

I Stand at the Door and Knock

A Course in Spiritual Growth
based on the
Book of Revelation



COURSE LEADER'S HANDBOOK

prepared by the
Apocalypse Study Group
on behalf of the
Committee of Ministers
The General Conference of the New Church

The
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The Illustrations of Revelation images
used in each session,
and the image on the cover of this handbook,
have been drawn by G.Roland Smith
to whom we are all greatly indebted
for his support of our work.

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Important Preliminary Note

The Course *I Stand at the Door and Knock* is offered as a tool for spiritual growth.

Therefore it may well involve the confidential sharing of personally sensitive information, an element that spiritual growth group work has in common with talking therapy. Also, research has demonstrated that counselling and psychotherapy, though capable of delivering many positive effects on people, may arouse some negative ones. The quality of communication, such as the presence of empathy and non-judgmentalism, is most important when groups are dealing with sensitive material shared in confidence, in order to avoid the potential of negative effects.

For example, if what is said in confidence concerning family matters were to leak outside the group, individuals or members of their family would probably feel betrayed. The consequences of such a leak could be serious as this course is for groups which form part of the network of the national New Church organisation where people are known to each other, and where word may easily get around. The result of such a negative experience when divulging embarrassing details could be that the individual becomes more inhibited and less open in talking about family and other personal matters. There might even be the risk of their leaving the group with a consequent future reduction of support and spiritual learning.

Therefore, it is important for group leaders to accept responsibility for the development of trust within their groups, so that each individual can feel safe about sharing potentially embarrassing information.

Introduction to the Course

Spiritual Growth Courses

Different spiritual growth courses may be based on many different spiritual sources, texts and/or techniques. A balance is desirable between the new ideas and material they introduce and the individual learning needs of the course members. The material introduced in the *I Stand at the Door and Knock* course is based on six key sections of the Book of Revelation to be meditated on in the light of the spiritual interpretation given by Emanuel Swedenborg. The course aims to introduce these spiritual ideas, in line with where the individual is at in his or her life, by taking a person-centred learning approach. The teaching material/background information should be integrated into group sharing as and where appropriate.

Although the course does not require trained group psychotherapists or counsellors to lead groups, nevertheless the focus on communication, as the quality of the way we relate to each other, is an important aspect of such professional skills that will need to be employed. In other words, spiritual growth group work is not seen as Bible Study as such, and is neither simply a teaching nor counselling endeavour, but rather a mixture of the two.

A Biblical Background

Many people do not acknowledge the Bible as the Word of God with an internal spiritual meaning. They have their own perspective and learning needs. For this reason, the Course is designed to be used with participants who acknowledge the basic religious beliefs of the New Church, and is unlikely to be suitable for those unfamiliar with New Church teachings.

The cover picture portrays the Lord 'knocking at our door' and may remind us of the famous painting, 'The Light of the World' by Holman Hunt. But how many who know the image are aware that it is based on a text from the Book of Revelation, or Apocalypse of John as it was originally called?

This last book of the Bible contains the visions that John received on the Isle of Patmos, and has always been regarded as one of the most difficult books in the Bible. Its fantastic, bizarre though occasionally beautiful imagery has inspired great artists such as Durer, Blake and Holman Hunt to portray its imagery in vivid pictures. Who, for example, has not seen pictures of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, or the Holy City, New Jerusalem descending out of the sky?

The Book is centred on a glorious vision of the risen Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of the Churches and also on the Divine throne of Judgment. Yet the Book as a whole, though part of the New Testament, seems to lack the moral and spiritual instruction and inspiration of the gospels and epistles, is difficult to read consecutively, and presents the incomprehensibility of a kaleidoscopic dream. Why on earth then is it being presented here as a basis for group exercises in spiritual growth?

Swedenborg's Spiritual Interpretation

Swedenborg has shown at length how John's visions are a revelation of the inner spiritual states of the 'church', as he calls it. Found both within individuals and collectively within religious communities, groups and denominations, these are states that remain necessarily hidden and unconscious for long periods of time. When the time is right (the person is ready and prepared), they are revealed or made conscious as a preparation for the spiritual (or Second) Coming of the Lord within the human soul.

Depth Psychology and Spiritual Growth Groups

The purpose of a spiritual growth group is to help the sincere religious person examine him or herself so as to uncover hidden motivations and notions in one's attitudes and behaviour. Many of these form barriers that block or distort the Spirit of God which is always working within to promote the development of a person's divinely gifted nature and character.

Spiritual growth groups are part of a modern development that traces its origin back to the depth psychology of Jung. Just as Jung discovered that dreams are a symbolically disguised manifestation of unconscious thoughts and feelings, so also the Book of Revelation, with its fantastic dream-like imagery, can be seen to be a symbolic representation of hidden spiritual aspects of the 'church' - both good and bad - within the human spirit.

In this connection it is of special interest to note that Jung pointed to the 'archetypal' nature of much dream imagery. He found images that are universal – that is, common to the human race as a whole, which arose long ago in the earliest experiences of the human race on earth. Likewise, Swedenborg before him has unfolded the archetypal, and therefore universal, nature of the 'church' within the human spirit - that is, that part of the human spirit that relates to the knowledge of God and living a religious life.

Remnants and Hereditary Evil

Swedenborg teaches that from our earliest moments God is sowing seeds of heavenly affections and perceptions within us, so that from them a heavenly life may spring up and develop. He also teaches that since the Fall of Man we are all born with a tendency to be motivated erroneously to seek happiness in a self-centred way, and mistakenly to prefer to believe and trust in outward appearances rather than inner spiritual realities. All this at first, and for a long time, we remain unaware of, until we develop sufficient spiritual awareness of our deeper beliefs and attitudes, to be able to face a 'day' of self-judgment when the Light of Truth illuminates our whole mind to see what is really there.

The Lord whilst on earth beautifully and simply expressed this universal human situation in his key parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30). At first these grow together in an indistinguishable way, until the time of harvest, when they can at last be distinguished and separated. Spiritually, this means that our inherited tendencies to be self-motivated, and our divinely sown seeds of pure love and wisdom, remain for a long time hidden or

unconscious. This is because they are at first indistinguishable from each other.

The time of harvest represents a time of spiritual judgment when their true nature can be revealed so that we can then judge between what is genuinely good and true, and what is really self centred or illusory in the normally unconscious beliefs and attitudes of our religious life. The written Word, when spiritually unfolded, reveals that *everyone* without exception has both these genuine and erroneous elements hidden in their inner being. And it is the Word, again spiritually unfolded, that can help us to realise and accept this universal truth, and so be able to proceed with further spiritual development.

The Separation Process in Spiritual Growth

This process of 'harvest' judgment is therefore a key element in spiritual growth or regeneration. Without it we would often go on thinking we were good when we were really self-centred, or thinking we are very bad when really we are well intentioned at heart.

In the spiritual growth course offered here, based as it is on a small selection of the Judgment imagery of the Book of Revelation, our aim will be just that - to begin to see gradually, or step by step, a little of what lies hidden behind much of our conscious thinking, feeling and judging in our religious life. The result is likely to be a greater openness, honesty, and integrity of personality, and an increased desire to depend on the Lord for daily spiritual help and guidance. This development is emphasised very often in the Word, and in Swedenborg's writings, as an essential aspect of our becoming reborn or regenerated.

The Format of the Course

This Course is made up of 6 sequential sessions, each based on a specially chosen section of the Apocalypse. It is preceded by a taster session to help potential participants gain a clearer idea of the Course, and so be able to decide whether they wish to continue on to the Course proper.

Follow-Up Meeting

It is also strongly recommended that the Group commits itself to at least one follow-up "re-union" gathering to check back and give support to one another on personal progress following the Course.

Group Leaders

As indicated earlier, people leading this Course should bring with them an awareness of the basic teachings of the New Church. They will also need to have prior experience in spiritual growth groups and in group leading. This would include an awareness of the principles of group dynamics, and sensitivity to people's inner states.

It is recommended that leaders have access to a Minister or experienced lay person to whom they can turn for advice and support during the Course.

Final Note

Like all spiritual growth courses, this Course will need to be conducted and guided very sensitively and caringly, recognising from the outset that many interested persons may not yet be ready or really willing to undergo such a self-revelatory process.

Guidance Notes for the Group Leader

This section outlines things that you as group leader should make very clear to potential participants, before they and you agree that they are ready to take the course.

Then follows some guidance for leading the Sessions.

General

- This Course is not intended as a Bible Study as such, but is to be essentially a self-discovery course, using parts of a very special book of the Word as its basis.

It is not centred on gaining knowledge of the Book of Revelation, or the general spiritual significance of the passages used in each session. Rather it is to be centred on allowing the Lord's Word there to operate like a beacon or searchlight to light up unconscious dark areas of one's soul.

- Self-discovery, like any growth, and spiritual growth in particular, is often associated with some pain. Ultimately, and often almost immediately, the experience is very beneficial. ***One needs to be willing both to discover some of one's 'dark secrets' hidden from oneself, and to acknowledge or share the fact of the discovery with the group.***
- The need to share something of such inner discoveries, along with any connected pain, is important for the benefit of the group as a whole. This is especially so since each person is making what are essentially discoveries of deeper states of one's soul that are actually shared by all.
- This is to be a group that shares personal and spiritual thoughts, feelings and insights, but not one that becomes a confessional. So there is no requirement to share any specific details of such discoveries - such as some actual deed or incident in one's life - unless one is prepared for such details to possibly become common knowledge. Ideally, spiritual growth groups should be able to respect and keep confidentiality. But it is always possible for unintentional leaks to occur.

- Once participants have embarked on the sessions following the preliminary one, they are expected to commit themselves to attend and complete the whole course - if humanly possible.

Guidance for Leading Sessions

- Because of the importance of self-discovery the scriptural and doctrinal material should be integrated into the group discussion of personal matters. Therefore the Biblical material and images are not scheduled at the start of sessions. This is because - at least until there is more familiarity with them - they are too different from the average person's ways of thinking to be easily taken on board. If presented in a didactic way the material tends to provoke intellectual challenge and inhibit personal sharing. One task of the group leader is to feed in the relevant teaching and scriptural words and imagery, as and when appropriate, during the natural flow of conversation. Group members need to feel a sense of ownership of what the meeting is talking about.
- The group leader has the role of helping members participate naturally without feeling pressurised to do so. It is important, if trust and a positive appreciation of the programme is to be built, that people have a chance to warm up by talking about relatively non-threatening and easy-to-share personal matters, including positive features of their lives and expectations.

Session Outline

(Approximate times in brackets)

1. Welcome and attunement (5 minutes)

2. Session 1 (20 minutes)
 - Introduction
 - Sharing of initial feelings
 - Reaffirmation of Group Guidelines

- Sessions 2 - 6 (20 minutes)
 - Feedback from previous week's discussion and task

3. Presentation of Image and Biblical passage (15 minutes)

4. Group Exploration and Sharing (55 minutes)
 - leader providing background teaching
 - as and when appropriate

5. Reflection/Action Points (20 minutes)

6. Closing - prayer or meditation (5 minutes)

Notes on the Session Outline

Timing

We have assumed a time slot of 2 hours per session. The timings in brackets in the Session Outline are for general guidance only, not to be slavishly adhered to.

Feedback

You will need to be particularly aware of timekeeping in this section to ensure that the review process does not take too large a share of the whole Session. It is helpful to ask questions which are “open” rather than “closed”.

Presentation of Image and Biblical passage.

The purpose here is to encourage thoughts and feelings to emerge, stimulated by the Revelation image. Avoid getting into a discussion about technical aspects of the picture. It is to be a *sharing*, not a discussion or debate. Be willing to be flexible and open to a variety of techniques. For example, by inviting members to throw in ideas, words, phrases; or by encouraging practical examples and experiences to describe a concept.

Group Exploration and Sharing

The background teaching material is provided so that you can prepare yourself to offer to the Group some ideas in your own words centred around the summary key points. It is not designed to be read out as a formal text, which would deaden the exercise, but should come from you directly as a natural contribution to the discussion during the Group Exploration and Sharing section, as and when appropriate.

This section, of course, is the heart of the whole Session. The written material is intended as a store from which you can draw to stimulate the Group, as necessary. Where the sharing is running freely, you may well decide to go with that flow. The needs of the Group, not the supporting text, are of primary importance.

Reflection/Action Points

It is well-known that some people find it helpful to keep a private diary or notebook in which to jot down insights as they occur. It can be helpful to look back at such jottings. Some people find it a useful discipline. It is a possibility for you to raise this with the Group during the Taster Session, and perhaps at the first Session proper. There is space in their booklets for such notes.

Reflecting on insights gained during the session and voicing new intentions for daily life provide for continuity between sessions, and encourage the application of what Course members have learned or gained experientially. Acting on insights gained means responding differently to what life throws at us. Spiritual growth is about personal change if it is about anything.

Closing Prayer or Meditation

The text of a prayer is offered, but please feel free to modify it, offer your own, or to lead a brief meditation, if you prefer. Members of the Group could be invited to offer a prayer. Prayer could also arise out of a silence.

Resources

1. Bibles

Although the Course is based on Biblical material and images, it is not a Bible Study Course. It is suggested, therefore, that Bibles should not be used during the Sessions. The Leader will have one available for checking details. The main focus will always be on reactions to the image and text, and the feelings and spiritual states that are evoked. Members may need to be gently discouraged from pursuing textual details.

2. Booklet for Group Members which contains:

- **Bible Passages**
- **Revelation pictures by Roland Smith**
- **Space** where Course members can, if they wish, record jottings, significant moments, drawings related to the Reflection Points, and any other reflections on their spiritual states.
- **Guidelines for Course members**

3. Posters of the 6 images

Large poster size versions of the images painted by Roland Smith which are in the group members' booklet, are available if requested. If you have these then it can be helpful for you to focus the group on this at the appropriate part in the session rather than everyone having their heads down studying their own image, which may be more isolating.

Posters and additional booklets can be obtained from Helen Newton
tel: 01244 332239 email: helen.newton@spiritualwisdom.org.uk

Preliminary Taster Session

This Taster Session consists of:

- Introduction (approx. 40 minutes)
- Group Activity (approx. 60 minutes)
- Final Instructions (approx. 20 minutes)

Introduction

(approx.40 minutes)

1. Welcome people to the Taster Session saying what time the meeting will end. Be clear in your mind, and convey to the potential group members, that this is very much a “taster” session. . Today’s Session provides an opportunity for participants to decide whether they wish to take the main Course.

(approx. 5 minutes)

2. Get people warmed up and involved by asking them questions. For example, ask the group to talk about why they have attended the taster session. Encourage those present to share their hopes and expectations. Why is their own spiritual growth something they want to focus on?

(approx. 20 minutes)

3. Tell the group that the Course aims to aid people with their spiritual growth, using images and Biblical material from the Book of Revelation over 6 sessions. Draw upon ideas presented in the Introduction section of the Handbook. The crucial theme of self-evaluation is at the heart of spiritual growth, and it is the strong, dominant theme in Revelation. Explain the difference between a spiritual growth course and a Bible study course, pointing out how a spiritual growth course aims especially at the sharing of personal experiences and endeavours, in the light of the messages from the Word.

(approx. 15 minutes)

Group Activity

(approx 60 minutes)

1. Remind the Group of the teaching in Swedenborg's Writings that the spiritual sense of the Word applies to each of us as individuals, with every character mentioned there representing some aspect of our inner nature and spiritual dynamics.
2. Give the group members each a copy of Jesus' parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30) and have it read aloud.
3. The purpose of this section is to encourage group members to share their ideas and feelings about the meaning of the parable of the Wheat

and the Weeds. Draw out from them their personal as well as their intellectual reactions to the story. As and when it feels appropriate you may put some or all of the following questions to the Group. However, members should be encouraged to apply the feelings and ideas that emerge to their own inner states and self-awareness.

- What sort of 'seeds' were to be found in us as babies and young children? [If necessary, briefly remind the group of Swedenborg's teaching on remains and hereditary evil - see the Introduction].
- Could we, when very young, have any awareness of such spiritual seeds and their nature? [We do not have a memory of these. We simply experienced and felt them, and they became stored away.]
- What 'wheat and weed seeds' are we aware of now that have been secretly sown in us from our birth onwards? [Possibly not very aware at all! Swedenborg teaches that it is in the testing experiences of adult life that the Lord brings to the surface these unconscious experiences of love and insight.]
- What does the parable teach us about our spiritual seeds whilst they are growing - *before* harvest time? [They cannot be clearly distinguished from self-centred thoughts and feelings.]
- What might the harvesters represent in us? [Spiritual insights, or angelic helpers, from the Lord enabling us to distinguish between genuine and merely superficial good.]
- Do we believe that they are present in us now?
- How do we feel about this reality?
- Do we feel ready for an active engagement at this inner level of our being?

(Leaders, please note the use of 'we' and 'our' words rather than 'you' and 'your'. Leaders should not be afraid of sharing their own experience, as members of a group.)

4. Refer back to the Introduction to this Course, and present the key idea of spiritual harvest laid out there. Emanuel Swedenborg himself uses this parable to exemplify and summarise the whole judgment/harvest process revealed in great detail in the Book of Revelation.

Final Instructions

(approx. 20 minutes)

1. Give details of times and arrangements for the Course sessions.
2. Take the Group through the points laid out in the Guidelines for Course Members in the course members booklet - see next section. Having read the points silently, you could then invite the Group to read them together aloud. Alternatively, the members could read them through on their own, and then indicate their assent. Draw particular attention to the expectations concerning confidentiality and non-judgmental style of communication.
3. Ask each member to let you know before the first session proper if they wish to continue, and can make the necessary commitment.

Guidelines for Course Members

Those taking part in the Course are asked to consider the following guidelines:

1. **Everyone has something to contribute, so:**
 - we are going to encourage each person to speak, if they feel comfortable doing so;
 - we are going to listen sensitively to each other, and not dominate the conversation;
 - we will not judge or criticise one another;
 - we do not have to talk in the Group but taking the risk of making our own contribution will help us and the Group.

2. **Everyone has something to learn including the leader, so:**

we are going to help each other to appreciate new ways of looking at things, and try out new ways of responding to situations.

3. **What works for you may not work for others, so:**
 - we are not expecting to agree with everything on this course;
 - we will respect other people's opinions;
 - we will try to understand if there is disagreement.

4. **Confidentiality is important, so:**

we will respect people's confidences, and what is said will not be repeated outside the Group.

5. **The expression of feeling is acceptable, including negative feelings, so:**

we are going to be as open as we can in saying what we feel, and respect others for their honesty.

6. **This is a support group, so:**

we will be on the lookout for strengths and any positive changes in ourselves and others.

Session 1 : Opening the Door Revelation 3:20

1. Welcome and attunement. (approx. 5 minutes)

Welcome and settle the group. Remind them of the time the session is due to finish.

Attunement exercise - Sit comfortably, relaxing the body. Become aware of the breath coming in and out of your nostrils. Take a few deep breaths and then let it follow its natural rhythm. Then in the stillness and silence, come into God's presence.

2. Introduction (approx. 20 minutes)

Sharing of initial feelings. Invite people to share feelings about the course, perhaps feelings not more than hinted at during the Taster Session - their delights, hopes, fears; what they are looking for; what they hope to get from it.

Reaffirmation of the Group Guidelines outlined in the Preliminary Taster Session

3. Presentation of Image and Biblical passage (approx. 15 minutes)

Show today's image - a door. Explore through discussion the use of a door by asking:-

What is the use of a door?

Allows access, entrance, exit, privacy, keeping out cold, protecting, keeping in warmth, security.....

Text Arrange for the key text to be read aloud.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,

I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me.

[Revelation 3:20]

Contemplation. Then look at the image silently for a few minutes.

Discussion prompted by leader asking the group questions, e.g.:

How are you feeling in response to this image?

What intrigues you?

What are you thinking about yourself in relation to this text?

4. **Group Exploration and Sharing** (approx. 55 minutes)

Discussion prompted by questions to the group. E.g.

The Lord is on the other side of the door: hear Him knocking, hear Him talking to us.

What is He saying?

How do we feel?

How do we respond?

What is it that is tending to shut the Lord out of our life?

How might we let Him in?

What would help us to open the door?

Background Teaching The leader should draw on the following material to feed into the discussion, as and when appropriate.

In the Course Introduction and the Taster Session we were endeavouring to realise and acknowledge how much of our inner life is normally unconscious, that is, beyond our normal awareness. The Lord's parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30) teaches us that within us lie 'good seeds' - good affections, impulses and intentions implanted in us by the Lord from our infancy onwards. Also, there are 'bad seeds', due to our inherited fallen nature. These are natural tendencies to act and develop out of self-interest, perhaps even in our religious life and in the good we do.

Yet so often, without usually realising it, we tend to base our judgements of ourselves and other people on immediate appearances, rather than on underlying realities which have to be uncovered. So our Lord warns us:

Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.

[John 7:24]

The difficulty is that both these good and bad elements, the 'wheat and the weeds', are growing within us mostly without our being aware of them, and without our ability to distinguish them as to their different qualities - good or bad. So we remain mostly 'in the dark' as to what is developing within us. We do not normally and naturally go digging into ourselves to search in the darkness for what might be there: we may even feel a strong fear or aversion towards engaging in such an activity - fearing what we might discover. So we tend to 'keep the door closed', remaining content to go on making superficial judgements as to what or who we think we really are, or are becoming - good or bad.

But in the Word the Lord teaches us that:

There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

[Luke 12:2]

So it seems it's not a question of 'if', but '*when*' this is to take place.

In the Book of Revelation the Lord presents us with an image of Himself as standing at the entrance door of our consciousness. He repeatedly knocks to be allowed to enter into our consciousness with His Light to shine in our darkness, and so reveal to us inner realities we were unable to see or be aware of before. We have been gifted with spiritual freedom to choose if and when we open our door to Him.

'Behold, I stand at the door and knock' [Rev 3:20] means that the Lord is present with everyone in the Word and comes near to be received 'A door' stands for admission and entrance.

[Apocalypse Revealed 217]

The door is opened by a person removing evil, shunning it and holding it in aversion.

[Divine Providence 233:3]

Key Points

- **We tend to keep the "door" closed.**
- **It will be opened sometime.**
- **We are free to choose when the door will be opened.**

5. Reflection/Action Points (approx. 20 minutes)

The leader enables the group members to reflect on and share with each other the meaning for them of the ideas and experiences discussed. This will help people to plan and share individual action points.

What positive and negative reactions do we feel?

What can we plan to do to open the door to the Lord in our daily lives?

What can we stop doing that has been keeping the door shut?

What action do we now intend before next session?

Preparation for the next Session – At home read Revelation 5 and 6 on your booklet.

6. Closing Prayer or Meditation

(approx. 5 mins)

Optional Prayer

Lord, we thank you for Your presence with us, and for Your great love for us which desires to be more closely united with us. Help us to learn of You and Your ways and to want to live like You. Lord, we open our door - our heart and our mind - so that You may come into our lives. Amen

Session 2 : The Opening of the Seals

Revelation 5:4

5. Welcome and Attunement (approx. 5 minutes)

Welcome and reminder of finishing time (approx. 5 minutes)

Attunement Exercise: Sit comfortably, relaxing the body, and in silence and stillness come into the presence of the Divine. Feel yourself to be at the centre of His love.

2. Feedback (approx. 20 minutes)

Recall the Personal Reflection/Action from Session 1 - listening for the Lord's knock on our door. How was the experience for you? [Don't be afraid of silence. It can take time to tune in to what's been going on for people.] What did you experience? Struggles, insights, surprises? Is there anything relating to the last session that you wish to raise or anything that's come up for you?

3. Presentation of Image and Biblical passage (approx. 15 minutes)

Check whether Revelation chapters 5 and 6 have been read. Invite the Group to summarise their main recollections of the literal content of these chapters, highlighting the principal images, and avoiding all the details. You could do any necessary prompting, fill in any major gaps, and possibly help the Group to get a sense of the main sequence.

Chapter 5

Someone is holding a scroll with writing on both sides, and sealed with 7 seals.

No one in heaven or on earth is worthy to open the scroll.

John weeps.

Who can open it? The Lion of the tribe of David, the Root of David.

The Lamb takes the scroll, and there is great praise.

Chapter 6

The Lamb opens the seals, one by one.

Four horses and riders - white, red, black and pale.

The souls under the altar - crying out.

Earthquake - hiding from the wrath of the Lamb.

Display the image - portraying the opening of the seals.

Read aloud Revelation 5:4. *I wept and wept because no one was found*

who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

Invite the Group to be aware of their own thoughts, feelings and questions. They may wish to share these later on with the Group.

4. Group Exploration and Sharing (approx. 55 minutes)

Discussion prompted by questions to the group. For example,
Of what are we personally uneasy about?
How do we feel hearing about catastrophic things like plague, famine, and death?
What troubling experiences does this imagery remind us of in our own lives?
What reassurance can we get from the spiritual side of life?
Are there any personal scrolls, so to speak, that we need to examine?
What would it feel like to open a seal?

Background Teaching The leader should draw on the following material to feed into the discussion, as and when appropriate.

In this Session we are focusing on two particular extracts:

- Revelation 5:4 - John weeping;
- Revelation 6:12-17 - the 6th Seal - the earthquake

Divine Reassurance - a general, overall teaching for this whole section, which also relates to much of Revelation.

There is so much that is disturbing in these chapters which appears alarming and frightening: death, being weighed, famine, plagues, wild horses, the death of faithful souls, upheavals, sun turning black, moon turning red, stars falling from the sky, general fearfulness. These are all representative of the upheavals and the consequent feelings we experience in life.

So there is a need for reassurance.

This is God's Word, given to help us. There are very positive uplifting episodes which give a balance to the whole. Recall the confident praise in Chapter 5. Everything is in the Lord's hands. He unlocks what is hidden and concealed. All is well. His concern is only for our eternal salvation and welfare. But from His Love He also keeps locked up what must remain hidden for the time being.

Revelation 5:4 John weeping

John is said to be weeping because there is no one capable of unlocking the scroll. This indicates that it is actually very important to John that the scroll should be opened. For ourselves, there comes the realisation that it is vital for our inner recesses to be opened up so that we can come to know ourselves as we really are.

For our spiritual protection the Lord keeps the more deeply personally applicable internal sense of the Word sealed for us until He knows we are ready for Him to allow it to be opened. Yet for any real, permanent

spiritual growth to take place, hidden motivations and attitudes must eventually become exposed to the Divine light of the Word - a light that, in its essence, is warm, loving and understanding.

Key Points

- **Life contains much that has the capacity to disturb and frighten us.**
- **The Lord is in overall control.**
- **It is in our long-term interest for the light to be allowed to shine within our dark places.**

Revelation 5:4 - John Weeping

Let's now begin our personal exploration and sharing with the image of John's expression of grief and weeping that there is no one able or worthy to break open the scroll. Suppose you believed that it would always remain impossible for you to know what really was going on deep inside you. How would you feel?

Can we identify with such a great yearning for inner states to be opened up by the Lord? Or does the prospect simply frighten us? Could we, can we, handle such "exposure" whilst we are still here on earth, that might enable us to grow in spiritual stature, or would we rather defer it until we enter the spiritual dimension after death?

Revelation 6:12-17 – The Earthquake

[**Note.** As leader you may need to give some firm leadership here! Leave to one side the 4 horses and their riders as too intellectually detailed for the Group's present purposes. Leave aside for now also the Souls under the Altar, which will be dealt with in Session 5. Instead lead the Group to focus on the image of the great earthquake and its consequences.]

Explore your thoughts and feelings about natural earthquakes. What's actually happening? There are hidden, unfelt movements going on beneath the surface. There are realignments going on; seismic shifts - some huge, some almost imperceptible.

Lead the Group to see comparisons with upheavals and turmoil within our inner life. Talk around the phenomena.

Can we sense a value in the opening up of inner things, if we are to be rid of being perpetually harnessed to old negative feelings and memories? Having guilt feelings related to unconscious origins is actually a common psychological condition. So could we feel there is a positive and beneficial process described here? Do you feel your spiritual-psychological "landscape" could be changed for the better?

Revelation 6:15-17 - Hiding away

Can you sense a link here with our human fear of exposure, censure and condemnation, and the impulse to hide away?

5. Reflection/Action Points (approx. 20 minutes)

The leader enables the group members to reflect on and share with each other the meaning for them of the ideas and experiences discussed. This will help people to plan and share individual action points.

Do we need to set aside more time for self-assessment of our negative side?

What fears could we face rather than avoid?

Personal – Allow the Lord to reveal some negative aspect within you. Open your heart, and reconnect with Him.

Preparation for next Session - At home read Revelation 8:1-9 in the booklet.

6. Closing Prayer or Meditation (approx. 5 minutes)

Optional Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we yearn to feel Your protective love. As we allow our inner states to be opened up, enable us to develop a greater trust in Your eternal care for our well-being. When we are rocked by upheavals, when we are disturbed by our secret desires, take away our fear and shame, bear our burdens for us, and guide us along the path to Your kingdom. Amen.

Session 3 : The Blazing Mountain

Revelation 8:8-9

1. Welcome and Attunement (approx. 5 minutes)

Welcome and reminder of finishing time.

Attunement: Sitting comfortably, relax your body, and in silence and stillness come into the presence of the Divine. Feel yourself to be the focus of His loving wisdom.

2. Feedback (approx. 20 minutes)

Recall the Personal Reflection/Action from Session 2. Invite the Group to share how the experience was for them, what it was like experiencing a seal being opened. How did you feel? What new awareness of inner states have you experienced? What potential for change? What unusual feelings – joy, anticipation, excitement, apprehension, challenge? Feel free to share anything that has arisen from the discussion or session last time.

3. Presentation of Image and Biblical passage (approx. 15 minutes)

Check whether Revelation 8:1-9 has been read.

Provide an opening opportunity for any initial reactions to this new image.

Then draw attention to the movement of the Revelation narrative from the opening of the six seals, now to the opening of the seventh seal. Gloss over the intervening chapter; and be careful that the Group doesn't get side-tracked into discussing Biblical minutiae. This is not a Bible Study session!

The fiery, burning mountain at verses 8 and 9 is the focus for today's attention.

But first, preparation.

Display the image - illustrating the blazing mountain.

Allow a time for visualisation, which could incorporate the silence described in verse 1.

One possible way would be for the leader to read verses 8 and 9 at a very slow rate, with plenty of dramatic pauses.

4. **Group Exploration and Sharing** (approx. 55 minutes)

Discussion prompted by questions by the leader to the group. For example,

What feelings in us are aroused by mountains?

What are the positive and what the negative feelings that they inspire in us?

(For example, you could draw out the capacity of mountains to inspire us with awe, a kind of holy fear and respect. They cause us to lift up our eyes, to fire our imagination with a desire to “reach for the skies”, to scale the heights. And from the summit, what feelings are induced? Wonder, amazement, and so much more.)

What else in our lives do we respect and hold in awe?

What else is hazardous to us or even dangerous?

But, now, what about the ‘mountain which is all-ablaze, and which crashes down into the sea’? What does this very negative image reveal of certain very familiar human failings within us when they become set ‘on fire’ or ‘ablaze’?

Help the group discuss their experience of :-

- states of self-importance?
- indignation, when we occupy the moral high ground?
- self-righteousness or pride in our own opinions and achievements?

Acknowledging these states within us has the effect of separating them from us. Our acknowledgement of their nature and destructive power gives the Lord permission to cast them down.

Background Teaching The leader should draw on the following material to feed into the discussion, as and when appropriate.

We may recall that every image in the Word takes on a good or bad representation according to its context. With this in mind let us hear what help Swedenborg gives us as to the spiritual significance of ‘mountains’ – first as to their good correspondence.

As a person passes from the external sense into the internal sense the idea of a mountain first of all perishes, but the idea of height remains; and by height holiness is represented.

[from Arcana Caelestia 1430]

*When the people of the Most Ancient Church saw any high **mountain** they did not perceive the idea of a mountain but that of height, and from height they perceived heaven and the Lord*

[from Arcana Caelestia 920]

In a negative context – as in our image in Revelation - the meaning switches to its opposite.

It is worship of self when a person sets himself up above everybody else, even to the point of his being worshipped. Consequently, self-love, which is pride and arrogance, is called height, loftiness, and exaltedness, and everything high is used to describe it.

[see Isaiah 2.11-18]

*In a word, **those who are in the love of self are always aspiring after high things.** After death, when all the states of the love are changed into things correspondent, in their imagination they mount on high, believing themselves to be upon high mountains, and yet with the body they are in the hells.*

[from Apocalypse Explained 510]

Now what does Swedenborg teach us about 'fire'?

*'Fire' stands for heavenly love, and its zeal for truth. **In the opposite sense it stands for infernal love, and its zeal for falsity.***

[from Apocalypse Revealed 599]

When a person says or thinks, "I know I am absolutely right in these matters!" can you sense the fiery zeal for the so-called 'truth' in that expostulation?

So, collecting together these concepts, let's focus on the fiery image.

***And as it were a great mountain burning with fire** stands for the love of self and therefore the love of one's own intelligence. The reason why this love is meant by the mountain at Rev.8:8 is that in the Word a mountain stands for love in both senses, or celestial love and infernal love ... Fire has a similar meaning. The subject dealt with here is the evil people who were to be separated from the good, and cast into hell. With these people all truth was turned into falsity by means of that love. This effect resulting from the mountain cast into the sea is described in what follows. The mountain cast into the sea, whereby the third part of the sea became blood, means that in the natural man everything was changed into the falsity of evil. It is therefore evident that here the great mountain burning with fire stands for the love of self, and therefore the love of one's own intelligence; for all one's own intelligence is from the love of self.*

[Apocalypse Explained 510:1]

We need to remember that the spiritual development represented here by the upheaval is basically good. It is for our eternal benefit. The danger is that we will not feel able to acknowledge that the spiritual arrogance pictured is actually inside us. And yet the Lord's divine hand is at work, enabling hidden elements of spiritual superiority and arrogance within us to be made visible. In our freedom we can

acknowledge and reject them, making this development a very positive thing.

Such inner attitudes need eventually to be toppled from their domineering position in our inner world, cast down, and rendered impotent. Indeed, the destruction of such a towering inferno for our spiritual safety and benefit should be viewed as an act of great saving love.

Key Points

- **Love of self becomes dangerous when it leads to arrogance and pride, and an exaggerated sense of our own importance.**
- **Eventually, this love would burn us up and consume us.**
- **The Lord exposes these universal, hidden states in us so that we can reject them, and He can cast them out.**

5. Reflection/Action Points (approx. 20 minutes)

The leader enables the group members to reflect on and share with each other the meaning for them of the ideas and experiences discussed. This will help people to plan and share individual action points.

How can we monitor feelings of self-importance, pride in our own ideas and conceit?

How can we open our hearts, and reconnect with the Lord, so as to get his help in turning our back on these frames of mind?

What small thing can we plan to do to help us in this?

Preparation for next Session - At home read Revelation 17:1-6, 18 in the booklet.

6. Closing Prayer or Meditation (approx. 5 minutes)

Optional Prayer

Dear Lord, You experienced states such as spiritual pride and self-intelligence during Your life on earth, and You overcame them. As we become aware of pride and conceit within us, strengthen us to admit them for what they are, so that You can save us from them with Your Divine power. Whenever they rise up and burn within us, may we look to You, seeking Your loving and wise presence. Amen.

Session 4 : The Scarlet Woman

Revelation 17:4

1. Welcome and Attunement (approx. 5 minutes)

Welcome and reminder of finishing time.

Attunement Exercise: Sit comfortably, let your body relax and breathe gently. Keep your mind open and alert. Now let your mind become more and more calm, and your inner self more full of a growing sense of deep peace at the heart of your being.

2. Feedback (approx. 20 minutes)

Recall the Personal Reflection/Action from Session 3. How did you get on identifying spiritual pride and self-intelligence? How did such destructive and highhanded attitudes or beliefs make you feel? What general reactions or comments do you have relating to the last session?

3. Presentation of Image and Biblical Passage (approx. 15 minutes)

First, have the following section from the Word read out by the whole Group:

Rev 17:1-6, 18

Display the image – the Scarlet Woman.

Leader encourages involvement by asking:

What parts of the image draw your attention most?

What particular thoughts or feelings do they arouse?

What connotations does the Scarlet Woman have for you?

What do you understand by religious prostitution?

4. Group Exploration and Sharing (approx. 55 minutes)

Discussion prompted by questions by the leader to the group. For example,

What is our reaction to certain loveable yet dominating and/or pompous sitcom characters such as Capt. Mainwaring, Victor Meldrew or Hyacinth Bucket?

Can we identify occasions when our self-interest was rather powerful?

When have we ever shown a desire to dominate those around us, self-

righteously believing we are doing good by doing so?
At the time how might others have seen us?
Were we ignorant of the effect we were having on others?

Has there ever been a time when our main aim was to use the religious side of our life for such things as good name, prestige, success or even power?

Background Teaching The leader should draw on the following material to feed into the discussion, as and when appropriate.

Our subject in this session is spiritual prostitution represented by the Great Harlot or Scarlet Woman seen riding a Scarlet Beast who is also the Great City Babylon. This is one of the two key images in the Apocalypse (the other being the Dragon) of the two root evils that Swedenborg tells us unconsciously infect every church, that's to say, the church in every person.

The image for this session is an attractively unpleasant one - the infamous Scarlet Woman of the book of Revelation. We should not get too hung up on the sexual connotations of the literal meaning. This is because we know from much of the Old Testament that the Lord is extraordinarily concerned about His people's *religious* prostitution. They frequently lapsed into following and making deals with other gods - like a prostitute making deals with her clients.

In its personal spiritual application, the image of 'prostitution' can be seen to represent our human tendency to look to the religious side of our life for such things as good name, prestige, success, power or wealth. When these become our chief aims in life they tend to prostitute the truth we believe in and the inner quality of the good we do.

Some Quotes from Swedenborg's Writings on spiritual prostitution (or harlotry)

Read (or summarise) the following teaching from the Writings.

'Tyre' means the Church in respect of its cognitions or knowledge of truth and good, and so in the abstract sense means those cognitions. These are called 'a harlot's reward' when they are taught for the sake of gain, position, and reputation for knowing them, thus when they are put on sale so to speak, and are not taught for truth's own sake. In the Word this is called harlotry and whoredom.

Arcana Caelestia 10570:6]

The understanding corresponds to the lungs and the will to the heart. It is also like a beautiful harlot, adorned even with purple and gold, who is inwardly full of malignant disease. A harlot moreover corresponds to the falsification of truth, and consequently signifies that in the Word.

[Doctrine of Life 46]

Every church in its beginning is like a virgin, but in process of time it becomes a harlot. For it enters gradually into a life of evil and thus embraces a doctrine of falsity, as gradually it begins to love self and the world. Then from being a church it becomes either Babylon or Philistia, Babylon with those who love self above all things, and Philistia with those who love the world above all things. For as these two loves increase, persons of the church adulterate and falsify the goods and truths of the Word, which is from being a virgin to become a harlot.

[Apocalypse Explained 1029:18]

So, on the outside, we appear to ourselves and others to believe in the one true God, in Christian principles and in doing good for the sake of others. But, inwardly and possibly quite unconsciously, we may be doing much of this from some hidden self-interest. For example, personal elevation after death rather than punishment in Hell. This is, in a universal sense, spiritual prostitution of our religion and relationship with God, with the false gods of reputation, reward seeking, and the like.

Key Points

- **Spiritual prostitution is a "normative" human condition.**
- **It is usually well concealed from other people.**
- **It tends to corrupt all our relationships, even with God, and must eventually be exposed.**

5. Reflection/Action Points (approx. 20 minutes)

The leader enables the group members to reflect on and share with each other the meaning for them of the ideas and experiences discussed. This will help people to plan and share individual action points.

Personal -

What self-interest is there partly motivating a good thing we do each week?

With whom do we use our religious knowledge or church position for our own satisfaction more than theirs?

What religious situation might come up during the next week which is likely to provoke the Scarlet Woman in us to show herself?

What do we need to do or say instead of letting her act or speak?

Preparation for next Session - At home read Revelation 6:9-11; 20:4 in the booklet.

6. Closing Prayer or Meditation (approx. 5 minutes)

Optional Prayer

Lord, help us to become better able to discern the Scarlet Woman in ourselves, and to perceive how and where she operates. From the power and pure beauty of Your compassionate Love, may she become dethroned and made ineffective in our lives.

Session 5 : The Souls Under the Altar

Revelation 6:9-11

1. Welcome and Attunement (approx. 5 minutes)

Welcome and reminder of finishing time.

Attunement Exercise Sit comfortably, let your body relax and breathe gently. Keep your mind open and alert. Now let your mind become more and more calm, and your inner self more full of a growing sense of deep peace at the heart of your being.

2. Feedback (approx. 20 minutes)

Recall the Personal Reflection/Action from Session 4. What sort of experience was it for you uncovering or detecting some form of self-interest in the good you had been doing? How did it make you feel? What, if anything, has come up for you from the last session?

3. Presentation of Image and Biblical passage (approx. 15 minutes)

Get someone to read aloud Revelation 6:9-11 and 20:4.

Ask the group when the image in Revelation of 'souls under the altar' occurs

It occurs first when John witnesses the opening of the fifth seal of the Lamb's Book (chapter 6), and secondly, after the troublesome dragon has been thrown into the Abyss when John saw them released and reigning with Christ (chapter 20).

Display the image – the souls under the altar.

Note the parts of the image that most draw your attention.

What thoughts or feelings do they arouse?

Share any of these with the group.

4. Group Exploration and Sharing

Discussion prompted by questions by the leader to the group.

E.g.

How have we felt when we have been unfairly criticised or put down by somebody because of our religious beliefs or church going?

What do we say to ourselves when feeling unreasonably guilty?

What do we know about our better self that is often hidden from view?

How does our potential angelic character differ from how we are now?

Do we ever wonder when we will be freed from so much of the worldliness and self-interest that holds us back?

When can the best that is in us come out and motivate all we say and do?

What is delaying it?

Do we ever wonder when the Lord will be coming to us to help sort us out?"

Can we get in touch with some of these deeper purer longings now?

Are they in any sense, crying out now, as it were?

Background Teaching The leader should draw on the following material to feed into the discussion, as and when appropriate.

There is an inevitability that the Word should deal with persecution because it is a reality for human beings. The following texts from the Word give examples of the inevitable suffering of Christ's followers:

Jesus said to his disciples, "There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me."

[Matthew 24:8-9]

They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.

[John 16:2-4]

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?'

[Revelation 6:9-11]

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ

a thousand years.

[Revelation 20:4]

We know that, historically, the early Christians suffered much persecution. But what might this mean for us today on a personal spiritual level?

The teaching seems to be that when the seals of our hidden book of life are broken open, and its contents begin to be opened up, not all that is to be revealed will be of a spiritually bad or destructive nature. With the opening of the 5th seal, previously hidden good (the 'souls under the altar') is to be revealed. This is tender inner goodness from our childhood that has been suppressed and trapped in the unconscious part of us for a long time. It has been hidden and protected in the unconscious part of the mind by the Lord, as we are taught in the following quotes from Swedenborg.

Swedenborg's Teaching on the Lord's Protection of Remnants

The Lord stores away remnants [of good and truth] in a person's internal man, though the person himself is not at all directly conscious of this. Here [in the internal man] they are separated completely from the things that are the person's own, that is, his evils and falsities.

[Arcana Caelestia 561]

Remnants are preserved in the internal man, and cannot be brought out until his external man has been brought into a state of correspondence with the internal. This is effected by means of temptations, and by many kinds of vastation.

[Arcana Caelestia 2967:2]

During the time that a person is unable to be regenerated, his remnants are held in safe keeping within him interiorly. But when he is being regenerated they are brought from his interiors.... into his exteriors for the reason that through regeneration his interiors become joined to his exteriors, and act in unison with them.

[Arcana Caelestia 6156]

Remember that good seeds are sown in everyone by the Lord. Recall how these good impulses and heartfelt intentions are often attacked and thoughtlessly put down by other people, and especially by evil spirits when they put self-condemnatory thoughts into our minds. They are, in effect, "persecuted" and "slain". Can you make the link with the souls imprisoned under the altar?

As a result we may withdraw them quickly, and suppress them, afraid to let them out again lest we (they) are hurt again. Swedenborg teaches us that this is the Lord's providential preservation of what is genuinely good in us, when exposure would cause it too much spiritual harm.

Also, when the good seed implanted within us by the Lord starts to grow, it may become attacked and suppressed by worldly considerations, worries and delights, until such time as the Lord sees it may safely be resurrected to conscious new life in us. These negative states, of course, are the "weeds" of the Lord's parable.

So perhaps we should be looking to see if the Lord is ready and wanting to have any of these 'souls' released back into our consciousness. Are we now spiritually strong enough to have them opened up to us, so that we might begin

to live more consciously and directly from within us? Is it now time for these 'souls' to begin to 'reign with Christ' within us?

Key Points

- **There is inevitable persecution of good impulses**
- **The Lord withdraws and preserves these from being harmed**
- **The Lord releases them when we are spiritually strong enough.**

5. Reflection/Action Points (approx. 20 minutes)

The leader enables the group members to reflect on and share with each other the meaning for them of the ideas and experiences discussed. This will help people to plan and share individual action points.

Let us identify the presence within us of longings to be a more open, loving person.

When will we set time aside during the next week to acknowledge to the Lord that each of us is a Child of God, and recall that the Lord always protects what is His within us, which is yearning to be released?

What will we do in the next week to reveal our real better self that is mostly hidden from view?

Preparation for next Session - At home read Revelation 22:1-6 in the booklet.

6. Closing Prayer or Meditation (approx. 5 minutes)

Optional Prayer

Lord, help us to recognise and acknowledge more clearly the pure Children of Yours that we really are. Help us to release that Child, and to live each day as the beautiful, beloved Child You created us to be. Amen.

Session 6 : The Tree of Life Revelation 22:2

1. Welcome and Attunement (approx. 5 minutes)

Welcome and reminder of finishing time.

Attunement Exercise Sit comfortably, relaxing the body. Become aware of the breath coming in and going out of your nostrils. Take a few deep breaths and then let it follow its natural rhythm.

2. Feedback (approx. 20 mins)

Invite members to share with the Group anything that has come up for them since last time. How does it feel to be a Child of God? How are we feeling about our relationship with the Lord?

3. Presentation of Biblical passage and picture (approx. 15 minutes)

Get someone to read aloud Revelation 22:1-6.

Today's central image is our final one in this Course – a very special tree -

the very **Tree of Life** itself!

What tends to strike you most about trees? What functions do they serve?

What, in particular, do they mean for you?

Display the image - the Tree of Life. For a few moments in silence look at the image. The leader asks:

What are you drawn to?

What does that say to you?

What does it evoke for you?

How do you feel about the tree?

4. Group Exploration and Sharing (approx. 55 minutes)

Discussion prompted by questions by the leader to the group. For example,

Can we remember any experience of gaining insights into real spiritual love and life intuitively in the depths of our spirit?

Have we ever had the experience of our sense of guilt and shame being healed?

Can we recall any "rational spiritual ideas" which may have corrected our faulty thinking?

What, if anything, has brought us a sense of spiritual healing?

Have we, perhaps, already experienced some change taking place whilst or as a result of participating in this Course?

Do we now know (experientially) a little of what it means to 'eat of the Tree of Life'? Let's attempt to express it now in words arising out of our recent or current experience.

Background Teaching The leader should draw on the following material to feed into the discussion, as and when appropriate.

In the centre of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2) which Adam and Eve lost was the wonderful **Tree of Life**, and a **River** flowed from there to water the Garden (v.10).

Now, at the end of the Word, both the River and the Tree reappear in the Holy City – and now they are even more closely associated!

*Then the angel showed me the **river of the water of life**, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.*

[Revelation 22:1]

*On either side of the river is the **tree of life** with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

[Revelation 22:2]

So we have three beautiful key images closely woven into each other:

The River of Life

The Tree of Life

The Tree's monthly Fruitfulness

- all in the centre of the descending Holy City.

The image of 'Eating of the Tree of Life' is one of being able to gain one's insights into real [eternal] love and life intuitively from the Lord in the hidden depths of one's spirit. This is something lost to our fallen nature, even though something of heaven can shine through in our infancy and early childhood. But we can wonderfully regain this spiritual gift through the Lord's regeneration of our spirit in adulthood.

Some insights from Swedenborg's Writings to help point the mind in a spiritual direction of interpretation and personal application.

By a 'river of water of life shining crystal clear' is meant the Divine Truth of the Word in abundance, transparent by virtue of its spiritual sense.

[Apocalypse Revealed 932]

By 'in the midst of the street and of the river on this side and on that is the tree of life bearing fruit' is meant that in the inmost things of the truths of doctrine and of the life in the New Church is the Lord in His Divine Love, from whom are flowing forth all the goods that a person

does apparently as of himself.

[Apocalypse Revealed 933]

By the 'leaves of the tree' are signified rational truths ... in which there is a perception of truth in some form.... Those who are in evils and their falsities cannot be healed by the Word because they do not read it; but if they have a strong judgment they can be healed by means of rational truths.

[Apocalypse Revealed 936]

Also, in the Lord's Messages to the Seven Churches we read,

*Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the **tree of life** that is in the paradise of God.*

[Revelation 2:7]

'Eating from the tree of life' is the same as feeding on the Lord

[Arcana Caelestia 2187.3]

This (v.7) means that he who receives in the heart shall be filled with the good of love and hence with heavenly joy.

[Apocalypse Explained 109]

And,

*Blessed are those who do his commandments (NIV, wash their robes), so that they will have the right to the **tree of life** and may enter the city by the gates.*

[Revelation 22:14]

By the 'blessed' are meant those who have the happiness of eternal life. By 'to do his commandments' means to live in accordance with the Lord's precepts. 'That their authority [or right] may be in the tree of life' means so that they may be in the Lord and the Lord in them by means of love. By 'to enter in by the gates of the city' means that they may be in the Lord's New Church by means of (spiritual) knowledges concerning Him. By the 'tree of life' means the Lord as to Divine Love.

[Apocalypse Revealed 951]

Key Teaching Points

The image of **eating of the Tree of Life** is one of my being able to gain my insights into real [eternal] love and life intuitively from the Lord in the hidden depths of my spirit.

The River of Life is the spiritual Word from the Lord flowing out from his heart to bring renewed life to you and me and all mankind.

The Leaves of the Tree represent spiritually rational teaching (true spiritual philosophy) which can heal our sense of guilt and shame as we become more aware of the error of our ways, and our tendency to live selfishly.

5. Reflection/Action Point (approx. 20 minutes)

The leader enables the group members to reflect on and share with each other the meaning for them of the ideas and experiences discussed. This will help people to plan and share individual action points.

What changes do we think need to take place in each of us before we will be able to eat of the Tree of Life?

Over the coming days and weeks we need to keep the following sentence before us:

Take the free gift of the water of life.

[Revelation 22:17]

6. Closing Prayer (approx. 5 minutes)

Optional prayer

Lord, as this spiritual growth course comes to an end, we offer You our grateful thanks for Your guiding and inspiring presence amongst and within us as a Group. Again, here and now, we choose to open our door to You, so that You may enter our minds and feed us with Your fruits of eternal life. May we now go forth and find ourselves able to manifest something of Your wonderful spiritual fruitfulness in our daily lives. Amen.

7. Make arrangements for a follow-up meeting. (See p.9)

8. Future study

It is worth telling members of your group that the Apocalypse Study Group in collaboration with the Swedenborg Open Learning Centre has published a book by the Revd Michael Stanley, *Personal Revelation*, which sets out principles of apocalyptic interpretation. This can be purchased from the Centre. For anyone who wishes to go further with study of the Book of Revelation, the Swedenborg Open Learning Centre (SOLCe) offers a module, *Apocalyptic and the Book of Revelation*. More information can be sought from the Swedenborg Open Learning Centre, Manchester, david.lomax@solce.org.uk, tel. 0161 766 2521.

There are also additional materials available for small group work. Further details from Mrs Jan Millar, Auxiliary Ministry Co-ordinator, jan.millar@generalconference.org.uk