



Elephants and Dwarfs— Do You Believe?

Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' (John 11:25-26)

Have you ever seen huge elephants tethered to a small stake loosely hammered into the ground? Why don't they break free? Simple. They don't believe.

Apparently, when elephants are young, trainers fasten one of their feet with a chain that is attached to a deeply planted stake. The young elephant will try to break loose, but to no avail. Eventually the baby elephant accepts the fact that they are captive to the chain and the post, and they give up. They become a captive of their own mind.

After it gives up, the elephant grows up. Though fully mature, weighing thousands of pounds, the elephant remains a captive to its training and conditioning. For a fully mature elephant it would take, of course, only the slightest effort to break free of its chains, but the elephant doesn't even try. The elephant is enslaved, unable to believe that it can break free.

Deeply held religious suppositions and superstitions work in a similar way. When the Resurrection and the Life offers freedom, by God's grace, many look down at the religious shackles on their feet and choose to remain prisoners of their own minds.

Belief is a choice. We either believe or we do not believe. We make that choice based on experience, evidence (or the lack thereof), training and conditioning. Like a full-grown adult elephant, we are often so tied down to our suppositions that we just can't imagine how God could free us from the life we lead.

Toward the end of C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, in a book called *The Last Battle*, Lucy, Peter and Edmund, via their imaginations, or time travel if you like, visit what Lewis called the New Creation (some call this "place" heaven). If you read *Narnia*, or saw

the recent movie based on his work, you will know that Lewis depicts Christ as a lion—Aslan the Lion.

The New Creation is a place of joy, beauty and light. It's breathtaking. The colors and the sounds of the New Creation are like watching a heavenly 50-inch plasma T.V. when you've been used to watching an earthly 50-year-old black and white T.V.

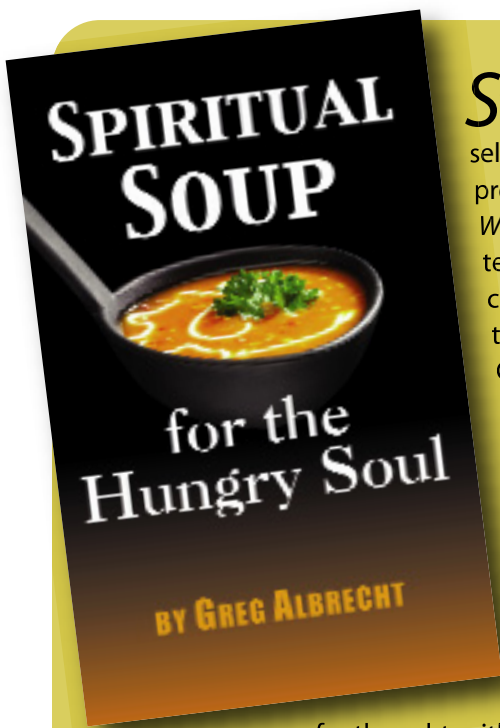
As Lucy, Peter and Edmund enjoy the New Creation, they see a group of dwarfs huddled together. The dwarfs refuse to believe they are in heaven. Before Aslan liberated them, the dwarfs had been held captive in a dirty, dark stable. Aslan rescued them from their bondage and placed them in the beautiful environment of the New Creation, with blue skies, green grass and fresh air. But the dwarfs refuse to believe that they are free. They remain huddled together in a little circle.

Lucy is upset and turns to Aslan, asking him to do something to help these dwarfs. Aslan, the Christ figure, says to Lucy, "I will show you what I can do and what I cannot do." Immediately the dwarfs are given plates filled with meats and vegetables—a sweet-smelling banquet. Each of the dwarfs is also given a goblet filled with the most delicious wine imaginable.

The dwarfs immediately dive into the feast Aslan has provided, but almost as immediately, they begin to complain. Refusing to believe in the sumptuous feast provided for them, they grumble about having to put up with the stink of a barnyard. They grouse about the hay and cow dung they are given to eat. They whine that the rich, red wine they have been given is nothing but dirty water out of the animal trough.

After Lucy, Edmund and Peter witness this sight, Aslan explains to them that the dwarfs had chosen to reject the reality of the New Creation and to be hostile, suspicious and critical. Even though Aslan had freed them from the filth of the stable where they had been held captive, they remained prisoners

"Although I do not fully understand the process of digestion, nevertheless I still eat."

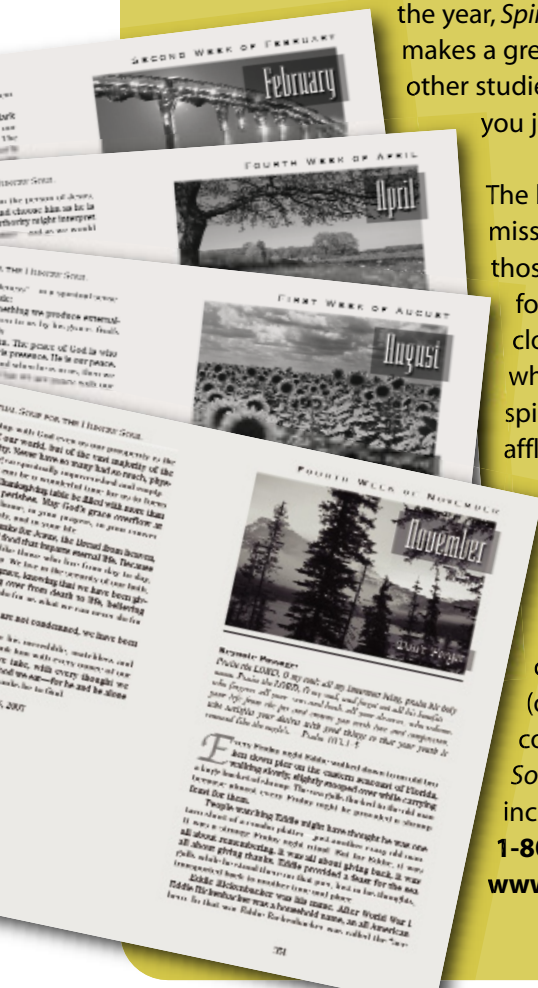


Spiritual Soup for the Hungry Soul is a collection of 48 carefully selected messages Greg has previously given at *Christianity Without the Religion*, PTM's online teaching ministry. With nearly 400 compelling and inspiring pages, this is the most substantial of Greg's books to date, so while you may be tempted to read it all at once—we recommend reading a little at a time.

In each of these 48 messages, Greg piques your spiritual appetite with a rich and satisfying Christ-centered meal, offering plenty of food

for thought, with a special emphasis on God's love and grace (and according to the letters we receive, people hunger to learn more about God's mercy, love and grace!).

Organized seasonally, with a message designated for each week of the year, *Spiritual Soup for the Hungry Soul* makes a great devotional or a companion to other studies and resources you may use as you journey through 2010.



The book's title grew out of PTM's mission—to provide spiritual food for those who are hungry, spiritual drink for those who are thirsty, spiritual clothing and hospitality for those who are naked and homeless, spiritual healing for those who are afflicted and spiritual freedom for those who are held in religious bondage (Matthew 25:37-39).

Most of our contributing PTM Friends and Partners will receive a complimentary copy. For others (or for contributors who want extra copies), *Spiritual Soup for the Hungry Soul* (item B256) is available for \$22 including shipping by calling **1-800-309-4466** or order online at **www.ptm.org/SOUP**.

commentary

of their own minds. They could not see or experience the New Creation because they *would* not.

Aslan says, "You see, they will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is truly in their minds...."

The choice is ours. We can remain tethered to the legalistic religious traditions that enslave us. We can choose to ignore the new creation that Christ provides us. We can ridicule the heavenly banquet he sets before us and choose the hell we have always known.

We can accept Christ as the Resurrection and the Life, or we can reject him. Apart from Christ, we are all like trained elephants or like dwarfs who refuse to accept heavenly realities. We can, like Paul, do "everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). We may be, if we accept Christ, "more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

On our three-mile early morning walks, my wife and I often meet a neighbor whose name is Fred. Fred is an engineer who became a distinguished lawyer—a well-read man who can cite chapter and verse from many great authors. We often talk theology and religion during our hour-long walks in the cool morning air.

A few months ago we were talking about the nature of belief. Fred says that one of his favorite quotes about belief was attributed to a mathematician he had studied as he trained to be an engineer. According to Fred, the mathematician explained the logic of human acceptance of absolute realities we could not prove by conventional methods, by saying, "Although I do not fully understand the process of digestion, nevertheless I still eat."

Believe it or not, Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. He does not reveal all of the details of how he is the Resurrection and the Life, but he audaciously claims that he is. We may choose to believe or reject him—it's our choice. □

—Greg Albrecht