

A NEW SPIRITUALITY

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Growth Strategies

So that spiritual growth can happen, we have to do some work. So that God can grow his goodness in the soil of our minds and hearts, the ground has to be prepared. There is a good old fashioned word for the work that has to be done. It is called repentance. Repentance does for our soul what working the ground does for the soil. Before we can sow seed in the ground we have to get rid of the rocks and pull up the stumps. Repentance is like that. It invites God to walk the land of our hearts and sow good seed. We have to first take a look into our hearts to see what needs doing and then acknowledge to him, the Sower, what we see - the rocks of greed or stubbornness, the brambles of resentment, the trees of guilt and shame with their deep roots, and so on. But this is just the beginning. To find out more about the process, read on.



When a heavenly life's love has been implanted by the Lord in place of an infernal life's love, affections for goodness and truth are implanted in place of the lusts of evil and falsity.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG



Repentance for Good Guys

George Dole

When we are threatened physically, "fight" and "flight" are mutually exclusive alternatives. We may do one or the other, but not both. Is there a way of dealing with our inner evil that could be described both as "fighting" and as "fleeing"? Is there a kind of nonresistance that leads to victory? A little story may help here. It is taken verbatim from *How Can I Help?* by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman.

One day a rabbi, in a frenzy of religious passion, rushed in before the ark, fell to his knees, and started beating his breast, crying, "I'm nobody! I'm nobody!" The cantor of the synagogue, impressed by this example of spiritual humility, joined the rabbi on his knees. "I'm nobody! I'm nobody!" The shamus (custodian), watching from the corner, couldn't restrain himself either. He joined the other two on his knees, calling out, "I'm nobody! I'm nobody!" At which point the rabbi, nudging the cantor with his elbow, pointed at the custodian and said, "Look who thinks he's nobody!"

I suspect that the main problems with "repentance for good guys" is that "good guys" want to think well of themselves. We approach the task of self-examination with mixed motives. In part, we really want to know the score, and in part, we want the score to be in our favour. Deep down inside, we are afraid that the score is against us, and understandably, that is something we do not want to face.

If we look at what is happening here, the problem is fairly obvious. We are quite preoccupied with ourselves - with our own self-image. We are awfully important to ourselves. This is where Heaven and Hell 302 may help: *If we believed the way things really are, that everything good is from the Lord and everything evil from hell, then we would not make the good in us a matter of our own worth, nor would the evil be attributed to us. Instead, we would focus on the Lord in everything good we thought and did, and when anything evil flowed into us, we would throw it back into the hell it came from.*

The same point is made in Divine Providence 320, and attention is called to our tendency to assume that we are the source of our own wisdom and prudence. This discussion goes on to say that if we acknowledge the divine of the Lord and acknowledge that things within us are wrong, we will simply reflect on the wrong within us, and will consign it to the hell it came from to the extent that we run away from it and turn away from it.

We really could take a tip from the way we treat our

friends - from our ability simply to try our best to understand without getting caught up in issues of praising and blaming. Strange as it seems, there is a real and important similarity between our best and our worst: neither is really "ours." We make them ours by our insistence that we are leading ourselves. Earlier in Divine Providence, there is a challenging statement that bears directly on this issue. *Our own prudence is nothing, and only seems to exist. And it should seem to exist. But the Lord's providence, because of its absolute detail, is universal.*

The easiest way I have found to focus this on everyday life is to recognise how little we know of what is actually going on. Physically, we can pay attention to only a fraction of the information our senses are providing us at any one time - and our senses themselves react to only a fraction of what's "out there." Interpersonally, we are largely unaware of what is going on inside each other. Individually, there are subconscious and supraconscious levels of our being - we are aware of only a small corner of our total humanity. Spiritually, "who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or marked off the heavens with his span? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?" (Isa. 40:12).

When we think, just who do we think we are?

In the whole vast scheme of things, in an immense universe over billions of years, we have one primary claim to significance: that we have been created by God and are precious in his sight. We have one secondary claim to significance: that we are precious to each other. The two great commandments are to love the Lord our God and to love each other. We do not possess the strength to do either, but the love we need is constantly flowing in.

Our repentance, then, need not be simply a matter of looking at what we have done wrong. We can simply look at each thing and ask, "Have I claimed this as my own?" This will not undermine our efforts to live well with each other . . . not at all. As our sense of self-importance fades, there is less and less resistance in us to the love and understanding that are constantly flowing into us from the Lord. We become more and more capable of the self-forgetfulness essential to genuine service, less and less susceptible to the hurts and fears that give birth to unkind words and deeds. In theological terms, our moral and civic life will flow more spontaneously from our spiritual life. In Gospel terms, we will find ourselves participating in the Lord's kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.

Editorial

Forgiveness

There are things in a person's life that need to be dealt with so that they are not burdened by underlying guilt and shame. These things are what the Lord called possessions and they prevent heaven from flowing in. They are the things like anger and bitterness, contempt for others, feelings of superiority, etc. The list goes on. Jesus said we should sell all we have and follow him. What this means is we should give up those things that are standing in the way of a heavenly life and choose to do the opposite. Easier said than done you might say. The Lord says that without him we can do nothing. That is why it is useless to struggle on our own strength. We should ask the Lord's help. He will take away the way of lying or whatever it is because he is the one who does the work so long as we are cooperating. He gives us the strength to overcome our negative tendencies if we ask him and he does the work of changing our hearts so that we are gradually made new.

Many people have the guilt of past wrongs hanging over them and the feeling that they could not be good enough to get into heaven. They should not feel that all is lost. If they are sorry for what they have done and have made amends, it is time to accept God's forgiveness and move on. It is a good idea to make sure that we deal with things as they come up rather than lugging around a lot of feelings of shame and worthlessness because of things we have said or done.

It's worth remembering that, whenever something comes up in our lives that is getting in the way of a heavenly way of life, we should consider where it has originated. If we were to think "this is from hell," then we wouldn't be weighed down by it but would return it to the place it comes from. We are all influenced by the spheres coming from hell and those coming from heaven. Let's choose to have the good spheres affect us and bring a bit of heaven down to earth.

Jenny



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No Power Without God

By Mark Pendleton

I'll begin with a real-life story.

Garland McDonald, nicknamed "Doc," is an elderly gentleman with neatly groomed, silver-gray hair and mustache. Doc will tell his life's story to anyone who wishes to hear.

Doc's drinking days began in his early twenties, and for over a quarter of a century he experienced many of the hard and jarring ups and downs that people typically do who are beset with a spiritual, moral, social and physical disease like alcoholism.

At one point along his spiritual journey Doc hunkered down and did what they call "white-knuckling it" through a four-year period of abstinence. But eventually his own human efforts to change his life failed him, and he returned to a drunken life-style. By age 49 the combination of forces in Doc's life finally caught up with him. By that time his alcoholism had caused him to lose nearly everything he had: his wealth, his house, and his wife and family, who left him because of his alcoholism. By that time too Doc had tried everything he could think of to "pull up on his bootstraps," quit drinking, and change his life for the better - including any number of what he calls "prescribed prayers" that he'd been taught to say while growing up. But nothing had worked.

One night at eight o'clock in the evening he sat in his apartment alone. His alcoholic roommate was out on the town drinking, and he wouldn't be home for hours. He knew this to be true because his roommate had no car and normally Doc was the one who would go to the bar and drive him home each night. So there was Doc - alone in his apartment. In his hand he held his roommate's loaded 38 revolver. At that moment he was trying to decide how best to use the gun to kill himself. In Doc's own words, he was "done," he was "lost," his life was "over." It was the darkest moment that he can remember in his life. Finally, in brokenness and desperation he opened his heart to the One who could help him. "God, help me," he said.

Three small words - "God, help me." They were

words of submission and surrender. They were a cry for God's mercy, help and power.

That was a major turning point in Doc's life. Seconds after he spoke those words his roommate showed up at the apartment. He was home early from his drinking and he saw Doc with the gun in his hand. Was his roommate's arrival an answer to Doc's prayer? Only God knows. But from that point forward, Doc began to turn his life around. He joined an Alcoholics Anonymous group and sobered up. He found his way back into successful business. He bought a new house. He remarried. His family returned to him. And, for the last twelve years of his life he has devoted himself to helping other people avoid or get out of some of the same troubles that he had encountered. When I spoke with Doc yesterday on the phone to clarify his testimony, he said to me, "Mark, my life has never been better."

*"Without me
you can do
nothing"*

(John 15:5).

*"With God all things
are possible"*

(Matt 19:26;

Mark 10:27)

Here is a life-related question that Doc might have asked himself many times before that fateful night. It's a question that some of us may ask ourselves from time to time as well - consciously or otherwise: "Why do I keep stumbling into this or that form of disorder that has gotten into my life? I fight against it, and at times I seem to make progress, but then I watch myself slip back into it. What is going on?" The disorder that we are dealing with in ourselves may be one that stands out to other people around us, or it may be one that is a more private thing within us - something lurking within the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, which we are able to hide from the observation of others. But the question remains: "Why does this thing have such a foothold in my life, and what can I do about it?"

There are any number of answers to questions like these, and those answers are as individual as we are. One of the answers, I believe, lies in a number of teachings in the New Testament scriptures that have to do with God's power relative to the power of human beings.

After the resurrection of Jesus (God incarnate), and just before he ascended into heaven, he told the

disciples, "All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth." *All power.* In another place in the scriptures he says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Unless the branch abides in the vine, it withers and is cast out. For without me you can do nothing." and in another place he couches it in more positive terms, when he says, "With God all things are possible."

Based on scriptures like these, the Writings of Swedenborg teach that the Lord alone has power to remove what is wrong from a person, to withhold him or her from wrongdoing and hold them in what is good. Another way this is taught is that when a person is engaged in spiritual combat (temptation) the Lord fights *for us*, that is, he fights *on our behalf*. And though we do have a part to play - by learning the truth of his Word, by deciding how we will respond to the spiritual crisis, and by exercising our God-given will to that end - it is still *the Lord alone* who has the power to fight for us. Any power of thought, will or action that we exercise as part of cooperating with him is actually *his power* acting into and within us.

All power has been given to the Lord in heaven and on earth. And so it is impossible for any human being or any angel to rule over evil from themselves. The Writings say, *The Lord alone rules over evil residing with a person, and over hell residing with him or her.* It is *his power* within us and within angels that allows us to exercise our thought, our will, and our action against any form of disorder that has gotten into our hearts, minds or lives.

But let's return again to Doc McDonald's three words - "God, help me." He said those words in a moment of utter desperation and when he said them, notice what he did: he asked God for help. He even begged and implored him for that help. Doc's words seem to echo words from the book of Psalms where it is written, "Then I called upon the name of the Lord: 'Oh, Lord, I implore you, deliver my soul!'" (Psalm 116:4). Doc's words also echo the words of a leper who came to Jesus, fell on his face, and begged him, saying, "If you are willing, you can make me clean" (Mark 1:40; Luke 5:12). And finally, Doc's words echo the words of a man who came forward from a crowd of people and cried out to the

Lord - in front of everyone - "Teacher, I implore you to look upon my son, and come down and heal him, for he is at the point of death" (Luke 9:38 and John 4:47 combined).

These people were able to be healed by the Lord, in part, because they acknowledged his power to help and heal them, and because they begged him for that help. At least one of these people even did this in front of a crowd of onlookers - apparently without hesitation, pridefulness or embarrassment.

What is your personal experience of turning your heart and soul over to God and asking, or even begging, for his help? Is that a part of your relationship with your Creator? At times when you're seeking his help and power are you able to break through any feelings of pride or embarrassment that might stand in the way? And what are some of the ways that you've been able to accomplish this?

It is the Lord's power within us and within angels that allows us to exercise our thought, our will, and our action against any form of disorder that has gotten into our hearts, minds or lives.

I listened to a man who was speaking in a public forum saying that at times it is hard for him to genuinely ask or implore God for help and power. He has noticed that part of what makes this difficult for him is an inner pridefulness that he feels against doing so. At other times it is a desire to accomplish things by his own efforts that prevents him from asking God for help. These are obstacles that any number of us may have experienced. They're a standard part of the human condition and they are very real obstacles to our spiritual growth.

The good news is that the same person whom I heard talking about his pride and ego getting in the way of asking God for help, went on to say that at times he *has* been able to say to God in a heartfelt way, "I need your help with this." At times when he has been able to do this, he said, God's help and power have been immediately present with him, providing him with calmness and strength that he has needed to make important changes in his life.

A middle aged man reaches a point of crisis and desperation in his life when, for a moment, he opens his heart to God and utters the words, "God, help me." Without God we can do nothing, but with God all things are possible.



Repentance: A Doorway to Growth

By James F. Lawrence

True story from a newsletter called *Chemical and Engineering News*: A man confident about an upcoming election made a bet with his friend: If my candidate loses, I'll eat my shirt. You guessed it: his candidate lost - and his friend held him to the bet. To find a safe, and maybe even a tasty, way out of his predicament, he contacted a professional association of chemists.

They mulled it over and then suggested this recipe: Take one cotton shirt and burn it to a crisp in a very hot oven. Recover the ashes. Grill one steak. Sprinkle the shirt ashes on the steak and smother with onions. Eat shirt, steak and all.

There are times when we must be ingenious chemists of a spiritual sort. We are called to work with God in transforming our spiritual dross into spiritual gold - of taking those seemingly inedible and certainly indigestible parts of our lives and making of them a spiritual feast.

Such amazing culinary alchemy, however, is attainable only through a price - an effort - and that process is called "repentance." Repentance is the psycho-spiritual doorway through which we can initiate real change; a doorway whose opening, when accomplished sincerely, connects us with a living, healing, empowering growth experience.

The Writings of Swedenborg describe genuine repentance in many places. Taken as a whole, we can discern three basic characteristics. First, repentance involves accepting and affirming the life standards that our Creator has laid down for us. Second, genuine and effective repentance deals with *specific* wrongdoing that has found its way into our spiritual diet - specific acts and tendencies - not merely a vague confession of anything that may exist. And third, real repentance must be of the life, not just of the mouth.

Let us look briefly at each of these three

fundamental characteristics. The first characteristic has to do with standards. Jesus himself was sorely tempted to serve his lower ego instead of his higher, divine nature. If this was true for Jesus, how ferocious and subtle must be our constant danger of clandestinely giving our hearts over to lower objectives than that which the kingdom of heaven is all about.

In his landmark book *The Ascent of Mind*, W.H. Calvin makes a fascinating observation on the powerful force survival represents in our consciousness. He writes, "Hummingbirds haven't yet made an evolutionary adaptation to the false alarms caused by the bright jackets favoured by hikers, and visually they will come over to inspect the big flower. Bees make the same mistake. To keep them from stirring around my head, I once had to take off a bright neck scarf and throw it aside. They followed it. It makes me worry," Calvin continues, "that we humans have such senseless attractions, too, following things for reasons we don't understand."

*Repentance is the
psycho-spiritual
doorway through which
we can initiate real
change*

Sometimes the reason is all too clear: survival of a lower kind. A few years ago there was a bestselling book entitled *Success!* In the first chapter, the writer lays out his moral parameters: "It's OK to be greedy. It's OK to look out for Number 1. It's OK to be Machiavellian if you can get away with it. It's OK to recognise that honesty is not always the best policy." Success, he says, means getting over worrying about the moral content of what you do, because "morality has very little to do with success." Success is getting to the top of the ladder without caring much what that ladder is leaning against.

We *must* care about what our ladder is leaning against. Jesus gave us the truest vision of realised humanity the world has ever known. In his earthly life, and in the ongoing revelations from that life, he has cast abundant light on our higher nature. We are to seek understanding about this, and to accept no other standard.

Second, a *general* acknowledgment of our sinfulness is of little use. To say "This car is in terrible shape" is only the opening gambit to real improvement. There must be a skillful diagnosis of what *exactly* is causing our pain or sense of failure. Of all the techniques in the nearly endless rainbow of practices, theories, and fads over the past twenty-five years, one of the simplest and most effective was developed by Eugene Gendlin, a professor of psychology at the University of Chicago. He calls it "focusing." It is so simple that I find I use it more than any other spiritual technique. It is excellent for this second characteristic of effective repentance: diagnosis.

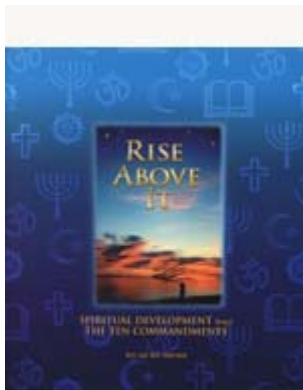
The theory is that we repress a great deal of unfinished spiritual business through pride, fear, stress, or even an overfull life. But our conscience has not forgotten a single episode, word, or deed, and it keeps trying to get the attention of our command center.

To "focus," simply grab a pen and pad and set aside as few as ten minutes to focus on a meditation object such as a flame, a meaningless word, or nothingness. Your focus will be interrupted repeatedly by some thought or concern. Simply jot it down and go back to

focusing. Twenty to thirty minutes is best, but even ten minutes will usually yield a list of a dozen things, some of which will be mundane ("pick up dry-cleaning"). But as you relax into a calmer spiritual focus, messages that are much more spiritually crucial begin to surface ("I shouldn't have lied to so-and-so about that"; "my silence with so-and-so is a selfish, hurtful behavior"). When you want to get specific, you can study the standards and prayerfully let God work through your conscience in letting you know what needs attention. Effective repentance requires a discovery of what exactly is causing pain or a sense of failure.

Third, unless a change does occur, nothing worthwhile has happened. There may not be instant transformation, but there must be a new and persistent movement toward real change. Something *can* be done, and something *must* be done.

According to the Writings of Swedenborg, people who live a life of kindness and faith do the work of repentance daily. They think about the tendencies to wrongdoing that are within them, acknowledge them, guard against them, and ask God for help.




Rise Above It
Ray and Star Silverman

If you want to enter into life - a joyful, peaceful, vibrant, and deeply spiritual life - the path is simple. Believe in God and keep the commandments. Sometimes however, this is easier said than done.

This book delves into each of the Ten Commandments and shows how we can keep them in our daily lives. Drawing from different sacred texts, including the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, this book shows how by living a life according to the commandments we can be happier here on earth and continuing into the next life.

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A New Spirituality

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