriage—the rituals of job, household and children—that the heavenly ideals that were so clearly there in the beginning are forgotten or lost. The routine of the life of marriage becomes an end in itself, and hopelessness—even bitterness and

resentment—replace the love the couple used to feel. Sometimes a couple can become cynical about their former loves: “Yes, I used to believe in those dreams about marriage, but they’re not for me, not in this life, not in this marriage.” And eventually, if steps are not taken to return to Canaan, the couple can find themselves captive in Egypt with no apparent hope of ever returning to the promised land.

The vision of Canaan is dependent upon a trust in the Lord. The promise of Canaan can be a reality in the life of a marriage. The qualities of joy, intimacy, spirituality, giving and sharing are not fantasy. The Lord tells us that these goals are real, and that He will work with us in their accomplishment. He wants us to know and believe in the journey to Canaan. This belief and trust in the Lord motivates us to take the first step out of slavery on our journey. ■

# You Can Change

Many of us want to make changes in our lives. We often know what is not working, but aren't sure how to change. **Thane Glenn** explores this common life experience, and shares four simple (we didn't say easy!) steps to make change.



I've spent a lot of time in my life trying to look good. The problem, I discovered, is that just wanting to look good isn't enough to pull it off. Despite my best efforts to control my world, my personal shortcomings slip out from time to time. And I can be a real jerk. Arguing with coworkers just to be right, making sarcastic jabs at my friends to get a laugh, reflexively thinking with disdain of people who hold different viewpoints than I do. I learned from a young age how to hide my resentments, mean-spirited thoughts, lust, and selfishness, to cover up my faults, and to ignore the incidents when I treated other people badly. These negative attitudes and actions, repeated often enough, eventually make life miserable.

The New Church offers a solution which promises me neither eternal damnation nor instant salvation. Instead, it promises that life is a process of working with my God in overcoming my dark

tendencies—from petty irritations to really abusive attitudes—the things that keep me from healthy relationships with others, and living happy and free.

The process is called repentance, and it involves four basic steps toward real change and a new life.

- 1. We examine ourselves.** We take an honest look at the specific harmful behaviors, thoughts, intentions, and desires that show up in our lives.
- 2. We acknowledge our bad behaviors as sins.** We acknowledge that these negative impulses are in us and recognize they are harmful to others and to our relationship with God.
- 3. We pray to God for help.** We ask our God to help us to be guided by His truth, and to inspire in us loving and useful intentions, thoughts, and actions.
- 4. We begin a new life.** We consciously work to bring new intentions, different thoughts, and changed actions into our daily interactions with others.

The process of repentance is simple, but not easy. People working through these steps may get halfway through and despair at how spiritually defective they are compared to what they thought; they may feel more hopeless than ever—condemned. And, in fact, the New Church teaches that this sense of condemnation is part of repentance: “[repentance] cannot exist unless a person not only in general terms but also in detail knows that he is a sinner. No one can know this unless he examines himself and sees the sins in himself, and for that reason condemns himself” (*True Christianity* 513).

And yet, really being able to see ourselves through self-examination also promises freedom from condemnation. We realize that the harmful attitudes and actions we see in ourselves are not salvageable, nor do we need to salvage them. I don’t need to justify my desire to be right or to excuse my sarcastic comments; it’s a relief just to acknowledge that they are hellish and to practice rejecting them altogether. Listen to this promise in what the New Church teaches: “He who practices [the work of repentance] repeatedly, perceives the delights of evil, when they return, as undelightful, and finally he condemns them to hell” (*True Christianity* 532).

The New Church offers a solution which promises me neither eternal damnation nor instant salvation.



The most important thing to remember is that there is a loving God working with us every step of the way, a God who never condemns us. The New Church teaches that our Lord “cannot even turn Himself away from a person, nor look upon him with a stern countenance,” let alone be angry (*True Christianity* 56). And He knows what we are going through. The New Church teaches that the Lord God Jesus Christ, my God, went through a similar process to repentance on earth. Born human, He experienced tendencies toward all of the same evils that the rest of us are

tempted by, and He overcame every one. This means my God knows me—not in the distant, impersonal way that the word “omniscient” conjures up for me—but

He knows me as the greatest friend, as Someone who has gone through the exact same struggles.

And He knows that it is a slow and imperfect process. A person who is working daily with the steps of repentance, we are taught, “is continually falling, but is continually being raised up by the Lord” (*Heavenly Secrets* 8391). He sets us on our feet, and we try again. We examine ourselves, we acknowledge our failings, we pray for help, and we begin a new life. ■

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- **God is Love** and nothing but what is good can come from God, because His very nature is Love. God came to this world in the form of Jesus Christ, who is the one and only God.
- **The Old and New Testaments** have a deeper meaning, revealed in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, which help people learn how to live happy and useful lives to eternity.
- **All religions have goodness** in them. There are many paths and gates into the heavenly city, New Jerusalem.
- **Heaven is for everyone** who wants to live a heavenly life. Heaven is where people (angels) love God and others and want to be useful. While people are free to choose to live in hell, God wants everyone to live with Him in heaven to eternity.
- **There will be no “last judgment”** for God does not judge us, but we judge ourselves by what we love and how we live. People who love God and try to live a good life according to what they believe to be true are saved.
- **Marriage can last forever** for God blesses people with a special love in marriage that goes on after death, even to eternity.
- **God’s 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.

**“Without  
the Lord  
there is no  
salvation.”**

*New Jerusalem  
and Its Heavenly  
Doctrine 294*

**The operation of Divine  
Providence for a person's  
salvation begins at birth  
and continues right on to  
the end of life and  
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*Divine Providence 331*

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