



Five Ways to Prepare for Heaven

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A sermon delivered at LaPorte New Church in LaPorte, IN



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Readings

Psalm 25:1-10 (NRSV)

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

do not let me be put to shame;

do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;

teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,

for you are the God of my salvation;

for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,

for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

according to your steadfast love remember me,

for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.¹

Matthew 25:31-36 **(NRSV)**

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand,

‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’”²

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² *Ibid.*

Emanuel Swedenborg,
***Divine Love and Wisdom* §142**

Since these two loves—love for the Lord and love of controlling prompted by self-love—are absolute opposites, and since everyone who is caught up in love for the Lord turns toward the Lord as the sun, as explained in the preceding section, it stands to reason that everyone who is caught up in a love of controlling prompted by self-love turns away from the Lord.

The reason people turn in opposite directions is that those who are caught up in love for the Lord love being led by the Lord more than anything else, and want the Lord alone to be in control.

In contrast, if people are caught up in a love of controlling prompted by self-love, there is nothing they love more than leading themselves. They want to be the only ones who are in control.³

³ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Divine Love and Wisdom*. Translated by George F. Dole. West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010.

A lot has been happening in our country these past two weeks—unfortunately, in addition to a lot of good things going on lately (such as millions of American parents taking care of their children, and millions of us being good neighbors to one another), there were a handful of very sick and twisted people who chose to use their guns to commit murder of innocent people.

When these senseless and terrible murders happen, in addition to feeling grief for those who have lost their loved ones, I choose to pray for them too. And then, at some point, comes the inevitable drive inside of me to want changes to happen in our government's policies and programs so that it becomes much less possible for crazed killers to accomplish their evil deeds.

While my family and I were on vacation last week up in upper-middle Michigan, I found it very good and useful for the adults in the group to take some time and share and listen together about our own spiritual and political thoughts, values and beliefs related to this oh so real and life-impacting rampage of murder and death killing too many Americans today. We were able to allow each of us to express ourselves, to listen to and understand one another, and to therefore help each other to further process and reflect about this major issue affecting our country.

Sadly, indeed, white supremacist values are still a huge problem in America, which means that the evils of Nazi Germany have multiplied in our land. Perhaps now is the time for our congregation to try to join up with many other churches in LaPorte County to figure out how we can work together to lead others away from bigotry, discrimination and hatred. Tomorrow, in fact, I will be writing letters to our state and federal politicians expressing my own hopes and wishes for changes to be made in our public policies and programs. I encourage you, too, to make your hopes and wishes known to your government leaders.

In addition to all of this, within my own family's life lately, something else happened for us last week. The LaPorte Public High School held its annual Freshman 9th Grade Open House. Principal Ben Tonagel led the orientation, and during it he shared with us his Top 10 Slicer Success Tips for having a great journey of learning and success in high school. Five of them are as follows:

1. *GRADES COUNT! EARN YOUR CREDITS.*
2. *MAINTAIN 95% OR BETTER ATTENDANCE AND BE ON TIME TO CLASSES.*
3. *BE IN "GOOD STANDING" TO ATTEND SCHOOL DANCES AND SCHOOL EVENTS.*
4. *GET INVOLVED IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND MEET NEW PEOPLE.*
5. *ACTING WITH RESPECT AND A POSITIVE ATTITUDE WILL GO A LONG WAY.*

I found it very good and helpful for Principal Tonagel to inspire our new freshman students to think about and plan for making high achievements in high school in the next four years ahead.

As a side-benefit of being in the audience that night, it inspired me to think about what would be the *TOP 10 NEW CHURCH SALVATION SUCCESS TIPS* to share with you today.

In sharing them now I hope that they inspire you to figure out your own "Top 10 Salvation Success Tips" for yourself as a child of the Most High. My time is limited, of course, as a preacher so I will take the liberty of sharing with you my own "Top 5 Regeneration Success Tips" for life aiming at angelhood in the Lord's Kingdom of Heaven on Earth as well as in Heaven after death.

New Church Top 5 Regeneration Success Tips

1. *PUT GOD FIRST EVERY DAY:*

This means putting love, goodness and truth into action in my life. Embrace the literal and inner meaning of the First Commandment. *Exodus 20:1-3*, “And God spoke all these words, saying: ‘I *AM* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.’” This is about re-devoting myself to the Lord every morning and acknowledge that all goodness and truth belong to God and flow into us from the Divine One.

Examine myself regularly to be sure I am not worshipping false idols in life. Thus, keep the Lord and His love, goodness and merciful justice in the forefront of our hopes and goals each day.

2. *PURSUE SPIRITUAL GROWTH WITH ZEAL:*

As the ancient Israelites were called to pursue the Promised Land, so also are we called to pursue our spiritual growth and living. Good character and good usefulness every day must be sought and won daily! Our true way of life centered in the Lord and His Holy Word must be discerned by us personally and consciously. This is not a gift that we can inherit by someone else’s effort or journey.

The parable of the ten virgins teaches this great truth. At the end of my life I cannot beg, borrow or steal anyone else’s heavenly love for God and others, just as the five foolish virgins could not borrow the lamp oil from the five wise virgins waiting for their bridegroom to come.

Love for God and others found within ongoing spiritual growth must be fought for and chosen, even when doing so feels hard and painful to do.

3. ***BE CONSCIOUS OF ONE'S EXISTENTIAL TRUTH:***

God created us all as human beings to enjoy at the roots of our inner life a gift of self-awareness. We know we are alive and have free will and reasoning. This is God's fabulous gift to us, making us free moral agents in life.

However, the spiritual residue from the massive ancient spiritual fall of humanity (pictured in the Old Testament myths of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden of Eden, the great flood with Noah and the ark, and the Tower of Babel story) teaches me that we all inherit an instinctive inward antagonism toward a genuine spiritual way of life.

Thus, I must remain ever watchful, ever on guard, for the influence of selfishness in my daily journey of life. Be vigilant within daily or weekly self-examination, and when evils and false ways of thinking show up, then name them for what they are and shun them quickly, praying for the Lord's help in turning away from such dark ways of life.

4. ***"The life of faith never exists without the life of charity, for without charity the life of faith is impossible." (Secrets of Heaven §2049:4)***⁴

This is another way of saying the truth of *James 2:26*, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Love in action, goodwill and compassion are the heart of all faithful thoughts and beliefs. Real faith in God only lives from a loving and willing spirit. This helps me to have a successful journey of life now and after I die.

Secrets of Heaven §1013: "Loving our neighbor is loving the Lord."

⁴ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Arcana Coelestia*. Translated by John Elliott. London: Swedenborg Society., 1983.

5. ***“In you, LORD my God, I put my trust.” -Psalm 25:1***

Put your greatest trust in the Lord and pray often for His leading. Choose spiritual innocence, asking the Lord to lead your purpose and intentions---yet also understand that God calls us to compel ourselves in choosing to follow His Commandments daily.

All who “are caught up in love for the Lord love being led by the Lord more than anything else, and want the Lord alone to be in control.”⁵ (*Divine Love and Wisdom* §142)

Matthew 25 brings all of this down to earth for us. In this chapter we hear from our Lord’s own mouth what it means when we apply His truths and Commandments into daily life. Read literally and spiritually He tells us that feeding the hungry is vital, both those who hunger for physical food and those who hunger for love. Also, those who thirst for clean water and for spiritual truth. Also, to care for the strangers among us, those who long for hospitality from us. To clothe the naked is important to God, and to help each other clothe our minds with true ideas and beliefs. Visiting and looking after the sick among us is also vital to the Lord, as is helping those who suffer from spiritual “dis-ease.”

And, yes, making time to visit our neighbors who are in prison, whether those prisons have metal bars in them or the prisons within our minds, keeping us from living life to the full, in carpe diem each day!

Ultimately, all people who live good lives, regardless of their religion, are welcomed into heaven. Above all, authentic religion is about kindness towards the neighbor and a willingness every day to be led by the Lord.

So, these are my top five tips for a successful spiritual journey through life leading into Heaven now and after death. What are your own top five or even top ten tips for successful empowerment in the Lord? Matthew 25 indicates that when our neighbors are suffering physically, mentally or spiritually, then it’s time to take action and be of use to our community and our society.

⁵ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Divine Love and Wisdom*. Translated by George F. Dole. West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010.

There are too many Americans today starving for love and mercy inside while they promote hatred, indifference and white supremacy. Perhaps the horrible evils that have simmered in America since the end of WWII are surfacing now by means of massacres of innocent people, telling us that it's high time for us religious people to ramp up our efforts to thwart the bigotry, discrimination and hatred now killing our people.

Principal Tonagel did a fine job last Thursday of helping LPHS's new freshman class to know what it takes to have a successful journey through high school. Now it's our turn to pull together as Christians in our area to put our values into action in a way that will stop the slaughter of innocent victims by putting our own faith and charity into action.....*NOW!*

Amen.