

THE WORD OF THE LORD



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

The Lord has provided us with His Word and taken great care to protect it for thousands of years. Why? Because it essential for us to have it if we are going to lead useful and happy lives. It the way the Lord speaks to us and Shows us truths that can help us make better decisions. It is the only source of spiritual light or truth. What we see in the world around us can confirm our spiritual beliefs, but science by itself can't teach us anything about God, eternal life, and other essential spiritual truths. We need the Word of the Lord to give us the spiritual light that can guide us on the pathway to heaven.

READINGS FROM THE WORD

As you read this lesson, reflect on ways the Word can help people and angels in heaven. Why is it so important for us to have the Word?

Spiritual Light

Imagine that you are trying to find your way to a place you have never been, but you have no light to guide you in the dark of night. Or perhaps you have some light, but no directions or map. It would be difficult to find the way. This is also true of spiritual journeys, except that we need a different light—the light of heaven. This is because

The understanding has light from heaven, as the sight has light from the world. And a person [can see what is true] *because* his understanding is illumined by the light of heaven (see *Heaven and Hell* 130).

The light of heaven is much more perfect than the light of the world. It gives us a clearer perspective on life, because it is, in reality, wisdom from the Lord. This is why He said

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

The Lord provides us with this heavenly light—the light of life—in the truths of His Word. We can learn many things by studying the world around us, but knowledge from the Word is essential for learning about the Lord, heaven, and how we can walk with the Lord in our daily lives. So each of us might ask the Lord

Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths.
Lead me in the Your truth and teach me (Psalm 25:4).



THE WORD OF THE LORD

How do we define the Word? It is Divine revelation—what the Lord has chosen to reveal to us. It is the Old and New Testaments (which people in the New Church often call “The Word” rather than the Bible), and it is also the Heavenly Doctrine revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg. In the New Church, all three are considered the Word of God.

From the Mouth of the Lord

The Word is the Lord God Jesus Christ speaking to us. He gave us the Word by means of people, inspiring them to write it, but communicating *His* words and conveying *His* Divine truths. He carefully directed what was to be written there. As the prophet Isaiah testified

“The mouth of the Lord has spoken it” (Isaiah 40:5).

In the New Testament, Jesus emphasizes this with words like “Most assuredly (or Truly, truly), I say to you.” And in the Heavenly Doctrine, the Lord told Swedenborg to tell people how he received this revelation.

I have not received any instruction concerning the doctrines of that church from any angel, but only from the Lord, while I was reading the Word (see *True Christian Religion* 779).

When we find truths in the Word that comfort and inspire us, it is easy to feel that these are revelations from the Lord. But when we come across a teaching which we find difficult to accept and apply in our lives, it can be helpful to have these other reminders that the Lord is speaking to us in His Word.

Why Should We Read the Word?

The Lord can give us an essential, spiritual perspective on our lives through the Word that we could never get through our own experience. The Word helps us learn what is universally good and true. The Word can lead us to see not just what seems to work today and tomorrow, but what will lead to happiness and usefulness far beyond what we could ever see for ourselves. For

When the Word is read, the Lord comes in and teaches (*Arcana Coelestia* 6516:3).

We can learn spiritual truth only from the Lord through revelation. Once learned we can confirm these true ideas through the wonders of nature or the human interactions around us. It is said that “the Lord comes in and teaches.” When we read the Word with a humble heart and open mind, we allow the Lord into our lives. For

It is through the Word that the Lord is present with a person and conjoined [in a close loving relationship] with that person, for the Lord is the Word, and as it were speaks with the person in it (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 78).

THE WORD OF THE LORD



The Word is from the Lord and about the Lord. He is present within its powerful truths and through them the Lord reveals Himself to us. The Lord's Word is consequently unlike any other kind of book. It also means that there is infinite wisdom within the Word. No matter how much we study its teachings, there will always be more for us to learn—even in heaven. The deepest, inmost meanings of the Word are beyond our reach because our understanding will always be limited. Not even the wisest angels in heaven can completely understand the Lord's Word.

A Lifeline

The Word is truly our lifeline to the Lord, heaven, and all that is good. Its precious truths can preserve our spiritual lives and help us in times of trouble. But we need to reach out and hold onto it, recognizing how essential it is for us to have these truths.

No one can be introduced into the church and formed for heaven, except by knowledge from the Word (*Apocalypse Explained* 112:3).

The Word is the Divine truth which is the source of the angels' intelligence and wisdom. For without the Word no one knows anything about the Lord, love and faith, redemption, and all the other secrets of heavenly wisdom. In fact without the Word heaven would not exist, just as without the Word there would be no church in the world, so that there would be no conjunction [close loving relationship] with the Lord (see *De Verbo* 14).

The existence of the Word is essential because it makes spiritual light available to everyone in heaven and on earth. In heaven the Word is surrounded with a brilliant light and rainbows, but here it appears much like any other book. We are not compelled to believe that this is Divine revelation from Lord. We can close our eyes to the brighter heavenly light that the Lord can provide for us and walk in relative spiritual darkness.

But if we wish to become wise, we will look to the Lord in His Word. We will seek spiritual nourishment for our minds just as we provide natural food for our bodies. And we will apply what we learn to our lives with as much understanding as we can. In this way, we are letting the Lord lead us by His heavenly light and can truly say

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).

OPTIONAL READING

When a person reads the Word the angels of heaven enjoy the wisdom they derive from the Word, and at the same time the person is joined to these angels. This is why the Word has been given to people. For if this means of joining together did not exist in the world the connection with heaven would perish, and with it all the good present in a person's will and all the truth in his understanding. It would be like walking in thick darkness and stumbling wherever one goes (adapted from *Arcana Coelestia* 10452:3).



FOCUS POINTS

1. Which of these analogies most appeals to you for thinking about the importance of the Word and the truths within?
 - The Word is like light in the darkness.
 - The Word is like spiritual food for the mind.
 - The Word is like a lifeline connecting people with the Lord and heaven.

How can this comparison help you understand and appreciate the importance of going to the Lord in His Word?

2. If you were making a list of the “top 5” reasons why the Lord gave us the Word in a written form, how would you rank these reasons in your list?

___ To give us spiritual perspective on the purpose of our lives.

___ So He can speak to each one of us through the truths of His Word.

___ So people can learn about the Lord and the spiritual world in a way that is accessible but leaves people on earth in freedom to believe in Him or not.

___ To help people learn the spiritual truths they can't learn in any other way, since nature and science confirm spiritual ideas but don't reveal them to us.

___ To help people make better decisions and more wisely care for themselves and others.

- *Variation for Groups: If you would like to do this as a group activity, you could rank these individually or working in pairs, then compare.)*

Optional: What other reasons might you add to make this a “top 10” list?

3. Imagine that you are giving copies of the Word to ten year olds. What would you tell them to help them appreciate the importance of reading the Word?

Activity 1

GIVE US THIS DAY...



When we say the Lord's Prayer, what do we ask Him to give us? Our daily bread. We ask for natural food to nourish our bodies and spiritual food to nourish our minds. Spiritually, this daily bread is love and charity and the true ideas that the Lord teaches through His Word. The Lord was referring to this kind of food when He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

As we ask for our daily bread, we can also consciously acknowledge that the Lord is the Creator of everything in nature that sustains us and the source of everything good and true.

The Lord wants to feed us spiritually and naturally, but asks us to do our part. We need to "work" for our food. When it comes to getting bread, people grow the grain, grind it into flour, and make bread with it. We can shorten the process by buying flour or a loaf of bread, but it still takes some effort on our part. And we will need to repeat the process so that we have fresh bread to eat day after day.

The same is true of getting spiritual nourishment for the human spirit. We need to go to the Lord in His Word to get the good loves and true ideas that can feed us spiritually. The Lord encourages us to listen to Him by reading or hearing the Word each day, to take time to reflect on it, and then try to put what we learn into action.

Choose one or more of the following activities:

Enjoy Eating Bread

- Bake bread (a quick bread—such as muffins or banana bread—or a yeast bread) or purchase some special bread at a store.
- As you eat the bread, think about the many ways the Lord provides us with what we need for our physical bodies.
- Now read a portion of the Word and reflect on how it is the "bread of life" that nourishes us spiritually.

Variation for Groups: Take turns reading a quotation from the Word as you enjoy eating some delicious bread together.

Spiritual Food

1. Think of stories in the Old or New Testament in which food is mentioned.
Example: The Lord provides manna for the children of Israel while they wandered in the wilderness.
2. Choose one of these stories and think about how it reflects the ways in which the Lord feeds us. When stories of the Word mention food, this symbolizes the spiritual food that we need in our lives.
3. Optional: Write a couple of sentences about how the story reflects the ways the Lord feeds us.



WHAT IS THE LORD TRYING TO TELL YOU?

Anyone who reads the Word with the intention of being wise, that is, of doing good and understanding truth, gains instruction according to his intention and affection. Without his knowing it the Lord flows in and enlightens his mind (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3436).

The Lord speaks to us in His Word, providing the light of truth to help us see our way. How much we gain from our reading partly depends on our reasons for going to the Word.

Look at the following scenarios in which a person might be reading or hearing the Word. Put a checkmark by those that you think would be most likely to help a person have an open mind, receptive of the Lord's truth.

A person reading the Word...

- 1. hopes to feel closer to the Lord.
- 2. is reading the text but mostly thinking about going on a vacation.
- 3. wants to know more about it than other people in order to sound impressive.
- 4. wants to know what the Lord teaches about being kind and just.
- 5. is angry with someone and is looking for arguments against that person's ideas.
- 6. seeks to follow the Lord and understand His ways.

Question Reflect on ways you can get into the right frame of mind for reading the Word so that you are better able to hear what the Lord is saying.

Suggestion Keep a journal as you read the Lord's Word. Write about the passages strike you as especially powerful, comforting or helpful in your life. Look back over your journal from time to time so that you can appreciate how the Lord is leading you to find spiritual nourishment. You might want to reflect on these questions:

- What parts of the Word are currently speaking to your heart and mind?
- What is the Lord trying to tell you?

Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live.
(Isaiah 55:2-3)

Activity 3

TURNING TO THE LORD'S WORD



The Lord touches us with His love, wisdom and mercy through His Word. Look for a passage in the Old Testament, New Testament, or Heavenly Doctrine that helps you know and feel that...

The Lord loves us

The Lord forgives us

The Lord is a refuge in times of trouble

The Lord is always watching over us

Variation for Groups:

- *Choose one of these four themes and work in pairs (or small groups) to find quotes that convey it. Try to find one quote from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament, and one from the Heavenly Doctrine. Do people choose the same quotes for the theme or is there some variety? Why might people find the same quotations? Why might they come up with different selections?*
- *Have each pair (or small group) choose a different theme and find quotes to support it. Plan on sharing what you find with the whole group.*

Helpful hints for this activity:

1. Identify a keyword in each phrase.
2. Use the keyword to help you find relevant quotations in these online resources:
www.heavenlydoctrines.org
www.biblegateway.com
3. Use a Bible concordance to find quotations which relate to the keyword. (Note: There is sometimes a small concordance toward the back of a Bible.)

TAKING IT HOME



Here are a variety of activities that can help you bring this lesson into your life.

Ideas for Journal Entries *(choose one)*

Use one of these journal ideas to help you hear the Lord speaking to us in His Word.

- ◆ Select a portion of the Word to read. Think about what the Lord is telling you and how you can use His teachings in your daily life. Then write your thoughts in your journal.
- ◆ Open the Word to a random spot and read what is written there. Think about how these words can apply to your life. Repeat this several times and write your observations in your journal.

Spiritual Task

Make a habit of reading the Word every night for a week. Try to open your mind to the comfort that the Lord and His angels can bring you as you read His holy Word.

Prayer

Cut out this prayer card and put it where you will see it each day.

O Lord Jesus Christ,
Your voice is powerful and full of majesty.
Help us to hear You in Your Word
and to feel the wonder of Your presence there.
For in the Word, we shall find Your life
that will sustain our spirits as bread sustains our bodies.
There we may drink from the fountain of Your everlasting life,
so that we shall never thirst again.
And most of all, there we will find the way
to follow You into eternal life.
Bless us, Lord,
in the hearing and doing of Your Word.
Amen.

A PRECIOUS HERITAGE: READING THE WORD

Excerpts from a sermon by the Rev. Daniel W. Heinrichs

“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14).

Many people believe that spiritual things are beyond our comprehension. In fact, they are often taught this by their religious leaders. “You don’t have to understand this,” they are told; “it is a mystery of faith.” According to this belief, people are not saved by knowing and understanding the laws of spiritual life and by living according to them, but by believing that Jesus Christ died for their sins and by observing certain religious rituals and ceremonies.

What does the Lord say about this?

“I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; I did not say to the seed of Jacob, ‘Seek Me in vain’; I, the Lord, speak righteousness; I declare things that are right.... Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.... The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return” (Isaiah 45:19,22-23).

This passage clearly states that spiritual things are not incomprehensible mysteries. The Lord does not ask us to seek Him in vain. The Word has gone out of His mouth so that we may be saved by reading it and living according to its Divine teaching.

In another place the Lord says, “Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you” (Isaiah 55:3). He says, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me...and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21). Also in this Gospel, He said, “If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (8:31-32).

Could anything be clearer than these statements asserting that knowing and living the truth of the Word is the basis of salvation? So the New Church teaches that a person’s salvation is dependent on his faith in the Lord and a life according to His Word. A person is assured of salvation only if he diligently lives according to his understanding of the Lord’s Word. Becoming an angel is a life-long work.

The Lord has given us the Word in order that we may read it, reflect on its teachings, apply them to our lives, and so be prepared for eternal life in heaven. The Word is the source of eternal life. There is no other! This is what the Lord meant when He said to the

woman of Samaria, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14).

If we desire spiritual life we must drink deeply from the fountain of living waters. We must go to the Word regularly—to the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church—and fill our minds with its life-giving truths. We have been blessed with an abundant fountain of spiritual truths—“living water” given for our salvation. We have been blessed with the opportunity to refresh our souls from it. If we do not do so, we are cutting ourselves off from the source of everlasting life.

The Lord assures us that if we approach the Word with a desire to see truths so that we may live according to them, then we will be gifted with understanding and spiritual life. If we allow ourselves to be deterred from reading the Word by its style, then we are regarding the Word from a purely natural point of view. And we are depriving ourselves of a precious heritage. Consider this: If a person were to offer you a great fortune if you were to read a book and master its contents, would you not make every effort to do so, no matter how difficult the style and vocabulary? How much more then should we make the effort to master the style and vocabulary of those books which are the source of eternal life!

Reading the Word is not always a pleasure. This is to be expected. When someone is just beginning to read the Word, he encounters many words, phrases and ideas that are not familiar. Generally speaking, we do not enjoy what is unfamiliar. But a person who, from conscience and a sense of duty, reads a small portion of the Word every day will gradually build up a storehouse of truths into which the Lord can flow with love, and then a miracle will take place. Gradually, without a person being aware of it, the power and beauty of Divine truth will create in him a love for the Divine truth of the Word. Then that which was done in the beginning from conscience and duty will become a never-ending source of delight and refreshment.

The Lord issues this urgent invitation to humankind:

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live....”

(Isaiah 55:1-3)