

WINGS OF TRUTH



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

Through the truth taught in His Word, the Lord can lift up our minds and give us a spiritual perspective on the purpose of life and what we can do to make the world—and heaven—a better place. Our part is to look to Him with an open mind and an affirmative attitude toward the teachings of His Word. The enlightenment—the wings of truth—that the Lord then gives helps us to see how to apply spiritual truths in our daily lives.

READINGS FROM THE WORD

As you read this lesson, think about the ways that truth can uplift, protect, and free you of issues and burdens that might otherwise weigh you down.

Getting a Different Perspective on Life

There is something exhilarating about standing at the top of a mountain and looking down at the surrounding area. Familiar things look different from above. The Lord wants to help us view our lives from a higher perspective as well. It is easy to become immersed in our daily routines and lose sight of spiritual things. We need to climb out of this “valley” and go up the “mountain” that a spiritual perspective can bring to life.

It is said that a person climbs up, but it must be understood that it is God who lifts us up. We have free will and can use it to gain religious knowledge. When we exercise our intellect and gain religious knowledge from the Word, we smooth a pathway that God can use to come down and lift us up. The concepts that can lift our intellect higher—and let God take us by the hand and lead us—can be compared to the steps on the ladder that Jacob saw (see *True Christian Religion* 24:2).

Knowledge from the Word allows us to have communication with heaven. This is what was pictured in Jacob’s dream when he saw angels were going up and down the steps of a ladder or stairway (see Genesis 28:12). We need to consciously choose whether or not to seek spiritual knowledge and receive it into our lives. If we don’t bother to learn—or reject what we have—our understanding is like a ladder barely reaches the windows of the first floor of a palace rather than top floor where angels live (see *TCR* 24:2). The Lord doesn’t lift up our minds unless we do our part by turning toward Him.

The Affirmative Approach

The Heavenly Doctrine describes two ways of thinking about the Word. A person with an affirmative attitude has an open mind, believing that the teachings of



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the Word are true because the Lord gave us the Word. A person with an open mind wants to understand the truths of the Word and learn how to apply them to life.

A person with a negative attitude only believes what he can see with his own eyes or confirm with other senses. For example, a young adult might say that she does not believe in the New Church ideas about marriage because she hasn't seen a truly happy marriage with her own eyes. She only believes what she can see and understand by the light of the world. Unfortunately, it is impossible to understand spiritual things from a worldly or natural perspective.

The reality of our lives here—in the natural world—can blind us to essential, spiritual truths. But if we are affirmative to the truths of the Word, the Lord will help us understand them. He can give us spiritual light or “enlightenment.”

Receiving Enlightenment

The Lord wants to give people spiritual light from heaven. What are some of the ways we can open our minds to the teachings of the Lord's Word? We can make an effort to be affirmative to the teachings of the Word, trusting that they are true even if we don't understand them all. We can look to the Lord God Jesus Christ as the one God of heaven and earth and the source of all good and truth. We can search for truth and pray for enlightenment. The Lord tells us

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

People who try to obey the commandments to love the Lord and the neighbor will be more enlightened than those who seek knowledge for selfish reasons.

[The Lord] leads those who love truths, and who will them from Himself. Such are enlightened when they read the Word; for the Lord is in the Word and speaks with everyone according to his understanding (*Apocalypse Explained*)

The Truth Shall Make You Free

Truth can do amazing things for us. It gives us spiritual light so that we can see how to walk with the Lord. Through truth, the Lord gives us something like “spiritual wings” that lift our understanding so that we can have a spiritual perspective on life, like an eagle flying high above the ground.

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40: 31).

To mount up with wings as eagles is ascent into the light of heaven, thus into intelligence (*Apocalypse Explained* 281:3).

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Truth also has the power to protect us being led astray by evil motivations or false ideas. The quotation below compares this protection to wings.

He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge. His truth shall be your shield and buckler (Psalm 91:4).

The Lord wants to take us under His wings and shelter us, but He can only do that if we listen to what He says in the Word and try to follow it.

The truth can also make us free. Think of the freedom that birds experience—flying on the winds, wings outstretched. Truth offers this kind of freedom in a spiritual way. As Jesus 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” (John 8:31-32).

How can truth make us free? True freedom involves following the Lord. People who behave selfishly and only do what they want to do might think that they are free, but they are really slaves to the evil forces of hell that try to capture and drag us down spiritually. The Lord gives us truth to show us His ways and help us fight against evil.

The power of Divine truth is directed especially against falsities and evils, thus against the hells. We fight against falsities and evils by means of truths from the sense of the letter of the Word (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 49).

If we look to the Lord as we make our spiritual journey—believing what is true and doing what is good—He can lift us up and protect us. The freedom of the Lord’s truth can eventually bring us a happiness beyond what we can presently imagine.

OPTIONAL READING

Real understanding sees in the light of heaven, and the light of heaven is spiritual truth (*Apocalypse Explained* 8764:2).

When a person possessing a heavenly love reads the Word, it links him to heaven and through heaven to the Lord, as a result of which, he receives enlightenment and instruction (*Arcana Coelestia* 9382:3).

The Lord instructs everyone by means of the Word, and He instructs a person to the degree that the person receives goodness from the Lord in his will, which in turn depends on the degree to which he abstains from evil thoughts and actions because they are sins (*De Verbo* 13:2).

It is the Lord’s good pleasure to impart strength to a person through faith springing from love in the things that belong to his spirit and that contribute to eternal life (*Arcana Coelestia* 10182:6).



Focus Points

Exploring Analogies for People Who Have Spiritual Light

Put a **T** (for True) beside the analogies that picture someone who is affirmative to the Lord's teachings and is being enlightened by the Lord.

Some one who is affirmative to the Lord's teaching and is in the light of heaven is like...

- 1. a person standing on a mountain top at noon and seeing clearly all that is below.
- 2. a person at the top of a tower or tall building in a city.
- 3. a person in a light house looking out over the sea.
- 4. a person standing in a valley near a tall mountain.
- 5. an eagle soaring aloft and seeing everything below.
- 6. a person on the lowest level of a house with paper over the windows.
- 7. a person on top of a mountain at night, holding a lantern.
- 8. a person on the third story of house looking out on the city through walls of glass.

Variation for Groups: If you would like to use this as a group activity, mark your answers individually and then discuss your answers. What states of mind are like the ones you didn't mark?

For Reflection and Discussion

- 9. Which of these situations is most appealing to you?
 - a. Standing on a mountain?
 - b. Looking out from a tower or the top of a tall building?
 - c. Soaring aloft like an eagle—perhaps hang gliding or flying in a small plane?
- 10. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you had a better perspective on your life or the world around you? What was it?

Dealing with a Natural Perspective

We may find it challenging to understand certain teachings in the Word while we are living in the natural world. For example, the Heavenly Doctrine tells us that there is no time and space in the spiritual world but it is difficult for us to picture life without these dimensions.

Brainstorming What are some of the false ideas one might have about the natural world if we were to rely solely on the five senses of the physical body? (*Example: One might underestimate the size of an iceberg based on the part that can be seen above the water.*) What might these ideas suggest about our understanding of the spiritual world if we didn't have the Word?

Answer Key: 1. T, 2. T, 3. T, 4. F, 5. T, 6. F, 7. F, 8. T

SEEKING ENLIGHTENMENT



The Lord wants to help everyone see spiritual things more clearly but the quality and extent of an individual's enlightenment depends on his or her own spiritual development. Our enlightenment is affected by the questions we ask the Lord and the reasons why we are seeking answers. The Heavenly Doctrine tells us how our attitudes and spiritual states influence enlightenment.

The Lord leads those who love and want to obey truths from Himself. These are enlightened when they read the Word; for the Lord is in the Word and speaks with everyone according to his understanding (see *Apocalypse Explained* 1183).

We can ask the Lord a question by consulting the Word because the Lord is present in the Word. He is present there because the Word consists of Divine Truth that comes from Him (see *Arcana Coelestia* 10548:2).

The Lord instructs everyone by means of the Word, and He instructs a person to the degree that the person receives good loves from the Lord in his will, which in turn depends on the degree to which he abstains from evils because they are sins (*De Verbo* 13:2).

Evaluate These Activities for Seeking Spiritual Light

Put a ✓ (check mark) by activities that you think would help someone receive enlightenment from the Lord. Put an X by an activity that seems irrelevant or wrong to you. Put a ? if you are unsure.

- ___ 1. Read the Word with the wish to serve the Lord and your neighbor more effectively.
- ___ 2. Become a vegetarian.
- ___ 3. Join a group of people who want to read and discuss the teachings of the Lord's Word.
- ___ 4. Ask the Lord questions when you pray to Him and want enlightenment.
- ___ 5. Climb a mountain.
- ___ 6. Do nothing other than read the Word all day.
- ___ 7. Turn away from evil thoughts and actions because they are against what the Lord teaches us to do.
- ___ 8. Attend church every Sunday.
- ___ 9. Don't bother to read the Word. Just focus on doing good in your life.
- ___ 10. Acknowledge that the Lord's wisdom is infinite and that all wisdom comes from Him.

Variations for Groups

a) Mark your answers individually and then discuss your answers together.

b) Challenge the participants to advocate for one or more activities (so that each activity has someone speaking in favor of it). After hearing from everyone, see which activities have the most support as effective ways to seek enlightenment. Follow up by asking why they chose these? What were the criteria?

Possible Responses: 1. ✓, 2. X, 3. ✓, 4. ✓, 5. X, 6. X, 7. ✓, 8. ?, 9. X, 10. ✓



ANSWERING THE DEVIL

The gospel of Matthew tells us about one of the times “the devil” (evil spirits) tried to tempt the Lord. As you read parts of the story, focus on how the Lord responds.

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.... Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matthew 4:1-4, 8-10).

What did the Lord do when the devil tried to tempt Him? He answered him with a quotation from the Word. Truth has power over evil and falsity, but

We fight against falsities and evils by means of truths from the sense of the letter of the Word (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 49).

Defending Ourselves with Truth

The truths of the Word are like a heavenly shield that can protect us from the attacks of hell.

Can you find some teachings in the Word that could help you when evil influences challenge your peace of mind? Here are two examples to get you started:

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him in truth (see Psalm 145:18).
“Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed” (Jeremiah 17:14).

Activity 3

ROLE PLAYING "ANSWERING THE DEVIL"



This activity asks us to think about how truth can help us when the hells attack.

Note: "Defending Ourselves with Truth" provides useful background and should be done prior to trying this activity. Please adapt the scenarios and process as needed.

Preparation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scenario Choose one of these or come up with one of your own. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A person dropped a friend's laptop computer and it broke. - A person forgot that he had promised to help a friend with an urgent errand. - A person spoke harshly to a friend, hurting her feelings. - A person is late picking up a friend. - A person finds money outside a school and hasn't tried to find out who may have lost it. 2. Attackers Have 2 people prepare to make a verbal attack—solely based on the scenario used for the role play. They should consider how the hells might use this opportunity to try to make the person feel worthless. 3. Defenders Have one or two people help the person who has made a mistake. They should not try to <i>excuse</i> the person's mistake but use teachings from the Word to put it in perspective and keep the attackers from making the person feel that he is destined to go to hell.
Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Try role playing this situation, allowing time for verbal attacks and defense. 2. Does this help us see what the hells are doing when they attack us?
For Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We all make mistakes—some are relatively minor and others are more serious. - The hells attack us whenever they see an opportunity. - The hells want us to feel so guilty that we give up hope. - The Lord gives us the truths of the Word to help us protect ourselves from the hells and to give us a spiritual perspective on how we can become better people.

Ideas for Further Discussion

- How does it feel when the hells attack us?
- Are there times when we should feel guilty and other times when we should not?
Healthy guilt strengthens us to do better the next time we are in a similar situation.
- One of the tricks of the hells is to remind us of everything we have ever done wrong (even times when it was the best we could do), so that we will feel overwhelmed and give up.

TAKING IT HOME



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

Ideas for Journal Entries

Use one of these journal ideas to help you think about the power of truth to help us in our lives.

- Have you ever had a dream that you were flying? How did it feel? Do you think “spiritual wings” could give you this feeling of flying in the air? Consider the ways in which true ideas that the Lord has taught us are like wings that lift us up, protect us, and give us power to fight against evil.
- What are some of the questions you would like to ask the Lord? Do you think you would know when the Lord was answering your questions? Why or why not?

For Reflection

“You have seen how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.” How does this quotation from Exodus (19:4) reflect what the Lord wants to do for us?

Optional: Read “Footprints in the Sand,” a poem attributed to Mary Stevenson. Compare its message to what the Lord tells us in Exodus 19:4. [This poem can be found online at www.footprints-in-the-sand.com/index.php?page=Poem/Poem.php]

Quote Card

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

You, O Lord, are a shield for me,
My glory and the One who lifts up my head.
(Psalm 3:3)

Cause me to hear Your loving kindness in the morning, For in You do I trust;
Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, For I lift up my soul to You.
(Psalm 143:8)

It is by means of the truths in a person that the Lord has the power to save Him.
(*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 49)

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.
They shall mount up with wings like eagles.
(Isaiah 40: 31).

Further Reading

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Adapted from a sermon by the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith.

"I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself" (Exodus 19:4).

We have all thrilled to see a majestic bird in flight. With an easy rhythm it maneuvers through and around obstacles, and rises above the earth. Gliding on the wind currents, wings outstretched, it has an overview, a unique perspective, on what is occurring on earth below. And then, when it tires and needs rest, those same wings that lifted the bird up will often serve as a cover for its eyes. Many birds in sleep nestle in their wings, resting their heads, protecting themselves from harm.

These two uses of the wings of birds are reflected in their usage in the Word. There, wings are mentioned there as in image of being lifted up. "And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind" (Psalm 18:10). "Those who wait on Jehovah shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles" (Is 40:31). "I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself" (Ex 19:4). Wings are also used as an image of protection. "I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings" (Psalm 61:4). And upon the ark, which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, two cherubim sat with their wings outspread for protection.

Spiritually, the truth we have serves the same function as wings do for birds. And so there is a correspondence between wings and truth. By means of the truth our understanding can be lifted up to soar above the mundane habits which tend to blind us to anything else. As our minds ascend on the wings of truth, we can gain a sight of where we are, and where we can go.

Truth is also a protection for us. Wrapped in the cloak of the teachings of the Lord we are far less likely to stumble on our journeys. "I will trust in the shelter of Your wings," said the Psalmist. How do the wings of the Lord, His truth, give us shelter? Consider how we feel when we have insufficient information. For example, fear of death is very common. Most people do not want to think or talk about death. The fear is so strong and widespread because most people do not know what will happen, and they fear the worst. Similarly, people are afraid of the dark because they cannot see what is happening around them.

Without knowledge, we are afraid. Without truth, we make mistakes. This is why we are told that "they who are in truths are in safety" (*Arcana Coelestia* 6769). People in truth are safe because they do not need to fear what might be lurking in the dark, or the

possibility of unintentionally wandering down a destructive path. Psalm 119 sings, "Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path" (v.105). Truth sheds light on the path we should follow even as it lifts our sight of ourselves.

False ideas, on the other hand, are not just wrong, they are dangerous. When we think, "The Lord forgives everything, so it is all right to do this," we not only misunderstand His way of forgiveness, but we will probably choose to do something that harms our spirits. A lack of true ideas allows selfishness and the love of possession a free reign in our lives. When our sight is not carried up on the wings of truth we cannot see what is before us, we cannot avoid roadblocks and dead ends.

But knowledge alone will not enable us to rise on the wings of eagles. When walking in the dark a person can say, "I know there is nothing here to harm me," but the fear does not automatically go away. We can know something intellectually, but not believe it, not really accept it as true. Trusting in the shelter of the Lord's wings means having confidence in what He says. Without this confidence, what we learn about the truth remains in our minds as mere facts or data. We are not touched by a vision of the truth.

Shelter in the Lord's wings comes from seeing what He says as true. It occurs when a wide array of ideas from revelation are drawn together, producing a sense of delight. As we connect these ideas and see them in relation to each other, we begin to feel affection for them. We see them as truth, not just an intellectual system of thought. This vision provides the basis, the motivation, for incorporating the ideas into our lives (see *Arcana Coelestia* 8725).

The image of a soaring eagle is most apt here. As it flies high above the earth, an eagle's keen eyesight can identify the smallest movement or animal on the ground. An eagle is a symbol of our reasoning ability. With this ability, our minds can be elevated and gaze down on our life. But if we are to see properly, if we are to reach our high point, we must be borne on the wings of truth. Only true ideas drawn from what the Lord has revealed can give us a clear perception of our own current state, and of the heavenly state that we can achieve. And only true ideas can protect us from our own selfish desires and impulses.

It is the Lord, not ourselves, who is the source of this vision and protection. It is He who confirms what is true. "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself." Whenever we accept an idea as true for us, we are merely recognizing it as the presence of the Lord in us. He is the one who lifts us up and draws us to Himself (see *Arcana Coelestia* 8764). It seems like we do all the work, but it is the Lord who leads us and bears us up, so that we might see and be near to Him.

The Lord is present with all. He does not teach us openly with miracles or direct speech. Instead, He leads us by means of good. He flows in and touches our affections, inspiring the idea that there is a God, He is one, and that the Word is true (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5952:2). He confirms us in this belief when we open ourselves to Him. "They who wait upon Jehovah shall be renewed in strength; they shall mount up with strong wings as

eagles" (Is 40:31). To wait upon Jehovah is to say, "I will listen to what the Lord says in His Word and try to follow it." Such an attitude enables the Lord to bear a person up on eagles' wings to Himself.

This state of willingness does not come from our head, but from our heart. It comes from feeling that what the Lord is saying is good and useful (*Arcana Coelestia* 9103:3). Only from good can we see what is true. There are unlimited philosophies, religions, and methods of living. We can only sort them out and choose to accept one or another from a sight of what is good.

Our feelings of good let us delight in true ideas. Where there is any spiritual life there is a longing for truth (see *Arcana Coelestia* 6119). It is from our good—our affection for seeing others happy—that we can say, "this is true." Our understanding can soar like an eagle when our affections are heavenly. But when we turn inward, when we are so concerned for our own welfare that we ignore the needs of others, we cannot find delight in truth (see *Arcana Coelestia* 8456). This is because truth describes good, not selfishness.

It is falsity—distortions of truth—that gives form to evil. When we are callous or uncaring, we justify ourselves with false ideas: "He deserved what he got," or "We have to look out for number one, no one else will." When we are in a selfish mood, the truth is unappealing because it casts us in a bad light. This can be a warning to us. When we react emotionally in opposition to a teaching of the Word, it indicates that we, not the Word, has a problem. Recognizing that the Lord's concept of right and wrong should take precedence over ours, sets the stage for having our minds rise above our selfishness and toward the Lord.

The Lord's Word is what prepares us to allow Him to then lift us up and to shelter us with His wings of truth. We come face to face with the Lord by reading His Word (*Apocalypse Revealed* 224:3). While we can *feel* His presence in every good action and feeling, we *see* Him as He has shown Himself in His Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This does not mean that we must memorize extensive passages of Scripture. It does not mean we must read all of the Heavenly Doctrines while on earth. The accumulation of knowledge is not the key. If we approach the Lord, worshiping Him alone, we "come into the potency of knowing all truths" (*True Christian Religion* 354:3). Moreover: "He who loves truth for truth, that is, because it is true, can see spiritual truths; and those which he does not see in the world he sees afterward in heaven" (*Apocalypse Explained* 832:4).

Reading the Word is the one tangible way we have of spending time with our God. We need not read for facts, for we will pick those up anyway. We should read the Word so that we might be close to the Lord. Committing time to being in the presence of the Lord is to be lifted up on the wings of truth. Our sight soars not just because of the knowledge we gain, but because of the impact of His truth in our minds. Reading the Word gives us a feeling for how the Lord reaches out to humankind. The act of reading can itself confirm for us that the Word is true.

When we accept the Lord's teachings as true and spend time with Him in His Word and speak with Him in prayer, His truths are ever more deeply confirmed in our minds. In the New Church the rite of confirmation exists to support and encourage the vision of truth found in the Lord's Word. Confirmation is a statement and recognition by a person that the Lord has spoken to him or her; that he or she has been borne up and sheltered by eagle's wings. When a heart is open to the Lord and touched by the value of His truth, the Word becomes a measuring stick and a description of heavenly life. There is no need to know it all prior to confirmation, just as a teacher, mechanic, or doctor does not understand all aspects of their work before preparing for and entering it. What is necessary is the belief that the Lord does speak to us in His Word. This is the belief that the Lord confirms in a person as he or she begins the journey of regeneration or spiritual rebirth.

The rite of confirmation is a specific event which celebrates and strengthens an individual's recognition that what the Lord is saying cannot be ignored or avoided, that it is the basic orientation for a happy, heavenly life. But the process of confirmation is life-long. Every time we are touched by the truth—leaving ourselves behind so that we can see what the Lord is saying—we are preparing for the next step in regeneration. As we continually gain a clearer sight of the Lord, we are drawn ever closer to His path to heaven. He bears us up on eagles' wings so we may view the horizon with Him.

It is also through this process that we receive the Lord's protection, the shelter of His wings. Confirming truth builds our inner strength. This strength gives us the freedom to shun the ideas and feelings that come from hell, to turn away from selfishness. This is the protection of heaven, a freedom given to those who look to the Lord for answers.

The wings of truth serve two uses on our spiritual journey. They lift us up to see the way ahead clearly and they shelter us from the storms and dangers of hellish emotions and false thoughts. "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."