Learn by Doing

Choice Making Excuses



The Writings reveal that all thoughts flow in from the spiritual world. Some come from the angels with us and are heavenly. Others come from the evil spirits with us and are selfish. We have the choice of dwelling on or rejecting them; of making them our own or not.

This activity explores where excuses for not engaging with the Word come from, and how we can nurture and strengthen thoughts that help us read the Word with a view to doing what the Lord wants.

1. What thoughts and feelings come up when I ask, "Have you read or listened to the Word today?" or "Have you have thought about the Lord today?" or "What have you done for others today?" If it's Sunday and you are here, chances are you have thought about things like this. But how about on other days of the week?
2. If we are reminded that we should be thinking about this kind of thing we might hear voices in our minds bringing up excuses—trying to shelter us from guilty feelings. Where do these excuses come from? We're going to take a look at this.
3. Hand out *Making Excuses* (pp. 2-3). Read and discuss.

Materials Needed for Each Student

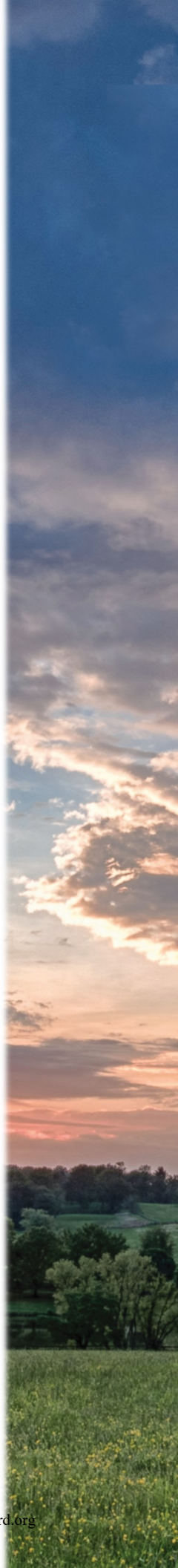
Pen or pencil, copy of *Making Excuses* pp. 2-3

Prepare in Advance

Read through *Making Excuses* pp. 2-3 **Note**: answers for the questions on the bottom of p. 2 can be found by reading the material on p. 3.

New Church Concept
God's Goal

Divine providence has as its goal a heaven consisting of people who have become angels, to whom it is possible for the Lord to impart all the blessings connected with love and wisdom, and to impart these from Himself in them. See *Divine Providence* 27



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Making Excuses

1. At times it is difficult to make the Lord a part of our lives—to think about Him and what He wants for us and for others, and especially to read His Word. Even people who do this regularly struggle from time to time. Below is a list of excuses that might be stopping us.

   Read the list and circle two excuses you would like to talk about later.

It can wait until later.	**I did it yesterday.**
I don't really care.	**I'm too busy. I don't have time.**
Going one day without reading is not going to hurt!	**Being useful is more important than reading.**
It's not relevant to my life.	**Nobody will care if I do it or not.**
I've already read it.	**I don't see other people doing it.**
What I'm doing now is more important.	**It's easier for other people to do it.**
It's my business if I want to read it or not.	**I'm too tired.**

2. Thoughts stream through our minds all the time. Just try to stop them! Is it ever possible to have *no* thoughts in your mind?

3. The Writings tell us that our thoughts come from the good and evil spirits who are with us—even though we cannot see or feel their presence. So some of our thoughts come from heaven and others come from hell.

   - If this is true, do *thoughts* that casually flit through our minds show what we really care about?
   - Does *dwelling* on particular thoughts tell us what we care about?
   - How can we find out whether a *specific* thought comes from heaven or hell?
   - Does knowing this help us understand what we are thinking?

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Making Excuses *continued*

4. While we are not responsible for the thoughts streaming into our minds, we are responsible for spending time dwelling on them. When we dwell on good thoughts we bring the angels with us closer to the center of our lives. When we dwell on mean thoughts or justify our poor choices with excuses, we bring hell closer to the center of our lives.

5. The Writings teach that there are three levels of heaven. The angels in each level are motivated by a different kind of love. The devils in hell are also motivated by three different kinds of love. These loves are opposite to the heavenly loves.

The Angels in the Heavens...		The Devils in the Hells...	
Highest Heaven	Love the Lord and do what He wants as soon as they learn what it is	**Deepest Hell**	Love only themselves and want everyone to obey them
Middle	Love learning what is right, thinking about it, and doing it	**Middle**	Love to have possessions and dominate others through having stuff
Lowest Heaven	Act from moral principles without understanding them very well, so some-	**Mildest Hell**	Have no faith in the Lord and lead an immoral life

6. Now look back at the statements you circled at the top of the previous page.

   - It is never possible to be *sure* about where thoughts come from. However, what kind of love is *most likely* to be behind each of those thoughts? Use the chart about the loves of angels in heaven and devils in hell to help you. What did you discover?

   - How might you explain this to someone—perhaps even yourself—who struggles with thoughts like this but wants to have an easier time reading the Word or remembering the Lord and others.

   - How does knowing the way angels and evil spirits influence our thoughts help us deal with negative thoughts that come up?

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