

The Author's Commentary
on
The Four Weeks
of
Phase II

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier (www.thefaithkit.org)
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The Four Weeks

Introduction

Like “The Author’s Commentary on the Seven Steps of *Faith Is Easy*,” this little book presumes familiarity with its namesake, and its purpose is to clarify and encourage. In this case, the author hopes to help readers to understand and appreciate each of the four weeks of spiritual activities which are offered in Phase II, and to show how naturally they follow one from another.

First, however, allow me to point out how Phase II follows from *Faith Is Easy*, which is really Phase I.

Phase I is a natural starting point. It presumes nothing, asks for minimal reading, and is designed to be studied over the course of just one week. It opens with some of the most basic things we can say about faith; and it ends by asking people to *do* something. It is only in action that we show ourselves what we believe. And it is only in exercising our faith that we can make it stronger.

For lots of good reasons, Phase II does not require that one has already made his or her way through Phase I. Therefore, Phase II needed to begin by going back to the basics and, in order to offer something deeper, it starts with the most basic of the basics, faith in God, and it wants to help a person experience God by the most direct route possible. From there Phase II wants to help a person move from this experience to a concrete faith that offers the richest spiritual life that might be communicated in just a few pages. Like Phase I, Phase II ends by asking people to do things because, once again, it is only in action that we show ourselves what we believe; and it is only in exercising our faith that we can make it stronger.

Week #1

The overall purpose of Week #1 is to guide a person from wherever he or she may be to the most wonderful experience that we can have while here on earth. We will make our way by means of five steps, each offering some potentially thrilling discoveries.

Our first step is to experience the miracle of existence. This is not difficult but it hardly ever happens.

Step #1 wants us to attack the problem at its source. As this author likes to say: “The primordial sin is the failure to pay attention!”

We all do it. I suspect it is a vestige of our animal ancestry. We feel a built-in need to be alert, constantly looking around. Translated into human terms, this means that almost all the time, except when we need to concentrate on some task, our minds are darting around restlessly from one thing to another. (This, surely, is one of the reasons that modern people’s lives are so dominated by the need to be entertained, whether by TV or the messages about almost nothing coming to us on the new “small screen.”)

Even when we find ourselves focusing on something for more than a few seconds, it is almost always something from the past or something we hope for or fear from the future.

Most people are almost never in the pure present. Some people have never been there at all.

Now, by “pure present” I am not talking about the attitude of the immature, who can never wait or work for anything because they only know “today.” There is a difference between the “pure today” of those who cannot think in terms of a lifetime, much less eternity, and the “pure present” we experience when we are able to settle our minds and focus patiently on anything that exists.

Step #1 offers one way to do this. In short, it suggests that we do it by looking at some thing and focusing on the details of its existence. By doing this, it is hoped, we will experience the amazing fact that *anything* exists,

and through this the existence of God standing behind things, and then the truth of our faith in heaven, love, and God's plan.

By the way, the more we try to settle our minds, the better we learn to do it, and the more obvious, and perennially present to us, will be the truth of the basics we call faith.

Step #2 follows Step #1. On the presumption that we have gained an experience of God, we are now being encouraged to talk to Him. This, Step #2 suggested, will in effect *double* our experience of God. By speaking to God out of our hearts *and feeling heard*, we are now experiencing God in another way.

Best of all, by pointing out that God speaks back to us by means of our own nature made in His image, Step #2 wants to help us see that a conversation with God is not mysterious and unbelievable but instead most natural and easy to be open to.

But, let it be clear: The degree to which a person's thoughts represent the mind of God depend on the degree that this person has learned about God and grown in His image. Our basic human nature knows a lot, it is true, but sometimes we don't "hear" the right thing because our formation in faith is lacking.

Nonetheless, most of the time, if we are really in touch with our deepest thoughts, those most influenced by the structure of our nature, what we hear will be really helpful.

The key to this happening is for us to be truly honest with ourselves about what we really have inside. This author tries to get people to do this by reminding them that they do not need to tell anyone else EVER whatever they might need to admit to themselves; and they have everything to gain if they do it, and no chance at peace and happiness if they don't.

Step #3 now follows because it wants you to get the full meaning of what you experienced in Step #2—that God is paying attention to you! By correcting the two wrong ideas that Step #3 talks about, you are being

prepared for the four part fact that God loves you “the way you want to be loved”:

The one you love is beautiful,

the one you love thinks you are beautiful,

thinks about you ALL THE TIME,

and loves you so deeply, who it is you are, that you know there is no chance he or she will ever love you less!

If people would get this how would they not be changed?!

At this point, I would like to point out that Step #3 does NOT use the formula for believing in yourself for the right reason “because God has made you who you are.” This idea, based on God’s plan, is the ultimate reason for a person to be sure of God’s love, but understanding and feeling God’s love does not require us to start by studying God’s plan.

I would also like to point out this: Like Steps #1 and 2, Step #3 offers an activity to help you experience the miracle of existence. In the case of Step #1, this involves looking closely at any-thing. In the case of Step #2, it involves experiencing God within you by concentrating on the time which is passing by *right now*. And, in the case of Step #3, it involves experiencing your-self by making use of the phrase “I am.”

The image with which Step #3 concludes—a person standing on the sea shore looking out at the ocean—wants to help us believe that we are loved the way we want to be loved while at the same time keeping our focus on our theme for the week: paying attention and experiencing fully all that actually *is*.

In Step #4 are we helped to meditate on the full implications of the obvious—that when God made the world He knew what was going to happen.

Immediately we helped to see that God's plan must extend to every detail in every thing, and, even more importantly, we are helped to see what this must mean about you and me.

Here, of course, is more reason to be sure of God's love for us, and even to be awestruck by who it is that we see in the mirror.

Maybe even more wonderful is the idea that at any moment each of us is exactly who we were meant to be, and exactly on course to our glorious destiny. This wonderful thought is renewable at any moment, several times a day!

Step #5 wants to help us to picture our glorious destiny.

Like in Steps #1, 2, 3 and 4, we are being helped to "get" a great idea by recognizing a lesser idea that might have been in the way.

Also, we are again being asked to get something by paying attention to what we really have inside. In this case, we are being asked to get in touch with the dreams that God would not have given us if they were not going to come true.

The text of Phase II does *not* include this observation: To look from earth into our glorious, immortal destiny is the most wonderful experience that we can have while we're on earth.

Week #2

Week #2 has the nicely rhyming title “a progressive *read* of the practical *creed*.”

The author, however, would rather comment on the words that begin with “p.”

The creed is “practical” in the sense that it explains Christianity in such a way as to have the most impact on the human spirit with the fewest words.

Besides this, the practical creed seems to many to proclaim its own truth without even trying. This author often asks people, “which of these sentences do you NOT believe?” Venerable formulas of faith are important to the history of faith but they talk about things that are too far from what people can relate to. The result is that people have no way of seeing them as true, or even knowing what they mean.

The practical creed makes faith comprehensible. It provides a comprehensive basis for spiritual life. And it provides people with an explanation of their faith that they can be proud of, leaving them unthreatened by any other formula of faith whether Christian or not.

Its seven articles can be divided into two groups: the first four which explain life and were written explicitly into all of our hearts, and the last three which speak of the main ways that Jesus made faith concrete.

The read is “progressive” in the sense that it wants to show how each of the seven articles follows one from another.

Article one picks up where we left off in Week #1—we concluded to faith that God made us for life with Him in heaven and this is our starting point in Week #2.

Articles two, three, and four want to answer an obvious question about the article that came before them.

Article five follows from article four.

Article six follows from article five in the sense that no form of Eucharist would be nearly so powerful without the fact that it plainly represents Jesus' acceptance of the cross. The Eucharist demands an article of its own because sharing this sacred meal has been at the center of the Christian experience from the beginning.

Article seven follows from article six in the sense that it is an expansion of the same thinking that lets us say that the Eucharist was ordained by God to speak for Him. In the case of the Eucharist, we say that God planned it because we experience irreplaceable inspiration from it and we need the many spiritual benefits it provides. In the case of the rest of the life of Jesus, we can say the same about the main things that have come down to us (or that we can rightfully presume) about the obstacle-laden life of Jesus. Here again we experience irreplaceable inspiration and our "need" is to have the truth presented in concrete terms.

Trying not to do too much, our progressive read does not provide a detailed "apologetic"—an explanation of how we know something is true—for the Practical Creed. This, however, was not the purpose of the progressive read; and there are many other places among this author's works, including many which are clickable, that provide apologetics as deep as one might need.

For the time being, I am pleased to offer you this:

We know that God made us for life in heaven because we experience God, cannot imagine that He is NOT good, and cannot imagine that He made us for death.

We know that the way to heaven is a life of faith and love because we are not in heaven. We are here where life is often hard and we know that God in His goodness would not have asked us to struggle here if it were not to give us more than He could give us by just making us in heaven. We know that the "more" God wants to give us is to be our own person—someone that WE had something to do with making us—because this is what is happening as we grow, and because we experience this as "more." We know that "more" means having more faith and love because we experience this too.

We know that God guides our lives according to His plan for everything that happens because we cannot imagine a God who did not know what would come from what He made, and had no plan for what was going to happen next.

We know that we are going to share God's life as a family because we already owe others for who we are, because it is exactly what love will do when we are together in heaven, and because it makes sense of God's plan like nothing else we can imagine.

We know that Jesus was sent to found the family in faith that we are called to be because God had to send *someone*, and the story of Jesus' life strikes us as God's speaking to us, and the resurrection was something God needed to do if He wanted Jesus to found His family. We say that Jesus' acceptance of the cross teaches and shows love because it does.

We know that the Eucharist was planned by God to show us the love that God showed us first on the cross because it was at the last supper that Jesus revealed his decision not to run and this was when, for all intents and purposes, he accepted the cross. We know that the Eucharist is the meal we share to be God's family because, like nothing else, meals make people into families, and this plainly is the holy meal that God's plan left us.

We know that the rest of the life of Jesus was planned to show us that faith can conquer any adversity because this is precisely the effect of the story of Jesus' life.

Week #3

I like The Weekly Prayer for several reasons.

First of all, it is based on the Practical Creed. And why is this so important? As we said when we reflected on the activity of Week #2: The Practical Creed “explains Christianity in such a way as to have the most impact on the human spirit with the fewest words.”

Also, The Weekly Prayer is designed to be repeated, weekly, and repetition *is* the mother of learning.

Also, the identification of a particular day with a particular article is unforced and meaningful. It can add to our appreciation of the article and even add something to how we experience each individual weekday.

Most of all, I like The Weekly Prayer for the individual prayers; and here below I would like to share with you some of the things I like best.

In the prayer for Monday, I especially like the power of this line: “Make heaven the true, great goal of my life, and not just some feeble hope I turn to when everything else is gone.” I might have added the line: “Please, please, do not let this happen to me!”

In the prayer for Tuesday, I especially like the rhythm of the line: “caring, really, about no one else, needing, always, to be paid back now, willing, never, to let anything go.” And, more importantly, this line describes well the self-centered person trapped within him or herself.

In the prayer for Wednesday, I especially like the word “awestruck” as it appears the line: “Let me be awestruck by what [God’s plan] means about all that has happened to me, and who I am right now.”

In the prayer for Thursday, I especially like the opening: “Let me be happy about the truth: that each of us will share equally in all our family gets from You.” I like this line because I know that some people have to be pushed in this direction because their faith is about rewards and punishments, and not yet about the idea that God is love. I am hoping that by

praying to be happy about the truth, people will help themselves to see that the doctrine of the family was God's brilliant way of making us more like Him AND giving us a reason to strive for a richer life in a way which is not selfish!

In the prayer for Friday, I especially like the line with regard to the cross: "Let me remember the choice that came before it, and the pain that Jesus knew was coming." After all, Jesus had seen crucifixions. And yet he faced his own *peacefully*! This is where his tremendous faith in the Father is really on display.

In the prayer for Saturday, I especially like the line: "Let me feel the fullness of what communion is meant to tell me: that what You want is to be one with me, and, one day, I am going to be one with You." I would say that, like the prayer for Friday, the prayer for Saturday is trying to add an inspiring new element to the explanation of its doctrine.

In the prayer for Sunday, I especially like that we are being reminded that Jesus "had no Jesus to inspire him...." This makes three in a row where a prayer is trying to add an inspiring new element to the way a doctrine is explained.

Week #4

My commentary on Week #4 wants to answer the question, with regard to “The Ten Suggestions,” why is number 1 number 1, etc.?

Number 1—post the Practical Creed—is number 1 because the Practical Creed really is the best blend of simple and inspiring I can think of, and repetition really is the mother of learning. If the Practical Creed is always in front of us at home, our faith will always be in front of us in life. We will always think quickly of the right thing as things happen to and around us.

Number 2—say the Our Father once a day and mean it—is number 2 because our life will be greatly changed for the better if we mean it when we say the Our Father. How does this NOT happen if, indeed, we are reminding ourselves that nothing matters but where we are going, and God’s plan is sure to get us there?! I am asking for us to do this *once* a day because we can focus our thoughts for this purpose at least once a day but not repetitiously.

Number 3—treat others... —is number 3 because we need a workable guide to action, and the golden rule is inspiring. It is especially inspiring when we consider how we ourselves do NOT want to be treated, and the sub-point concerning “moments of conflict” is really useful. After all, moments of conflict come up all day long!

Number 4—see the loss of peace as a warning—is number 4 because the loss of peace *does* mean that our faith is not working. Note, please, that I said “peace” not “joy.” Joy is NOT always possible, but, thanks to faith in heaven, love, and God’s plan, peace is.

Number 5—be honest with yourself about what you’re feeling and thinking of doing—is number 5 because once we put our issues plainly on the table, almost always it becomes clear what we should do—or not do. We mess up when we manage to avoid thinking about what we say we believe, and what might happen, and how we will feel if it does, etc.

Number 6—have rules concerning television—is number 6 because TV, with its constantly changing picture, *is* addictive, and it diminishes our

ability to concentrate. Even worse, for far too many people, TV gets them to waste most of the free time of their whole lives.

Number 7—give yourself at least two hours to do or not do what you want before you go to bed—is number 7 because when our days connect we are NOT living a 24 hour day and we human beings were not made for this. We will burn out. Even before this, we are living without something daily to look forward to, and this results in a dry, joyless life.

Number 8—get enough sleep—is number 8 because energy is everything; it is our power to see things clearly, to do things well, to have patience, to feel great. The lack of energy results in what most people mistakenly call “depression.”

Number 9—come to church—is number 9 because, as Phase I rightfully says, “coming to church is the most concrete thing you can do to show yourself that you believe—or that you want to believe.”

Number 10—have a rule for giving and keep it—is number 10 because it is only in action that we show ourselves what we really believe, and it is only in sacrifice that we show ourselves what we have in our hearts is really love.

A Practical Creed

God made us for life in heaven.

The way to heaven is a life of faith and love.

God guides us according to His plan for everything He sends into our lives.

We are going to share heaven as a family where all of us are going to be richer for the holiness of each of us.

Jesus was sent to teach the truth, to found the Church, and to accept the cross on which he taught and showed us love.

The Eucharist is the meal we share to be God's family, and it is also God's way to show us again and again the love He showed us first on the cross.

The rest of the life of Jesus was planned to show us that faith can conquer any adversity.