

“Spiritual Bridge Building”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scriptures

Isaiah 41:8-10, 13

John 16:33

James 1:2-4

Hymns/Songs

“Jesus Loves Even Me” 248

“Open My Eyes, That I May See” 172

“Leaning on The Everlasting Arms” 614

Isaiah 41:8-10, 13

⁸ But you, Israel, my servant,
 Jacob, whom I have chosen,
 the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
 and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, “You are my servant,
 I have chosen you and not cast you off”;
¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you;
 be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
 I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

John 16:33

[Jesus said,] “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

James 1:2-4

The Testing of Your Faith

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

***MAY THE GOOD LORD BLESS THE HEARING, THE
UNDERSTANDING AND THE LIVING OF HIS HOLY WORD. AMEN***

Insight for Worship

Secrets of Heaven 2338 by Emanuel Swedenborg

That 'he urged them strongly' means a state of temptation when a person overcomes and continues to mature. As has been stated, temptations involve feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, and also regarding His salvation, which is an ongoing process throughout life. The evil spirits who are present with people at such times and who are the cause of temptation do all they can to infuse a negative outlook, but good spirits and angels from the Lord in every way disperse that doubting attitude, all the time preserving a feeling of hope and in the end strengthening an affirmative outlook. Consequently a person undergoing temptation hangs between a negative outlook and an affirmative outlook. Anyone who gives way in temptation remains in doubtful thinking and emotions, and sinks into a negative frame of mind. But those who overcome still experience feelings of doubt, yet they experience at a much deeper level feeling anchored by a hopeful outlook. This hopeful outlook is flowing in from God and remains steadfastly, inspiring faith and resilience.

SERMON: “Spiritual Bridge Building”

One of my favorite aspects of our religion is our helpful perspective on personal struggles, or in other words, on temptation. Many religions demonize temptations as if we are weak for having them. But the reality is, the opposite is true! When a bridge is made out of steel, the steel is tested right away and over time. That test becomes how it is known. In other words, when anything is tested it becomes known by that test.

The same is true of human beings, of us, when we become tested. It is also how the Lord Jesus Christ became known—that is, by the tests He endured. He became known also by His ministry and the quality of His loving and His wisdom. The cross was His final test, His final temptation battle, which made Him fully Divine and Human—or we can say that He became the One and only Christian Divine-Human manifestation of the transcendent God of the universe. **And when Jesus Christ became fully Divine, this gave us a clear view of Divinity and how Divinity reaches us in our suffering to transform or regenerate us --- and this is a pattern and a “bridge” we might say for us to follow and access, a way through the struggles we face in this life.**

I’m referring now to struggles like:

- DEPRESSION
- low self-esteem
- dealing with chronic anxiety

- going through GRIEF AND SADNESS
- OPPRESSION
- POVERTY
- LONELINESS

New Church theology lifts up the process of learning from temptation struggles, as opposed to demonizing it. For example our theology says that we all can and need go through such spiritual trials and tests --- even to the point where we WONDER IF THERE IS A GOD AT ALL, symbolized by Jesus on the cross saying, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?” (Mtt. 27:46)

THAT’S HITTING ROCK BOTTOM!
EVEN JESUS HIT BOTTOM.

So, we need not feel afraid or worried about us going through a similar dark night of the soul. There is critical value in experiencing ongoing spiritual struggles. **THEY GROW US. And we grow through them.**

So, if anyone here thinks that you are weak or failing in your spiritual journey because of the struggles you continue to have---**the opposite is true. The mere fact that you are having them is testing the steel that makes the bridge in you, the bridge that carries you into real life; it is the path into and through the Divine One, the presence that is the oneness of all things, like the link into the Eternal.**

God’s Word has a great deal to say about the spiritual trials that we have to face, and we can find there the way to come through those struggles a stronger and better person. **We have these trials or temptations because spiritual growth is gradual.** Just as it takes many years to become physically mature, it also takes many years to become spiritually mature. Love for the Lord and love for one's neighbor are not static qualities; they grow stronger and more perfect over the course of one's lifetime. In the meantime, our old, evil thoughts and self-centered habits still have an influence upon us. The result is a conflict between the "old man" and the "new man" as we read in *Ephesians 4:22-24*, a struggle between the "flesh" and the "spirit.”

But James adds this wisdom for our reflection today: “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4) Our spiritual family, all of us

here, and others as well in our lives who carry the Light of the Lord within, help us to persevere.

We need each other to get through, to overcome, especially when we can't feel the strength within us. The Lord works through us, working together. Also, the Lord sends us angels to help us persevere, angelic messages, angelic guidance and comfort...exactly when we need it the most. This deep, inner strength to persevere is accessed when we take the time and make the effort to address the excess clutter and constant busyness of our everyday lives. Limiting the constant movement and mental obstructions help us to face our temptations battles directly.

QUESTION: But, HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?

QUESTION: HOW DOES QUIETING THE MIND AND BODY HELP US TO FACE TEMPTATION DIRECTLY?

Just as the Lord went off by Himself to pray, so must we. This conscious quieting down opens us to our spiritual depths, and clarifies then...the Will of God. Being overly busy in life can keep us from facing the temptations we need to face. Why? Because we spend so much time fixing and controlling outcomes, so that the Divine's Will is powerfully yet so very quietly held at bay and does not have space in us to do its best for us. In order for God's Divine Will and powers of pure Love to do its **tremendous "best" for us**, we must get out of its way. We need to get out of our own way, in other words, and enter into spiritual struggles consciously, yet quietly, humbly listening, paying attention to the way that Divine Mystery works for us and is guiding us.

When we allow the risen Lord to fight for us, to conquer our deepest demons as we do our part to earnestly resist them, the ongoing spiritual struggles yield more spiritual strengths and character—adding spiritual mass, you might say. A bridge of steel is then being made within us, which is a work in progress, **and then it becomes a pathway into real joy and a life well-lived.** We become more conscious and aware of what is really alive and eternal. All of the ongoing struggles, then, are seen in the Light of purpose and what is best for our ultimate well-being---**and we can really perceive that our victories within temptation, empowered by God's Love and wisdom, build spiritual bridges between us and the Lord.**

Swedenborg wrote very insightfully that there is no growth without temptation. What we eventually become are beings of great love, wisdom and hope because God's

Divine Love has been poured out into our hearts. And then this amazingly beautiful, powerful and faithful reality of the Lord's powers to overcome all of our evils and struggles, the pain, the temptations and distractions of this world will not have the final say in us.

"But take heart; [the Lord said, for] I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)
AMEN