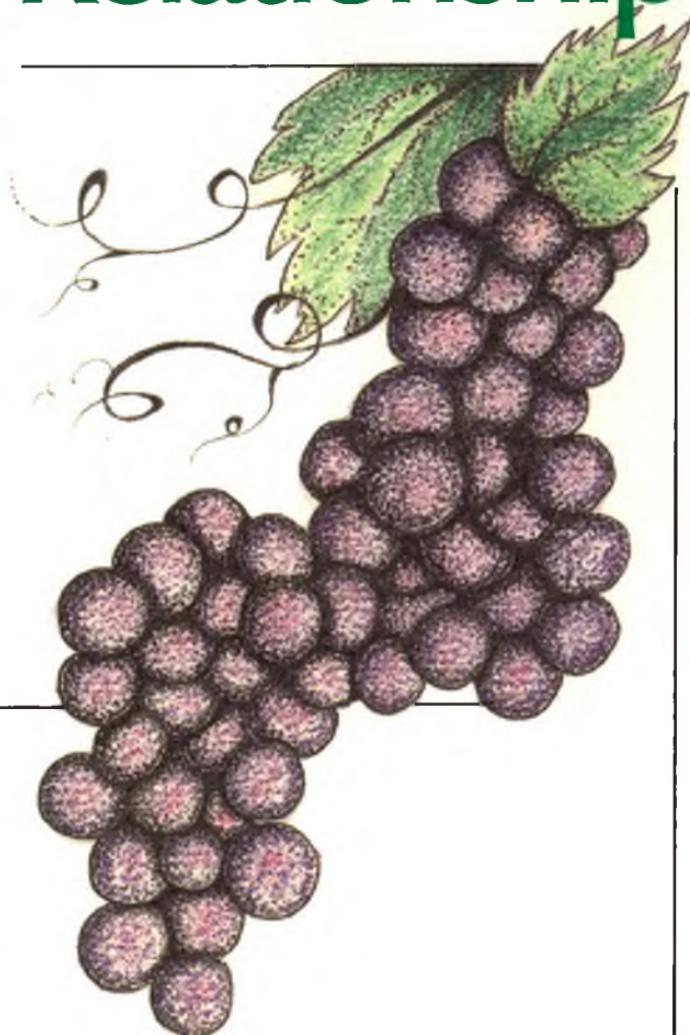


JANUARY-MARCH

# PRAYER: An Interactive Relationship



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide  
for Young Adults

CQ

[www.cq.youthpages.org](http://www.cq.youthpages.org)

# Prayer: An Interactive Relationship



## Staff

**Editor:** Gary B. Swanson  
**Editorial Assistant:** Shirlee J. Ingram

## Reading Committee

Kathy Beagles	Jennifer Perez
Lyndelle Chiomenti	Tim Poirier
Doug Guerrero	Ken Rogers
Pat Habada	José Rojas
Jonathan Kuntaraf	Jim Zackrison

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## Welcome to CQ's World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ*'s writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School lesson quarterly, more than 400 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 65,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Finnish, and Indonesian.

## Get Interactive

# Ever think about writing for CQ?

Why not! Each year 400 young adults from around the world participate in the *CQ* writing program. It gives Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the church.

You are the most important ingredient in our *CQ* formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson, write us today:

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12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904 U.S.A.

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E-mail: [cq@gc.adventist.org](mailto:cq@gc.adventist.org)



## This Quarter's Illustrator



Sherrie Freeman is a hairstylist and freelance artist/illustrator from Summerfield, North Carolina. She grew up in Takoma Park, Maryland, before moving to Tampa, Florida, where she studied commercial art. As a freelancer, she has designed greeting cards and produced various projects for local municipalities. Her interests include animals (especially reptiles), fishing, and motorcycles.

# Getting the Most Out of CQ

## Facts You Should Know

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the adult Bible Study Guide find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

More than 400 Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject. Circulation of CQ is about 65,000.

## POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The scriptural references on which each week's lesson is based appear in bold type at the beginning of the "Logos" portion of the lesson.
3. The Bible passage for the week is usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.
4. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the lesson:

"**Introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

"**Logos**," as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

"**Testimony**" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

"**Evidence**" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.

"**How-To**" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

"**Opinion**" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson, meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

"**Exploration**" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

## CQ and the Church

CQ is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

# Christ: the model prayer



“ ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened’ ” (Luke 11:9, 10, NIV).

# A New Year With God

## INTRODUCTION

Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-14

How do you know when God is in your life? When you're happy, rosy, cheerful, spirited, and jolly. This can be true, but we have a continual battle. Wherever your battle line is, you can take heart in the One who will take time to listen to you. God will make your heart easy when you communicate with Him through prayer.

After completing a year in school, my life came to a stand still. What was I to do and how would I know that God was in the outcome? A huge battle. I asked God in my morning prayers to speak to me. This particular warm April morning, my feet left the ground for 22 hours and hit Scotland for missionary work lasting nine months. But how did I know that God was in this and in my life?

I confronted many battles with daily earnest prayer. Home was so far away, so God was the closest to me. A poem called "I Asked . . ." described my whole experience. I now know that when I ask Him and seek Him, I find Him as part of my life, and I'm joyful. Here's that poem.

### I Asked . . .

I asked God for strength,  
that I might achieve.

I was made weak,  
that I might learn  
to humbly obey . . .

I asked for health,  
that I might do greater things.

I was given infirmity,  
that I might do better things . . .

I asked for riches,  
that I might be happy,

I was given poverty,  
that I might be wise . . .

I asked for power,  
that I might have the praise of man.

I was given weakness,  
that I might feel the need for God . . .

I asked for all things,  
that I might enjoy life,  
I was given life,  
that I might enjoy all things . . .

I got nothing I asked for—  
But everything that I had  
hoped for.  
Almost despite myself,  
my unspoken prayer  
was answered.

I am, among all,  
most richly blessed!

(Anonymous)

## LOGOS

Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-14

*"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6, NIV).*

Isaiah states it clearly. God says I must seek Him when He is available. But I thought He was always available. We need to get over the idea that we can dictate to God. Those urges to pray or seek Him come from Him. They are not intrinsically ours.

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you" (John 15:7, NKJV). I know my Bible, front to back and back to front. OK. Your point is? Unless you abide in Christ and have His words abide in you, there is no coupling. You can't access a website without an Internet service provider. You can try all you want; it won't happen.

Many think of prayer as point and shoot. I see, I want, I need, I ask, and I get. Oops! Sometimes I get, the rest of the time it's woe. We beg for others to pray us out of our pain. What's wrong with this picture? Everything! The point of suffering is to get us out of ourselves and into God. It seems there is no other way of moving us into God.

When He says "seek," we go shopping, we eat, read, spend time with family and friends, or anything else that is familiar and preferable to us. The comfort of

God is painful to us. God couldn't care less about our homeostasis until we get to the point that our homoeostatic self is only comfortable in Him.

Only then can we get to the point of asking correctly. When that happens, we spend more time listening to God and getting His take, His

desire, His goal in any situation. Only then can we ask and receive because we have moved over and gotten out of the way. We no longer value our opinionated selves. We know we are but a mix and mesh of complex hyperlinks, only needing something to click on us to get us connecting. We are then where God is pleased. If we do nothing but praise Him, we are doing what He wants.

God is not idle. He is constantly on the move, constantly changing us into the purpose of His design. Will you let Him? Only you can answer this question. Only in your innermost soul do you know the answer. You can hide from others, you can even hide from yourself, but you cannot hide from God. He knows what's real and what's a press release.

An interesting thing about Jesus and what He had to say is that He gives it in pieces. At least the writers of the Bible remember it only in pieces. "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1, NKJV). Not *in* the shadow but *under* it. Who can get under a shadow?

He knows what's  
real and what's a  
press release.

---

## **REACT**

1. How does your opinion compare to God's?
2. What portion of your prayer life is devoted to listening?
3. How can you know you are hearing correctly?
4. What is the difference between healthy self-esteem and dangerous self-sufficiency?
5. How do our opinions of ourselves affect our prayers to God and how we relate to other people?
6. How can one turn prayer from a daily protocol into a meaningful daily conversation with a good friend? Be specific.
7. What are some ways to remember God in times of trial?
8. In Job's story, how do you feel about the concept that God doesn't give us more than we can handle?
9. What is the difference between prayer and meditation?

## Pray and Receive—When?

### TESTIMONY

Matt. 6:6; 7:9

"In order to have spiritual life and energy we must have actual intercourse with our heavenly Father."<sup>1</sup> In prayer Jesus found comfort and joy. "Through continual communion [Jesus] received life from God, that He might impart life to the world. His experience is to be ours."<sup>2</sup> "[Jesus] taught His disciples how to pray. He directed them to present their daily needs before God, and to cast all their care upon Him. And the assurance He gave them that their petitions should be heard, is assurance also to us."<sup>3</sup> "Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to

the wants of His children."<sup>4</sup> "God's heart of infinite love yearns toward [us], ready to give [us] more than [we] can ask or think."<sup>5</sup>

God wants us to have the best of all. He doesn't want us to settle for any less than that. He gives Himself to us. Nothing

else in the whole universe can offer anything better than God. For our own sake He says, "Take Me, and you will have the ride of your life." We should seek Him, ask for Him, and take Him.

### REACT

1. Are there conditions for God to hear and answer your prayers? Explain your answer.
2. What relationship is there, if any, between answered prayer and belief?
3. Why do we feel we can't take some things to God in prayer?
4. How can one establish a comfortable praying relationship with God? Be specific.
5. Why do we so easily believe that the world can offer more to us than God?
6. How does prayer help us overcome this weakness?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 64.

4. Ibid., p. 100.

5. Ibid., p. 94.

# The Problem With Being Good

## EVIDENCE

Luke 18:9-14; Phil. 2:3-8

Luke 18 opens with the parable of the persistent widow. The lesson here is made not by comparison, but by contrast—a Jewish method of reasoning much used by Jesus and the apostles. If even the unjust judge delivers justice, how much more will God, the just Judge, do so! Jesus ends the parable with the rhetorical question, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (verse 8, NIV).

I wonder if this is connected to the next parable. The Pharisee's problem was that he was unaware of his lack of goodness. This condition is echoed in the warning to the Laodicean church in the last days.

The people greatly respected the Pharisees for their piety. They were zealous for the law, kept it to the letter—and beyond. By contrast, the tax collectors were despised by most Jews.

In spite of his apparent goodness, the Pharisee was lost spiritually, for he had no sense of spiritual need. In contrast, the tax collector stood at a distance, would not even look up to heaven, and beating his chest, said, “ ‘ ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ’ ” (verse 13, NIV). He did not seek to justify himself.

**The Pharisees thought of righteousness in terms of keeping the law.**

The Pharisees thought of righteousness in terms of keeping the law. Jesus taught that righteousness resulted from an inward working of God's grace, a condition of the mind, and a state of one's relationship with God. Even those who keep the law most zealously need repentance and humility to be in a right relationship with God and their fellow humanity.

## REACT

1. Why might we Laodiceans be tempted to be like the Pharisee in the parable, and how can we avoid that mistake?
2. How can we teach ourselves to ask for “self-help”?
3. How can we effectively use these lessons/parables to witness to others and still maintain humility?
4. In what ways are you like the Pharisees in your daily life?
5. Is honesty in sinners, i.e., no veneer of hypocrisy, an admirable quality? Explain your answer.

## HOW-TO

Luke 11:8-10

**Step one: Just ask!** Have you ever needed something and felt very disappointed when you didn't get it? Did you feel even worse when your best friend finally guessed your need and helped you out in a matter of minutes? Will you ever forget the look on his face as he asked you, "Why didn't you say something?"

Indeed, why not? Luke 11:10 says: "Everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (NIV). Logical, isn't it? Unless you ask, you are unlikely to get an answer. You need to come to God in prayer and speak to Him. Tell Him your needs, concerns, joys, and sadnesses. He is our Friend and wants to share in all those. He's also promised an abundance of blessings to those who ask (verse 13).

**Step two: Be persistent!** Jesus actually invites us to nag Him! As humans we will often deal with persistent people just to get them off our backs. In Luke 18 He tells a story of a widow who persistently asks a judge for justice. Eventually the judge says, "'Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" (verse 5, NIV). But Jesus continues, "'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?'

**"Why didn't you say something?"**

Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (verses 6-8, NIV).

Don't pray about something once and then feel uncomfortable bringing it up with God again. Jesus invites you to pray continually; your pleas will not go unheard.

**Step three: Believe!** Jesus said, "'Friend, your sins are forgiven'" (5:20, NIV). Throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus placed a lot of emphasis on faith. It is no different today. When you pray, don't make it just a daily protocol. Listen to what you are saying, mean it when you say Thanks for your food, and believe that when you ask God for your next meal, you will receive it. Never forget that Jesus is our Friend, but He's also God, and He's looking after His own! With Him we can allow our faith to stretch far beyond our next meal. The NIV translates Luke 11:8 "'Because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs'" (emphasis supplied). Even when you're bold or downright cheeky in your request, remember that "[You] can do all things through Christ who strengthens [you]" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV).

# The Model Prayer

## OPINION

Luke 11:1-4

In the personal prayer of Jesus, we see more than model words. We see a picture of the God who receives them.

Who is He? In Luke 11:2, what is God called? How does relating to God as your Father affect you?

Where does this Dad of ours live? Jesus' prayer tells us "in heaven" (verse 2, KJV). He lives in heaven, a real place above the chaos and confusion of this sin-infested planet.

What He is like. "Hallowed be thy name" (verse 2, KJV). What does hallowed mean? In the present day, what do you know that is considered hallowed? In Bible times one's name often described one's character.

What He does. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth" (verse 2, KJV). God has a mission and will for our lives. Jesus spoke often of the kingdom of God while He was on this earth. There are well over one hundred fifty verses in the New Testament alone that refer to the kingdom of God. What do you think His will for this earth is?

**God cares about our little daily needs as well.**

God doesn't just care, however, about the big goal of His kingdom. He cares about our little daily needs as well. "Give us day by day our daily bread" (verse 3, KJV). We can ask our Father for food because He is a provider. Every day He wants us to have what we need to strengthen us and keep us healthy. God provides for us not only physically but spiritually as well. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35, KJV).

"'Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us'" (Luke 11:4, NIV). God is a provider who forgives. He is Someone who doesn't hold grudges or bitterness, but Someone who longs for restored relationships not just between you and Him, but between yourself and others. 1 John 1:9 says it all.

"And lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:4, KJV). God doesn't just forgive us, cleanse us, pat us on our backs, and send us back to roaming. He knows that without Him, our hope of staying off the path of sin is hopeless. That's why He leads us. Our Leader knows the right road. Read how David described Him in Psalm 23.

Even while we are following the Leader, Satan is going to do everything he can to distract us, give us a wrong picture of God, and deceive us into forfeiting eternal life. We need a deliverer when the enemy comes our way. God is there to "deliver us from evil" (verse 4, KJV). How does knowing that your God has power over every form of evil give you confidence in Him?

## EXPLORATION

Luke 11:1-13

# To Form a More Perfect Union ...

## CONCLUDE

Jesus not only taught His disciples to pray and modeled for them regular, earnest communion with God, but He also gave them the promise, “ ‘Ask and it will be given to you; . . . For everyone who asks receives’ ” (Luke 11:9, 10, NIV). We know from Christ’s teaching and example that we can rely fully on the power of prayer, but only if we make room for God in our lives and initiate the connection. With those lines of communication open, we need only ask—not just once, but with persistence—and believe. He will listen and answer.

## CONSIDER

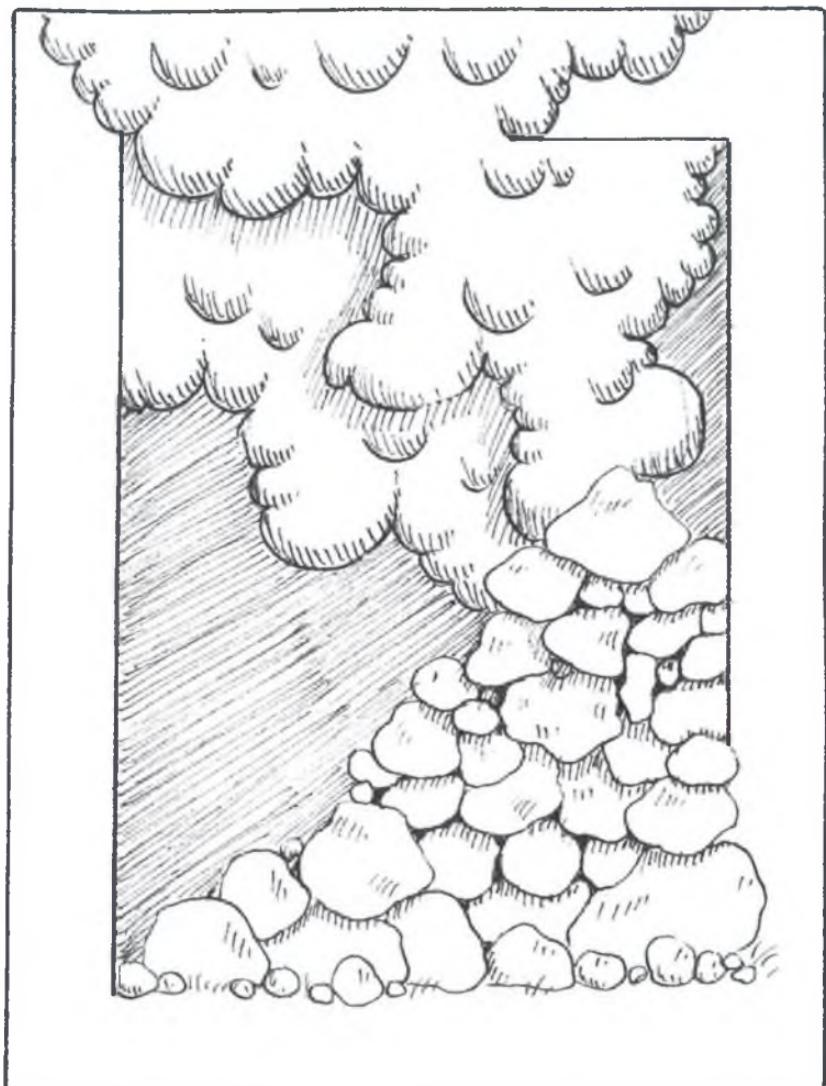
- Designing a poster that lists all the different names for God or ways to address Him in prayer such as “Our Father . . . ,” “Dear Jesus . . . ,” “O Lord, Most Holy. . . ”
- Listening to or singing the lyrics of the song “Just a Closer Walk With Thee”; then recall this plea each time you walk to or from your home, car, office, or classroom during the next week.
- Exploring <[www.eprayer.com](http://www.eprayer.com)>. This Web site offers electronic prayers that you can send to friends, family, and loved ones, a place for prayer requests, and other creative features.
- Designating a special place—similar to Jesus’ spot in Gethsemane and surrounded by nature if possible—where you can “watch and pray” to renew your prayer life.
- Making a list—or even a cassette tape—of all the songs you know that are prayers or that make a direct appeal to God. (Many of these are based on the Psalms; some are hymns like “Abide With Me” and “Father Lead Me Day By Day.”)
- Inviting a friend to join you for a weekly or monthly silent prayer vigil, at which you each pray for the other’s needs to be met according to God’s will.
- Writing out a prayer to God. Think of using the same kind of intimate tone, style, and issues as if you were writing a long-overdue letter to your closest human friend, mentor, or confidant.

## CONNECT

Matthew 6:5-15; Romans 8:26, 27.

*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, chap. 5; *Steps to Christ*, pp. 93-104. Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, pp. 51-66; Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*, pp. 42-51; C. S. Lewis, *Poems*, pp. 122, 123.

# Job: prayers of despair



"He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me,  
I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10, NIV).

## INTRODUCTION

Rom. 8:37

Still fresh is my memory of the events of August 7, 1998, in Nairobi. The United States Embassy had become the target of a terrorist bomb attack, and the building was a heap of rubble. Heavy clouds of smoke billowed from the spot. In a matter of minutes, rescue work had begun in earnest. Firefighters, ambulances, earthmovers, bare hands were now engaged in a rescue mission. Many were rescued, but some did not survive.

Israeli troops who arrived the following day outshone everyone in the rescue effort. One man was trapped several meters under the rubble. As he shouted for help, the troops engaged him in conversation.

"Help me, please. Save me, please."

"Are you seeing any light?"

"No. I am dying. Save me, please."

"We are just about to reach you. Just a bit more rubble and we will save you. Do you feel any vertical wall near you?"

"Yes."

"Stay close to it."

Forty-eight hours later, the man was saved—worn and unable to speak. He was flown to the hospital, where he later recovered. Recently, in an interview with

a Kenyan magazine, he said: "It was an hour of waiting darkness. My one and only business for all that time was prayer."

Our human experiences sometimes lower us to the lowest ebb. Job, the biblical hero of faith, was not exempt from temptations. He

went to the extent of questioning why God ever allowed him to be born into the world (Job 10:18).

Regardless of temptation, we must remember that God's love transcends human suffering and pain. Our problems should not scare us away from Him, but should make us reach out to Him since He is already reaching out to us. God is in heaven above and in the contrite heart. The vertical wall that makes our relationship to Him possible is the prayer of faith. God has given us faith to enable us to believe in His promises, regardless of what we meet on the way.

**"I am dying.  
Save me, please."**

# Freedom With Conscience

## EVIDENCE

Gal. 5:1

Freedom is sweet. But freedom without conscience is not freedom. Only those who have been subjects of oppression in prisons, in slavery, and other sorts of social injustice can testify to the validity of this statement. It will probably be more understood in South Africa than in any other part of the world.

The book of Job portrays the case of a righteous man who seems to be as aware of his righteousness as God and Satan are (Job 1:8, 9; 23:10). Satan, claiming that Job is righteous only because God protects him, seeks permission to oppress him. As calamities befall Job, he becomes an outcast. Friends and family see Job's problems as a result of his sins and advise him to repent and stop pretending. His wife urges him to curse God. But Job's conscience remains clear as he sees God's face in prayer. Although he has sought God in every direction and has not found Him, Job does not lose hope. His strong faith keeps him afloat.

"Faith keeps a dry skin in water: Job's faith combines those opposites, a vivid consciousness of an intimate relationship with God through obedience to His way and an equally vivid awareness of being denied fellowship with God. The latter is entirely God's doing. Job has done nothing to forfeit God's favor. Therefore he sees his experience for what it is, not punishment, not chastisement but a test—he accepts the test because he knows: I shall come out as gold."\*

Job's conscience led him to remain faithful to God. It is likewise with us. We need to understand our relationship with God. Our consciences should be clear. We should be able to discern the course of our sufferings and still have faith in God. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1, NIV). As much as you suffer, be free from sin.

## REACT

1. Why is a clear conscience important in prayer?
2. Hope is like a beam from a lighthouse. What are the strongest personal and spiritual sources of hope in the rough seas of your life?

\**Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1976).

Monday  
January 8

**LOGOS**  
Job 7; 10; 14

## Hardening Off for the Garden

In the heat of mid-March I witnessed an incident that, to me, seemed an inadvisable act. My father watered the tomato seedlings in the nursery and removed the shade that had provided the shelter for the tender plants. "Why are you so cruel to the plants?" I inquired. He looked at me briefly and then answered with a confident smile, "I am hardening them off before transplanting them." Time testified to the truth in my father's words. In the few days that followed, the stems grew stronger and the leaves bigger. This can be compared to our daily experiences.

### **Choice to Die? (Job 7:15)**

The problem of suffering even for seemingly righteous people has been with us in all history. Daily occurrences in our lives sometimes cause despair and despondency. Pain is sometimes an inseparable companion, and each one of us has had a point in life when we have asked, *Where is God?* Facing examination, failure, business losses, disease, death of loved ones, war, crime, and natural disasters leads us to question the love of God—even in our prayers. Some have wished to die. But the foregoing analogy shows us that our exposure to temptation and difficult circumstances (the removing of the shade) is not necessarily to our disadvantage. Sometimes we come out spiritually healthier and stronger after our temptations. True?

### **The Giver of Life (Job 10:12)**

My father took much more care of the seedlings after the removal of the shade than before. Although the seedlings looked withered on the day the shade was removed, they were much stronger on the second day and increased in strength with each passing day. We are lucky to have Job's suffering before us because in

his deep agony and pain, he remembers that it is God who has granted him life and that it is God who preserves his spirit. Shouldn't we then believe that God is working

**Pain is sometimes an  
inseparable companion.**

behind the shadows for our ultimate good? It is often impossible to understand fully the purpose of our temptation. This sometimes makes us pray to God to remove that which we look at as bad and to give us what seems good to us. When our prayers go unanswered (at least the way we wish), we invite the spirit of doubt and unrepentance to reign within us. Some are led to make dangerous and even untimely requests of God. We need to remember that God knows and understands our situation better than we understand it. This is why He provided a remedy beforehand. He has promised to go with us all the way if we stay in touch with Him.

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Some temptations and troubles come to us because we forsake God, but He provides a way out of it (Hos. 5:15). He has already been afflicted for us (Isa. 63:9) and has promised not to allow us to be tempted beyond our ability (1 Cor. 10:13). This is a faithful promise, and He invites us to cooperate with Him so that we can claim this glorious promise.

### Not Without Predecessor

There is not a single biblical hero who was never subjected to severe temptation with a purifying effect. These heroes and heroines have gone before us so that we may not lose heart in the face of suffering. Even if it leads to death, the Lord will finally call, and we will have to answer and give account of our lives. Since we know that God has already made the first move in saving us, we should also know that “‘prayer is not the overcoming of God’s *reluctance*; it is the taking hold of God’s *willingness*.’ ‘Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.’ Prayer does not change God; but it does change *us* and our *relation* to God. It places us in the channel of blessings, and in that frame of mind in which God can consistently and safely grant our requests.”\*

Try it and it will surely work for you. Here are some Bible heroes who have been purified by temptation:

1. Joseph by Potiphar's wife	“How . . . could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9, NIV).
2. Elijah by Ahab and Jezebel	“O Lord, . . . you are God in Israel!” (1 Kings 18:36, NIV).
3. Ruth by Naomi	“Your God [will be] my God” (Ruth 1:16, NIV).
4. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego by Nebuchadnezzar	“Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us” (Dan. 3:17, NKJV).
5. Daniel by Darius	“My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions” (Dan. 6:22, NIV).
6. Jesus in Gethsemane	“May your will be done” (Matt. 26:42, NIV).

You can become a hero, can't you?

### REACT

1. Should we seek temptation as a way to emerge spiritually stronger after resisting it? Why or why not?
2. To what degree do you think God allows temptation to befall us in order to make us stronger? (See Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 10:13.)
3. When you pray, do you seek to change your circumstances, or do you seek to change yourself? What's the difference?

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\*Bible Readings for the Home, p. 604.

Tuesday  
January 9

# "Look a Little Higher"

## TESTIMONY

Job 23:10

A writer once said, "If we forget our history, we are doomed to repeat it." We dare not forget how God has providentially led His church and answered the prayers of the pioneers. Prayer played a vital role during moments of sorrow and disappointment. After the great disappointment of October 22, 1844, believers asked God in prayer to show them where they had erred. God did answer their prayers.

Ellen White and four other young women met for prayer in the home of Mr. Haines of South Portland, Maine. As they were praying, God gave Ellen White her first vision, and it was an answer to their prayer. Ellen recalls the event: "While I was praying at the family altar, the Holy Ghost fell upon me, and I seemed to be

rising higher and higher, far above the dark world. I turned to look for the advent people in the world, but could not find them, when a voice said to me, 'Look again, and look a little higher.' "<sup>1</sup>

### Does God care when righteous people suffer?

Ellen White saw that those travelers on the path who kept their eyes on Jesus went safely on, but those who grew discouraged and faint lost their footing and fell away. The Day of Disappointment was in truth the day of God's appointment.

How delightful it is when heaven listens to prayers in times of despair. "I was shown that it is the privilege of Christians to obtain strength from God to hold every precious gift. Fervent and effectual prayer will be regarded in heaven."<sup>2</sup>

After the testing time, Job came out as gold (Job 23:10). Does God care when righteous people suffer? "The Lord had been trying us for our good, and to prepare us to labor for others; . . . Our work was to labor for souls; . . . trials had been permitted to come upon us to prepare us for the still greater conflicts that we would meet in our travels."<sup>3</sup> There are dark times in this pilgrimage to heaven. We are surrounded by fresh dangers and assailed by unexpected temptations. These should not be allowed to sidetrack us from the heavenly journey. We should "look a little higher" and see God's purpose for us—knowing that a day of appointment is soon to break. After it all we will come out as pure gold prepared for future challenges.

## REACT

How has prayer strengthened your relationship with God? Be specific.

1. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1982), p. 55.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 407.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

# We Must Persevere in Prayer

## HOW-TO

Col. 4:2

Matthew 15:22-26 is the story of a woman whose daughter was possessed by demons. When she pleaded, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession" (verse 22, NIV), Christ kept quiet. The woman persisted. She knelt down and said again, "Lord, help me!" (verse 25, NIV). This time Christ demanded to know whether the food for children would be given to dogs. (Gentiles were so called by Jews). The woman replied, "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (verse 27, NIV).

Even when Jesus doesn't seem to answer our prayers, He is not unmindful of our needs. Sometimes when we pray and Christ has kept silent, we become discouraged. We don't believe He will have compassion upon us. It must have seemed to the woman that Jesus was refusing her request when He referred to dogs. This would have sent many away.

In spite of all that discourages us, however, we should continue to accept what the Lord says, as did the woman, as a reason to persist. Like Job we should accept God's will and recognize that when Jesus seems not to answer our prayers, it doesn't mean that He is ignoring our needs. Answers are sure to come when it is for our best if we continue to have faith in Him.

Here are a few points that will help us as we pray:

**1. Faith:** Jesus told His disciples that they should believe that they will receive what they ask for in prayer (Mark 11:24). They should believe that God hears their prayers and will answer.

**2. Patience:** Unless we exercise self-control under greatest provocation, our prayers cannot be answered. This is a great condition for receiving that for which we ask (Rom.12:12). Peter says to be "clear minded" and "self-controlled" in prayer (1 Pet. 4:7, NIV). Paul says, "In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:6, NIV).

We should continue to accept what the Lord says.

**3. Forgiveness:** When we go to God for mercy and blessings, we should be sure that we have the spirit of forgiveness in our hearts. To refuse to forgive others shows only how ungrateful we are for what God did for us.

**4. Thanksgiving:** We need to praise God more. Our prayers are not to be solely asking and receiving. We must remember to say thanks to God for what He has done for us (Ps. 107:8).

### OPINION

James 5:17

It's very important to be prudent when we converse with God because God is a Creator and not a creature, a Maker and not a handiwork. Let us also not forget the fact that we are debtors by nature and that we have responsibilities to perform that we must not shun.

Sometimes our prayers have the intention of manipulating God. We use them to make God bend to our wants and desires, as if God is a fellow human being. We are so preoccupied with day-to-day activities that we forget that He knows us better than we know ourselves.

While Christ was on earth He was a Man of prayer, even though He was 100 percent divine. He went to secret places to commune with God. How often do we do that? Like Daniel, who prayed thrice a day (Dan. 6:10), let us also set aside time to commune with Him.

Sometimes our prayers have the intention of manipulating God.

God knows our needs. He knows what will make us comfortable and happy. Given that we know this, why is it so difficult to trust Him completely?

God's promises are true and will not go unfulfilled. What actually varies is how, when, and where we receive our benefits.

### REACT

1. How can one teach someone else who doesn't know how to pray to begin a life of prayer? Be specific.
2. How can we distinguish between belief in the power of God and abuse of His never-ending forgiveness?
3. What are some ways you have been purified by temptation?
4. If God knows our hearts' desires, why are temptations placed before us?
5. Assuming that God values sincerity in prayer, how can you cultivate and improve your sincerity?
6. How accurate are the portrayals of prayer that you've seen on TV or movies with regards to the nature of prayer and how prayers are answered?

# God Knows Best

## EXPLORATION

Job 7; 10; 14

## CONCLUDE

The book of Job provides important insights into human suffering. Even as Job, a faultless follower of God, suffered the loss of his possessions, his loved ones, and even his health, he continued to have faith in God's love and sovereignty. The Bible introduces us to numerous other individuals who continued to be faithful to God despite difficult circumstances. These examples assure us that though God does not cause our pain, He can help us grow stronger and more faithful through trials.

## CONSIDER

- Creating a scrapbook to remind you of the difficult experiences that God has carried you through. Use photographs, clippings, newspaper articles, etc.
- Discussing with a small group of Christians why God allows suffering.
- Viewing the classic film *It's a Wonderful Life*. Reflect on what lives God has already allowed you to affect positively.
- Visiting a museum exhibit of minerals and gems or purchasing a rock tumbler. Observe how rough conditions produce beautiful results.
- Playing charades for group or family worship. Ask everyone to depict a Bible character who plotted to get something outside God's plan (e.g., David plotting to have Bathsheba, Sarah plotting to have a baby from her servant, Jacob plotting to get Esau's birthright, the prodigal son plotting to get his inheritance and freedom, etc.).
- Beginning a prayer group in your home, work place, church, or neighborhood.
- Listing your assets and resources, including intangibles such as "life," "time," etc., on a spreadsheet. Title the sheet "God's." Explore how acknowledging God as the Owner of everything should affect your attitude and behavior.

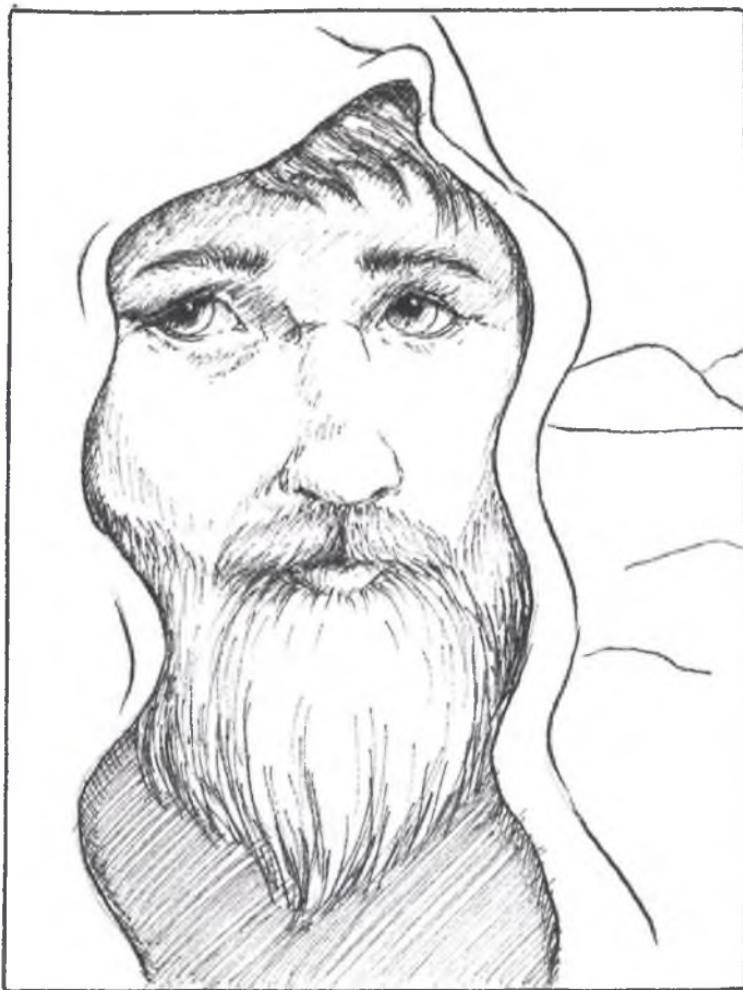
## CONNECT

The book of Job; Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 18:1-8.

*Steps to Christ*, pp. 93-104; *Education*, pp. 253-261.

C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, chap. 11; James Long, *Why Is God Silent When We Need Him the Most?* chap. 16.

# Moses: prayer of supplication



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“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God,  
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,  
maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness,  
rebellion and sin’ ” (Exod. 34:6, 7, NIV).

# A Promise and Its Fulfillment

## INTRODUCTION

Exod. 32:7-14, 31-35; 33:12-17; 34:8-10; Num. 14:11-21, 28, 29, 31, 33, 35;  
Heb. 5:1-9; Psalm 90

High on Mount Nebo, with a panoramic view of the valley and the river below, Moses rests. His hair, lightly streaked with gray, occasionally ruffles in the gentle, cooling breeze; his eyes are a little moist. He leans again on his staff. During his lifetime he has been many people: pauper and prince; Egyptian elite and Hebrew exile; outcast and orator; coward and conqueror. A full life he's lived, but it's not always been comfortable.

He shades his eyes, looking toward the Israelite camp below. Forty years he has spent with these people, forty years leading them to the Promised Land. Way off in the distance, he can almost see it.

Canaan: the land bestowed upon his fathers and forefathers, a promise from God. And he was handpicked by God to lead the people to this paradise.

He can feel the lush green grass between his toes, a welcome relief from the grit of the desert. He can smell the sweetness of the flowers and feel the shade of the trees. He can hear the gurgling, laughing water as it dances over the streambed's rocks. He can taste the juice of the fruits.

This, however, is as close to Canaan as Moses will get. A staff against a stone, instead of a word—just a word—for the water. A simple act of defiance cost him paradise. A tear slides down Moses' sun-brown cheek. He'll never enter Canaan, the Promised Land.

With confidence, yet also with trembling, Moses approaches the throne of God. He's seen the hands of God at work. He cannot question the sovereignty of his Lord. Lifting his eyes to heaven and pouring out his soul, Moses whispers his heart to his God.

"You've been our dwelling place, oh Father, when we had no place. You've seen our deepest secrets, known our countless fears, shared our greatest joys, and felt our deepest sorrows. We don't understand the way You work, and we cannot comprehend the way You love us."

"We have felt the fury of Your anger and the peace of Your forgiveness. We have known trouble, oh Lord, and we have known triumph. Be merciful on us! Make us glad and pour out Your favor upon Your children. Let this not all be for nothing. Oh, let this not all be for nothing."

**A simple act  
of defiance cost  
him paradise.**

## LOGOS

Exod. 3:1-10; 33:12-34:10; Psalm 90

Imagine. You're walking down an unfamiliar path through thick woods on a moonless night. All you have is a small flashlight, which dimly lights the path immediately in front of you. As you proceed, you hear strange noises. Your heart pounds and your mouth goes dry. You think, *If only I had a spotlight instead of this weak flashlight!* What if God gave us a spotlight with which to walk life's path, and we could see all around us and far down into our lives?

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord" (Jer. 29:11-14, NIV).

Prayer is talking to God when we can't talk to anyone else. Prayer is yelling at God when we're angry or disappointed. Prayer is crying to God when we're afraid or hurt. Prayer is confessing to God when we've made mistakes. We pray when we're struggling to get a class project completed on time, when we're reeling from the confusing drama in a relationship, when we're stressed over a major life decision. We pray when we don't know what else to do.

Praise God, we have  
only a flashlight.

Moses' prayer in Psalm 90 is an expression of a real person, living in a real world, with real struggles and fears, wrestling with God. Moses feels crushed and confused, and he cries out to God. He remembers his wrongs and the sins of the

Israelites. In sound and images, Moses sees himself gripped in passion and killing an Egyptian who had been beating a Hebrew slave. He hears himself treating contemptuously the offer of God to save His people through him. He can almost feel the stick vibrate in his hand as he strikes the rock instead of speaking to it as God had commanded. He can taste the fleshpots of Egypt as the rebellious Israelites dance wildly around the golden calf. He can smell the stench of the corpses of thousands of the unfaithful who had died from poisonous snake bites. He cries out, "We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan" (Ps. 90:7-9, NIV).

But Moses' eyes had also been opened by the love and compassion of God (Exod. 34:6). Although he felt crushed, Moses still looked to God for hope. "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:1, 2, NIV, italics supplied). Moses pleads, "Teach

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us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Relent, O Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants" (verses 12, 13, NIV). Like Moses, we cry out to God when our plans go awry or when we're scared about the future. We plead with God to make clear what we ought to be doing with our lives. Moses' prayer instructs us to place our lives in God's hands. "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands" (verse 17, NIV).

God has big plans for us, and He wants us to come to Him in prayer. We ought to come to God as to a friend and praise Him for all the wonderful things He is, thank Him for all the little things He does. And as a friend, God lifts us up from the pit in which we find ourselves to the heights of His throne. Ellen White paints this picture: "If you take even one step towards [God] in repentance, He will hasten to enfold you in His arms of infinite love. His ear is open to the cry of the contrite soul. The very first reaching out of the heart after God is known to Him. Never a prayer is offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after God is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it. Even before the prayer is uttered or the yearning of the heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working upon the human soul."<sup>1</sup>

If God gave us a spotlight with which to walk life's path and we could see the future, we'd probably be paralyzed. Praise God, we have only a flashlight, and "God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him."<sup>2</sup>

## **REACT**

1. Why should we pray to God?
2. What principles about prayer do we glean from Psalm 90?
3. At what point in Moses' life did he pray the Psalm 90 prayer?
4. How does praying for others benefit us?
5. Is it more important to pray when life is tough or when life is easy? Why?
6. Is there ever a time when it would be advantageous for God's people to know the end from the beginning? Give examples.
7. Identify five difficulties, featured in today's "Logos," that Moses had to cope with.
8. At one stage Moses was angry, but he looked beyond his own experience to God for help. What gave him the courage to plead with God?
9. How do you account for the instances in which God has seemingly changed His mind when people asked certain things of Him?

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1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 206.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 224, 225.

## TESTIMONY

Ps. 90:2, 3

How many of us know exactly what we should do with our lives? Finding direction among all the distractions is difficult. If somehow we are forced to think about the meaning of life, the answers don't come immediately. Contemplating our place in the cosmos can lead to even more confusion and disillusionment, especially when we compare ourselves to the Greatest Being in the universe.

God truly is great. The first part of Psalm 90 illustrates His majesty. He has been around since "before the mountains were brought forth" (Ps. 90:2, KJV). He is "from everlasting to everlasting" (verse 2, KJV). He "embraces past, present and future."<sup>1</sup> His vast experience and incredible responsibilities are so much greater than ours that our lives seem inconsequential. The author of Psalm 90 cries out to God to give our short lives meaning: "Establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands," cries the psalmist (verse 17, NIV).

Luckily for us, God is willing to answer this prayer. It is not the command that God has over the universe that makes Him truly great. It is the interest He takes in the lives of each of His creations, the sacrifice He was willing to make, and the guidance He is willing to give each of us daily. Though we may never understand God completely, the desire to know Him, coupled with the knowledge that He will go to great lengths to help us in our search, is one of the great benefits of a Christian life.

**God has given us a chance to know Him.**

The search for a closer relationship with God is the only sure way to a meaningful existence. "Man, created for fellowship with God, can only in such

fellowship find his real life and development. Created to find in God his highest joy, he can find in nothing else that which can quiet the cravings of the heart, can satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul."<sup>2</sup> For God's willingness to sacrifice so much to maintain this fellowship, we are all eternally in debt. He has given us a chance to know Him; that is enough to keep us busy for a long time.

## REACT

1. Though we cannot know exactly what heaven will be like, what do you think will make life meaningful there to you personally? Be specific.
2. How can we find fellowship with God in our everyday lives?
3. List five ways in which God is great to you personally.
4. How does the greatness of God compare with that of humans?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 270.

2. *Education*, pp. 124, 125.

# Forging a New Identity

## EVIDENCE

Ps. 90:1, 2

Psalm 90 shows Moses' interest in describing the eternity of God compared with the mortality of humanity. Most of the verses in the chapter specifically elaborate the vast difference between humans and God in reckoning time. Understanding why Moses included so many references to time in a prayer for mercy may be an important step in understanding both what we can apply from Moses' prayer example and what might be unique to his situation.

Moses spent much of his life trying to forge a new collective identity in a band of former slaves as they traveled to their new home. These people, with different ethnic and religious backgrounds, needed to learn to change from identifying themselves as Egyptian slaves to the people of Israel. Formation of a new group identity required linking the present to an ancient, continuous, and venerable past. In Moses' case, that past had to compete successfully with the old and powerful Egyptian society they knew. Reminding the new community of God's eternity and antiquity forged the crucial link between the miracles of the present and the social need for knowledge of the group's past. The most prominent example of Moses' (and God's) concern with this need is the book of Genesis, perhaps the earliest written revelations to the Hebrews. The origin stories in Genesis, in addition to Moses' prayer in Psalm 90, were essential and largely successful tools that helped transform the mixed multitude into twelve tribes. This social unity would mirror the spiritual unity of the new people under one God and His prophets.

**Moses spent much of his life trying to forge a new collective identity.**

## REACT

1. How important is loyalty to the church as a social group?
2. If you believe it is important, how can you help create that loyalty? Be specific.
3. How does thinking about the difference of time between God and humanity help you understand God or your church community better?
4. How does the knowledge that you're in the hands of a loving God change the way you react to a difficult situation? Be specific.
5. Was God more patient with the Israelites than He is with you? Explain your answer.

## HOW-TO Heb. 4:16

How often have we struggled with incomprehensible aspects of life? We search for something or someone to make sense of the chaos we observe. For Moses, that Someone was God. In Moses' prayer in Psalm 90, we observe a human being interacting with the divine. Moses' prayer shows a way to approach God that addresses human, everyday issues without losing faith in God's ultimate goodness and power.

Moses is honest about issues that he finds intimidating. In verse 9 he states, "All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan" (NIV). Yet, Moses also emphasizes confidence in God: "From everlasting to everlasting you are God" (verse 2, NIV). Moses shows that opening our hearts in prayer is a way to bring questions, frustration, anger, love, happiness, and thanksgiving—the ugly *and* the beautiful—to God, who hears and cares.

**Moses is honest about issues that he finds intimidating.**

From his human perspective, Moses grapples with topics like the nature of God and the search for happiness. He says, "A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by" (verse 4, NIV), a statement that compares the realm in

which God exists to the very different one that humans encounter. He looks to God for guidance: "Teach us to number our days aright" (verse 12, NIV). He turns to God for power and happiness: "Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, . . . [and] make us glad" (verses 14, 15, NIV). Moses describes what he understands of God's nature and tries to express what he needs and expects from God.

In verses 1-4, Moses looks at the past to enhance his faith in God. Then, in verse 16, he asks, "May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children" (NIV). As He has done in the past, Moses asks God to express His power and love in the present time to provide comfort to Moses and his people. Moses is also concerned about future generations and asks that the people would continue to recognize God's glory.

## REACT

1. Moses requests that God "establish the work of our hands for us" (verse 17, NIV). To what is he referring? Inner contentment? A career? A meaning to life? To what do we look to measure success and happiness?

2. Verses 1, 2 emphasize confidence in God's past actions. Verses 14-17 focus on the future. Contrast the tone of the two sets of verses. How do these two sets of verses illuminate verses 3-16, which focus more on the present life?

# How Long Will It Be?

## OPINION

Ps. 90:3-10

At one time or another, many of us have identified with the bleak picture Moses paints in Psalm 90:3-10. Faced with frustration, hardship, pain, and suffering, we cry out like Moses, "How long will it be?" We begin to wonder if our efforts are worth anything at all. We ask ourselves, *Why is this happening to me?* We ask God, "Where are You in all this mess?" "God's purpose is not merely to deliver [us] from the suffering that is the inevitable result of [our] sin, but to save [us] from sin itself."\* Even before the world existed, God had established a plan to free us from the consequences of our mistakes, to restore our relationship with Him (1 Pet. 1:18-20). Perhaps God, too, is asking, *How long will it be?*

Moses understood the big picture. He recognized God as the eternal, omnipotent Creator, who has continuously loved us (Ps. 90:1-4). Moses sees humankind as finite and sinful (verses 5-10). At the beginning of time, humanity had a perfect relationship with God, built upon love, reverence, and trust. When we mistrusted God and our relationship with Him became marred as a result, God put into action His plan to reconcile us to Himself. Through the blood of His Son, God forgives and forgets. Patiently He waits for us to accept the gift He so freely offers (Rom. 3:23, 24; Heb. 8:12).

**Moses understood  
the big picture.**

The Israelites willfully put God to the test. Time after time God restrained His anger and did not destroy the Israelites as they might have deserved (Ps. 78:38). Praise God He is so patient (103:1-11)! Thank God He does not grow tired (Isa. 40: 28)! It is not God who causes evil, but only He can bring about good from evil (Rom. 8:28). Certainly we ought to revere the Lord, "who keeps his covenant of love" (Neh. 9:32, NIV). Reverence for God rules out disobedience, and like Moses, it should motivate us in service to Him (Ps. 90:17).

How long will it be? "Though the mountains be shaken . . . my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed" (Isa. 54:10, NIV). God's Word will accomplish His desire and achieve the purpose for which He intended (55:11). Prayerfully, we must study God's Word. Through it we learn to trust God, and He will shape our lives according to His divine instruction. Despite the turmoil in our lives, we are not alone. We are in the hands of an awesome, loving God who intends to have an eternal friendship with us.

\**Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings*, p. 61.

## EXPLORATION

Ps. 90:1-6

## CONCLUDE

Each time we witness Moses in prayer, he is asking God to be patient and have mercy on Israel. He recognizes the greatness and sovereignty of God and then asks for direction, forgiveness, and favor. This week the lesson contributors have pointed out that in these verses we can have the assurance of God's interest and guidance in our lives. Even though we fall short, we can still come to Him with the confidence that He will provide for our needs.

## CONSIDER

- Reading Psalm 90:1-6 and then taking a walk in a cemetery. Read the headstones. Notice the length of the lives, the number of family members in a plot, the oldest grave, and any epitaphs. What insights to Psalm 90:1-6 have you gained? (You might explore the same ideas by reading two or three days of the obituaries in your daily newspaper.)
- Drawing what God's back looks like (Exod. 33:23); also include what goodness looks like when it passes (verse 19).
- Exploring *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* to find the perfect hymn that fits Psalm 90. Maybe your Sabbath School group can sing the hymn and then have you share with them how you believe it ties in.
- Going to traffic court and listening to the defendants. What are the reasons they give for their guilt or innocence? Do some ask for mercy? Do any receive mercy? What was the judge like?
- Calculating your patience factor in the light of God's. During the next week count how many times you become angry because you chose the wrong (long) checkout line and how often you try to hurry the one speaking so you can speak.
- Interviewing family members, friends, or co-workers about their experience of God's guidance in their lives. What are the common denominators and unique points?

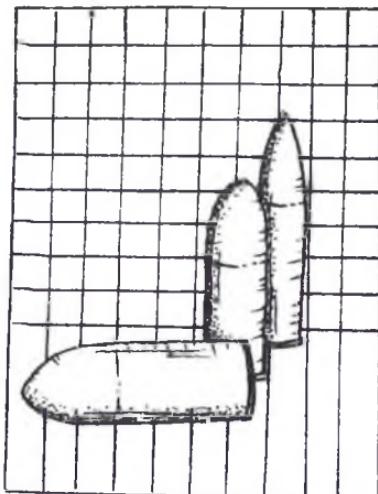
## CONNECT

Romans 11:30-36; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

*Patriarchs and Prophets*, chaps. 2, 28.

Jon L. Dybdahl, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier*, chap. 11; C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, chaps. 8, 9.

# Hannah and Mary: **prayers** of triumph



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"He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor" (1 Sam. 2:8, NIV).

## "Lord, Can You Hear Me?"

### INTRODUCTION

1 Sam. 1:10, 11

In January 1967, 20-year-old John W. Lewis's infantry unit received its assignment to the forbidding jungle of Vietnam's Tayninh Province. On their first maneuver they walked into an ambush. Lewis immediately dropped to his belly, as instructed in basic training. Bullets and the cries and screams of injured soldiers filled the air. *Stay low*, he told himself. For hours the snipers kept Lewis's unit pinned down as they waited for artillery strikes to push the Vietcong back. *This is only the beginning*, Lewis said to himself. He had just arrived in Vietnam and had a whole year of combat ahead of him—if he survived this attack. Though he knew he didn't deserve any special treatment, he found himself praying to live. "God, can You hear me? Are You with me now? Will You stay with me?"

Lewis immediately dropped to his belly.

With his heart pounding and his cheek pressed to the ground, Lewis noticed something barely sticking out of the dirt. He reached for a twig and scratched at the spot. The ground was hard, but he kept at it. Finally, he grasped

the end of a rusty chain that broke into pieces as he pulled it from the earth. A clump of soil loosened, and he rubbed a tiny object clean. After studying it for a while, he tucked it in the elastic band of his helmet, where it stayed until he was rescued—and until the day he was wounded and flown out of Vietnam several months later.

During one of the loneliest moments in his life, he had found something lasting and ever present. In a far-off jungle he had unearthed a tiny wooden cross, with the shiny silver figure of One who promised to be always with him and to make everything appropriate in its time.

# Fervent Praises of the Saints

## EVIDENCE

1 Sam. 2:1, 2; Luke 1:46-49

The *Song of Hannah* and the *Magnificat* were sung by devout women who trusted in God's Word despite contrary circumstances. Mary was a virgin who was to bear the Savior of the world; Hannah was a barren married woman.

In Hebrew culture, it was an honor for a woman to bear children and shameful to be unable to do so. In Hannah's case, this went on "year after year" (1 Sam. 1:7, NIV). "In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord" (verse 10, NIV) so earnestly that the high priest Eli thought she was drunk. When she explained her anguish, the priest responded that God may grant her request.

This narrative focuses not on Hannah's infertility but on God's actions. When she gave birth to Samuel, she promised to give him to the Lord to serve in the temple. Her rightful place with her husband and her dignity were restored. She rejoices in the Lord, who is her strength (verse 1). In verse 2 she emphasizes that no one is like God. She accents God's sovereignty (verses 6-8) and acknowledges that one prevails only by God's mighty acts (verse 9). The song ends on a prophetic note: the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.

Mary's prayer song, the *Magnificat*, is not so much for personal deliverance as for national deliverance. An angel had told Mary that she would become pregnant and that she should call her child Emmanuel, "God with us." The child would save the world. In this story, as in Hannah's, the emphasis is on God's activity. Mary rejoiced in a prayer of praise that magnified the Lord. She begins by praising God in synonymous parallelism: (Luke 1:46). She states that she can rejoice because the Lord "has been mindful of the humble state of his servant" (verse 48, NIV). Verses 51-53 are antithetical parallelism.

**"Our faith must rest upon evidence."**

Mary and Hannah exhibited undying trust in God's promise in contrary circumstances. "God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith."\*

\**Steps to Christ*, p. 105, emphasis supplied.

## When God Lifts You to Triumph

### LOGOS

1 Sam. 1:1–2:26; Luke 1:46–55

Hannah and Mary were ordinary people like you and me. They are often seen in their role as mothers. Through their prayers, we glimpse a spiritual identity.

Both women referred to themselves as God's "servant." Neither had any status or power in their society. At their times in history, women were regarded as not equal to men, as spiritually inferior. Still, they went to the Lord in prayer.

Hannah was in a line of well-known women in the Old Testament to lament their barrenness. But only Hannah took her case and pleaded directly with God.

When she first prayed to God at the temple, she didn't do as the custom of the culture was—to pray loudly<sup>1</sup>—but "only her lips moved" (1 Sam. 1:13, KJV). Eli the priest thought she was drunk. Could it be that she was so spirit-filled that she was oblivious to all around her, and the Spirit of God must have moved within her? Was this similar to the day after Pentecost when the people thought the disciples to be drunk? (Acts 2:13). The Spirit moved on both occasions.

In returning with the child to the temple, Hannah prays in a literary form. Some scholars believe that it is based on a song of thanksgiving for success in a battle (e.g., "the bows of the warriors" [1 Sam. 2:4, NIV]; and destruction of adversaries [verse 10]).<sup>2</sup> The implications of this are that Hannah herself didn't write or compose this prayer but adapted an already known prayer of thanksgiving.<sup>3</sup>

Hannah glorifies God for justice and praises the God who "raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap" so they can sit "with princes and . . . inherit a throne of honor" (verse 8, NIV). She is glad that her enemies can be put in their place (verse 1). She has been given victory by God. Her prayer is one that models how personal suffering can be the entry point of understanding; her liberation comes through God's deliverance. This prayer, then, is more than

merely a personal triumph. It is a victory for Israel over her enemies, but also a liberation in God for all people. The entire prayer continues in the same spirit, blessing God, who favors the poor, the weak, and the righteous but overturns the

wicked, the proud, and those who put their trust in riches. It ends on a difficult note (verse 10). Because the monarchy was not established at this point in history, some scholars believe this to be added at a later date.<sup>4</sup> However, this thought can also be seen as looking forward to the Messiah.

Mary's prayer is called a song. There is little doubt that she knew of Hannah's prayer and based her song on it. Hannah's song is "reworked in view of Mary's appreciation of the new phase of salvation history in which she has become involved."<sup>5</sup>

**Hannah and Mary, not their sons, prayed these victorious prayers.**

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She knew she would be called blessed (Luke 1:48) because she bore the Savior-child. Like Hannah's prayer, Mary's song highlights the justice effected: the hungry will be fed (verse 53); the humble will be lifted up (verse 52). In verses 50-55 Mary talks not only of God, but of the Savior Jesus Christ. It is possible to replace every "He," at the beginning of each verse, with "Jesus."

The two prayers are triumphant in a personal sense for these women, but they become larger than that and become victorious prayers for Israel. Mary's prayer in particular seems to have an impact because "not only does she identify herself with the poor and hungry, she becomes the mother of people yearning for liberation everywhere, especially in the third world. No wonder she means so much in Latin American Catholicism."<sup>6</sup>

Both Hannah and Mary are known for their motherhood because of their spiritual impact. Who else is comparable with the praying at Pentecost? Hannah must have been an incredibly spiritual person, caught in the expectations of childbearing as her only redeeming quality. And Mary becomes glorified as the mother of the Messiah and not as a person of wisdom—it must have taken wisdom to understand the incarnation within yourself. Women identify with her suffering motherhood and her purity through virgin birth. Her place throughout church history is justified only by her giving birth to the Savior-King. Here, in these two prayers, we can glimpse the deeper spiritual women they were. Hannah and Mary, not their sons, prayed these victorious prayers. These prayers bring comfort and triumph to sufferers of wrongdoings, hunger, or infertility. These two prayers are a result of God interacting in their lives and making a difference.

## **REACT**

1. Why do you think Hannah's and Mary's maternal contributions to history have overshadowed their contribution in the form of their prayers?
2. When in your life have you felt God and you triumph together?
3. How did Mary's and Hannah's prayer lives play a part in helping them to hold firm to God's promises?
4. Can someone be a Christian without others knowing of it? Explain your answer.

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1. La Sor, Hubbard and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, p. 231.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. D. L. Carmody, *Biblical Women Contemporary Reflections on Scriptural Texts*, p. 89.

6. Ibid.

# Can Prayer Change Things?

## TESTIMONY

Matt. 9:2

"The Lord God through Jesus Christ holds out His hand all the day long in invitation to the sinful and fallen. He will receive all. He welcomes all. It is His glory to pardon the chief of sinners. He will take the prey from the mighty, He will deliver the captive, He will pluck the brand from the burning. He will lower the golden chain of His mercy to the lowest depth of human wretchedness, and lift up the debased soul contaminated with sin. Every human being is the object of loving interest to Him who gave His life that He might bring men back to God. Souls guilty and helpless, liable to be destroyed by the arts and snares of Satan, are cared for as a shepherd cares for the sheep of his flock."\*

**"He will lower the golden chain of His mercy to the lowest depth of human wretchedness."**

Through prayer we are able to communicate with God. Although it is understood that God can read our very thoughts, He requires the complete surrender of our will to Him through the ministry of prayer. Ellen White suggests that through prayer the

communication of humankind with the divine is allowed. Prayer bonds us with God. His desire is to see us each achieve our best. Because of our sinful nature, we often separate ourselves from God and cease to pray. Yet we have an open invitation to come to Him. He is willing to accept us just as we are.

No one has preference over another. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NIV). Yet we are privileged to have the communication line with God at any time.

During times of separation, God yearns to hear us call to Him. Yet, this yearning does not cause Him to force His will upon us. He entreats us to call upon Him and share ourselves with Him. Give Him a chance to work a miracle in your life.

Ellen White's life is a testimony to what prayer can do. An uneducated woman by university standards, her ability to be a prolific and profound author is truly astounding. Her prayer life abounded much in her being used of God to further His work.

God can use you as a partner to further His work. Blessings are assured and eternal life can be secured if you accept Him at His word.

## REACT

1. What impact has the concept of prayer had in your life?
2. Can you reflect on instances in which you were afraid to pray? Why?

\**The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 161, 162.

# Blessings After Tears

## HOW-TO

1 Sam. 2:8

To be a barren woman in the time of the early prophets was to hold a position of disdain, to be subject to the ugliest names, to be looked upon as one cursed by the Almighty.

It was no secret that Hannah was preferred over Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah. And as is often human, Peninnah sought to gain more of their husband's favor by maligning her unfortunate "sister."

Mary, the mother of our Lord, also had her share of dilemmas. Here was a young woman who just before her wedding found herself pregnant (Matt. 1:18). She was subject not merely to derision, but public discipline. The law required her to be stoned to death (Deut. 23:13-21).

Undoubtedly, during the time just before the Messiah's birth, many women in Israel hoped that they would be the vessel chosen to bear the Savior. As Mary waited in earnest expectation of the promise, she too must have quietly hoped that the promise would be fulfilled in her. Mary, however, was more consumed with anticipation of the redemption of Israel (Isa. 9:2-4), than the prestige of being the chosen among ten thousands.

So here are two women: Hannah, whose heartstrings twist with passion and bitterness at her state of childlessness, whose load of anxiety pulls from the depths of her being the kind of prayer that moves the Everlasting Arm; and Mary, who at the risk of death, chooses to embrace the promise of the angel regarding the Messiah's advent. Here is a woman whose humility is honored in greater measure than she anticipated. Her prayer is a song of joy! (Luke 1:46-55).

Of these two stories, Hannah's experience moves me more. Let's look quickly at the steps to victory for Hannah:

**1. Provocation:** Here she senses a need to satisfy her husband with many children. A sense of one's need may be driven by either external or internal conditions.

**2. Tears:** These are the dew of the soul. Hannah's tears become her food. Every woman knows the refreshing that comes after the mists have rolled away.

**3. Persistence:** Even under the yoke of bitterness and intimidation, Hannah goes yearly to pay her vows to the Lord and present her petitions before Him.

**4. Covenanting:** This is self-sacrifice—the ultimate act of worship. Here Hannah vows with utmost earnestness to give back to God the very thing she desires.

The prayers of Hannah and Mary speak of the compassion of the Almighty toward the poor, weak, and defenseless—the objects of His honor.

Tears are the dew  
of the soul.

## A One-on-One Relationship

### OPINION

1 Thess. 5:17

By enduring hardship and pain, we as Christians are drawn closer to Christ. Hannah was ridiculed and ostracized in her community because of her barrenness. God was preparing her, however, for a greater role in history. So it is in our lives. God is allowing us to go through certain trials and tribulations so we will learn the importance of depending on and communicating with God.

Through these painful, discouraging moments in our lives, we cling to Christ and ask for His intervention. We begin to cling to the promises in His Word and try to apply them to our lives. During these agonizing moments, the foundation of a

relationship is being built with Christ. At first we don't realize that we are now depending more on Christ and not on ourselves. Nevertheless, as time passes, one is able to reflect and see how the threads of this relationship were woven.

### We must be like Mary and Hannah.

We can truly appreciate God's goodness only when we have been lifted from the pit of despair. We must be like Mary and Hannah and praise God before, during, and after our trials. With this attitude of praise, we recognize that God has a plan and that everything is working out for His good.

"Prayer is the answer to every problem in life. It puts us in tune with divine wisdom which knows how to adjust everything perfectly. So often we do not pray in certain situations because from our standpoint the outlook is hopeless. *But nothing is impossible with God.* Nothing is so entangled that it cannot be remedied. No human relationship is too strained for God to bring about reconciliation and understanding. No habit is so deeply rooted that it cannot be healed. No mind is so dull that it cannot be made brilliant. Whatever we need or desire, if we trust God, He will supply it. If anything is causing worry or anxiety, let us stop rehearsing the difficulty and trust God for healing, love and power."\*

### REACT

1. Identify a situation that caused you to question God and His judgment, which turned out to be a blessing.
2. What bad habit or activity, if any, am I cherishing and refusing to give up?
3. How can you encourage a friend who is experiencing discouragement?
4. Is it possible to be completely worry-free? Explain your answer.
5. Who should seek after Christ more: the person who has "painful discouraging moments" or the one who enjoys success and happiness? Explain your answer.

\*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, October 7, 1865, emphasis supplied.

# Touched by Grace

## EXPLORATION

Psalms 33; 34

## CONCLUDE

Through the experiences of Hannah and Mary, we have a window into how God is glorified through the lives of ordinary individuals. In moments of despair, God hears the cries of His children and reminds us that all things work together for good—even when we don't understand God's ways. The prayers of Hannah and Mary speak of the compassion of our Creator toward the poor, weak, and defenseless in order that all the earth can join in prayers of praise and thanksgiving to the Giver of life.

## CONSIDER

- Analyzing the accounts of Hannah and Mary to discover the truths revealed about the character of God.
- Reflecting on a time when you were astonished by God's working in your life. Using household materials, art or craft supplies, create something as a reminder of God's goodness.
- Researching one aspect of nature (e.g., a leaf, blood, the brain, etc.) to discover its intricate workings. Summarize your findings by completing the sentence: "I praise God because . . ." and share with a friend who is struggling in his or her faith.
- Creating a series of journal entries that could have been written by Mary or Hannah during their nine months of pregnancy and the early years with their children. Offer to present them as dramatic monologues for Sabbath School or church service.
- Selecting several psalms, hymns, or contemporary Christian songs that speak to your current spiritual state. Sing these as prayers to God.
- Checking out the creative prayer/worship exchange on the "Idea Center" web page at the following address: <[www.gospelcom.net/HyperNews/get/navs/NP/pw.html](http://www.gospelcom.net/HyperNews/get/navs/NP/pw.html)>.
- Discussing with a Christian friend how one handles situations when it appears as though God has not answered a prayer or He has not answered as requested. How is Hannah's story helpful?

## CONNECT

Luke 1:57-80; 2:21-40; Psalm 51:1, 2; 150.

*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 43-83; *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 250-259.

Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, pp. 81-91; Gordon MacDonald, *The Life God Blesses*, pp. 265-276.

# David: prayer of penitence



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"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions" (Ps. 51:1, NIV).

# Prayers of Penitence: David

## INTRODUCTION

Ps. 32:51

Growing up in a Christian environment is one of a child's most beautiful blessings. Many of us, however, tend to grow up as adults keeping Christian concepts of right and wrong under the same classification as mathematical or undoubted physical concepts such as gravity. In other words, we become so familiar with the concept that we don't discuss it or analyze it any further. Can we really enjoy God's mercy and forgiveness in a comfortable Christian setting? Do we have to wait until we do something terrible to raise a prayer of penitence to the Lord?

King David experienced the pain of sin and its consequences in a public and personal manner. He was a man of God, blessed with talents and responsibilities. He knew that the Lord was guiding his steps. He knew about God's promises of wisdom and prosperity. He knew, as all of us do, that there were concepts of right and wrong to choose from. Unfortunately, all this knowledge did not prevent him from falling and hurting himself and those he loved.

Like David, I've had moments of truth and pain that have helped me understand the joy of Christian life. For the last couple years, I have gone through a roller coaster of good and bad decisions and consequences, while taking for granted Christ's forgiveness and intercession. "Christ waits before the throne for our prayers. He is waiting for us to surrender our will, to cease our rebellion and come back to God in deep penitence . . . the Father will forgive us for our influence in causing others to disregard the law of Jehovah."<sup>1</sup> Don't wait until something major happens in your life to surrender to Christ. Make prayers of penitence a daily experience and let the Spirit fill you with the joy of a cleansed heart.

No matter the circumstances or people's judgments, Christ can change your heart.

"As you confess your sins daily, as you repent of your iniquity, Christ takes your guilt upon himself, and imputes to you his own righteousness and power. At the very first expression of penitence, Christ presents the humble suppliant's petition before the throne as his own desire in the sinner's behalf. He says, I will pray the Father for you. What an experience may be attained at the footstool of mercy, which is the only place of sure refuge. You may discern the fact that God is back of his promise, and not dread the issue of your prayers, or doubt that Jesus is standing as your surety and substitute."<sup>2</sup> Don't wait for the painful results of sin. Instead, lift up a prayer of penitence and rejoice in God's freedom of spirit and salvation!

**Do we have to wait  
until we do  
something terrible?**

1. *The Upward Look*, p. 155.

2. *The Youth's Instructor*, January 16, 1896.

## LOGOS

Psalm 32; 51

# Turning Mistakes Into Joy

My excitement turned to horror as I heard the loud crunch. All good intentions aside, it was my carelessness that had caused me to forget to shut the pickup door as I backed it through the narrow driveway. What would happen now? Would I be fired? Would all my hard-earned money go to pay for the damage? What would my boss say about this mistake? Would he give me what I deserved?

King David knew about making mistakes—really bad mistakes. He also had discovered some amazing truths about our heavenly Father and His mercy. David writes, “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered” (Ps. 32:1, NIV). What are some of those eternal lessons?

First, David teaches us that true repentance doesn’t try to hide from God or make excuses for our mistakes. Since God knows everything anyway, trying to pretend that there isn’t a problem just won’t work. We are told that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NIV). However, the Bible also says, “Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16, NIV). David explains what he did: “I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Ps. 32:5, NIV).

Second, David reminds us that simply saying we have a problem is not enough.

True repentance includes genuine sorrow for our mistakes, a desire for cleansing so as not to repeat those mistakes, and a willingness to accept whatever consequences we must face. David prayed,

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. . . . Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:1, 2,

## What would my boss say about this mistake?

10, NIV). We are told, “David’s repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened, inspired his prayer. But he saw the enormity of his transgression against God; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart.”<sup>1</sup>

Third, David demonstrates his faith in God’s promise to forgive, cleanse, and restore. Although David is horrified at his terrible sin, he asks for cleansing and restoration then boldly expresses his confidence in God’s mercy by exclaiming, “Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me” (verse 11, NIV). Again he says, “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken

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and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (verses 16, 17, NIV).

Finally, David shows relief in being forgiven and his gratitude to God by praising His name and proclaiming to others the mercy he has found with the Lord. "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you" (verse 13, NIV). "Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" (32:10, 11, NIV). "Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. He was now more fully in harmony with God and in sympathy with his fellow men than before he fell."<sup>2</sup>

So what do these lessons mean for us today? How does the experience of David years ago relate to the mistakes I make today, whether they be large or small? "This passage in David's history is full of significance to the repenting sinner. It is one of the most forcible illustrations given us of the struggles and temptations of humanity, and of genuine repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Through all the ages it has proved a source of encouragement to souls that, having fallen into sin, were struggling under the burden of their guilt. Thousands of the children of God, who have been betrayed into sin, when ready to give up to despair have remembered how David's sincere repentance and confession were accepted by God, notwithstanding he suffered for his transgression; and they also have taken courage to repent and try again to walk in the way of God's commandments."<sup>3</sup>

When we follow the simple steps David's example teaches us, we will have the same experience he described when he wrote, "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance" (verse 7, NIV). And God's promise will be true for us as well. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (verse 8, NIV).

## **REACT**

1. How specific must one be in a prayer of repentance?
2. Where does the faith to pray this prayer come from?
3. What is the solution when one has the need to pray this same prayer more than once?
4. In what way does acknowledging the truth set one free?
5. What other steps to freedom are underscored in the Scripture lesson? How do they relate to telling the truth?

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1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 725.

2. Ibid., p. 726.

3. Ibid.

## Lessons on True Repentance

### TESTIMONY

Psalm 51:17

There are lessons to learn from David on the nature of true repentance. First, we need to accept the consequences of our sin. "The prayer of David ... illustrates the nature of true sorrow for sin. His repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his guilt; no desire to escape the judgment threatened. . . . He longed for the joy of holiness—to be restored to harmony and communion with God."<sup>1</sup>

Second, true repentance is a gift. "A repentance such as this, is beyond the reach of our own power to accomplish; it is obtained only from Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Third, we must be mindful of those who may have been influenced by our sin. "The true penitent . . . thinks of those who have been led into evil by his course, and tries in every possible way to lead them back into the true path. . . . He does not gloss over his wayward course, making his wrong a light thing, but lifts the danger signal, that others may take warning."<sup>3</sup>

Fourth, seeking repentance is the noblest cause we as humans can ever pursue. "When man has sinned against a holy and merciful God, he can pursue no course so noble as to repent sincerely and confess his errors in tears and bitterness of

soul. This God requires of him; He accepts nothing less than a broken and a contrite spirit."<sup>4</sup>

Fifth, the Lord lifted David to a higher plane than he had been before. "Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. He was now more fully in harmony with God and in sympathy with his fellow men

than before he fell."<sup>5</sup>

**Seeking repentance  
is the noblest cause  
we as humans  
can ever pursue.**

Sixth, it is the one who confesses sin that is granted repentance. "David humbled himself and confessed his sin, while Saul despised reproof and hardened his heart in impenitence."<sup>6</sup>

### REACT

1. What led David to seek repentance?
2. David was better after repenting than he was before the fall. Shall we sin so as to become better? Explain your answer.

1. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 24, 25.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 78.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 435, 436.

5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 726.

6. *Ibid.*

# Forgiveness Forever

## EVIDENCE

Prov. 16:6

Does a time frame have any effect on the forgiving nature of God? Does forgiveness, in fact, cease to exist under a statute of limitations? Absolutely not. In our world today, with its ever prevalent chaotic mess of events, forgiveness from the Father is as much a reality as it was in David's time. This means something to us because our need as human beings for forgiveness, for the incredible effects of sin in our lives, has not changed.

David's prayers of penitence in the face of horrible repercussions from his sinful acts are as much a fact of life for the soul in need of redemption today. This need for God's forgiveness, and most importantly the fact that we can count on forgiveness, is probably one of the only constants in the lives of many.

That consistency—knowing God hears our cries for forgiveness and grants our requests—makes all the difference. It's a reassurance, an unfailable constant. That means something to people living here on earth at the beginning of a new millennium. It is as relevant to our lives now as it was then because sin is real, we suffer the consequences, and we need help; He gives it to us.

**Forgiveness from the Father  
is as much a reality  
as it was in David's time.**

## REACT

1. Even though God still forgives, does He do it differently?
2. Though we are to keep pleading for forgiveness with a repentant heart, does God record how many times we are making the same mistake? Does this, or should this, have an effect on how and when we feel God's forgiveness?
3. What is the human role, if any, in atoning for one's sin?
4. What is the "fear of the Lord" that helps a person avoid evil? (Compare with other Bible passages that refer to the "fear" of the Lord.)
5. What happens to the record of our sins the moment after God forgives us?
6. How does God's forgiveness make our lives better now?
7. How can one who has committed destructive acts be certain of God's mercy?
8. In what way can a restored sinner teach other transgressors the ways of God?
9. How can we still be saved when we repeatedly commit the same sin?
10. Because we sin daily, can we be eternally lost if we forget to ask for forgiveness for even one sin? Explain your answer.

## A Model Prayer of Penitence?

### HOW-TO

Ps. 13:5

Have you ever heard the expression "once bitten, twice shy"? Or how about "fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me"? It is human nature to avoid being let down. It is also all too human to put up our guard against disappointment. Luckily for us, we believe in a God whose love is unfailing (Ps. 13:5); whose patience knows no bounds (1 Tim. 1:16); whose forgiveness is unfading (Matt. 6:14); and whose mercy is limitless (1 Chron. 21:13).

How unfortunate, then, that having such assurances leads us to take advantage of them and sin time after time. It is during such moments of shame or desperation that one recognizes the need for a prayer of penitence. Of all the numerous ways to pray, the prayer of penitence is the most heartfelt and personal and as such it needs to be communicated with utmost sincerity and humility. How wonderful that we can find a simple, concise how-to guide in the very nature of God.

Before we seek the Lord's forgiveness and guidance, we must be willing to accept certain responsibilities that ultimately assist us in our endeavors:

#### Assurances

- God will surely hear
- God will surely forgive
- God will surely love

#### Our Responsibilities

- Trust in God
- Do His will
- Ask for His leading and show love to others

Once we recognize these responsibilities, we can then begin the final stage of the purification process and enter into the penitence prayer. The seven prayers

of penitence in the book of Psalms (chapters 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) follow a certain format. By comparing these chapters we can formulate guidelines for an effective prayer:

### The prayer of penitence is the most heartfelt.

1. Describe your situation and make your appeal (Ps. 143:1-6). Why is it necessary to make this appeal to the very nature of God? (i.e., forgiving, loving, righteous, merciful, etc.)
2. Present the prayer (Ps. 143:7-12). Why is it important to recount God's past acts of forgiveness?
3. Self-identification ("your servant") encloses the prayer. What is the difference between self-identification in a prayer of penitence and other prayers?

### REACT

If prayer is a personal communication with God, how are we to respond to "model" prayers?

# Bow Down and Pray!

## OPINION

Psalm 32

The only person who has never sinned is Jesus. That's why we need forgiveness. Thinking of sinning has to be a worrying feeling because it sets us apart from God. But He is true and faithful to forgive our sins if we repent and forsake them.

"Three thousand years ago there lived a great man who served a great nation under a great God. Yet David, the great man of God, committed a series of terrible sins that led to terrible consequences."\*

We have to spend more time thinking about this.

What about the consequences of my deeds, of yours, and of ours? Do you think that you hurt somebody with them? We have to spend more time thinking about this. David realized that he had sinned against God. He felt great shame. Then came Nathan, the prophet. When he made David realize his sin, David fell down upon his knees and shouted: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13, NIV). Then came something more important. After he had confessed his guilt, he bowed down and prayed.

We can read many prayers among the psalms, many of them written by David. These psalms of penitence show us what he felt when the Holy Spirit touched his heart. We can still hear that crying voice when we read Psalm 32. David says that because of his feelings of guilt, he groaned all day. Do you ever feel like this? Do you think that something could make you cry all day? What about praying? Try it! We have a God who is listening to our prayers, and He is the only One who can forgive us our sins.

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit!" (Ps. 32:1, 2, NIV). We can be blessed in this way. If you feel that you have sinned against God, just pray and tell Him what you feel. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NIV).

## REACT

How can you help your church corporately to rid itself of feelings of guilt? Be specific.

\*Charles R. Swindoll, *David: a Man of Passion and Destiny* (Dallas: Swindoll Pub., 1997), pp. 195, 198.

## “Create in Me a Clean Heart”

### EXPLORATION

Psalm 51

### CONCLUDE

David knew the joy of being chosen by God to do a special work, of having a close and vibrant friendship with God. But he also knew the sorrow of having sinned and suffered the consequences. His prayers of penitence, found in the Psalms, give us examples of how to confess to God, ask for forgiveness, and celebrate the joy of a clean, renewed heart.

### CONSIDER

- Writing your own “prayer of penitence,” using David’s Psalm 51 as a model. Be specific about what you need forgiveness for; you don’t need to share this with anyone but God.
- Creating a before-and-after collage to illustrate repentance. On one side, use images that illustrate sin and its consequences; on the other side, use images that show the experience of having “a pure heart” and “the joy of . . . salvation” as described by David in Psalm 51:10, 12, NIV.
- Listening to or performing the song “What Sin?” from the album *Love Over Gold* by Morgan Cryar, or “Don’t You Remember?” from Wayne Watson’s album *Field of Souls*. Read Jeremiah 31:34 and Micah 7:19 to highlight the biblical messages of these songs.
- Preparing and performing a short play about David’s sin with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, and Nathan’s rebuke (see 2 Samuel 11, 12). Your play might end with a dramatic reading of Psalm 51.
- Taking photographs of things that are brilliantly white—like fresh snow. Use them to create a photo display illustrating Psalm 51:7.
- Writing a card with a message of reconciliation to someone who has hurt you—or phoning, emailing, or visiting that person. Remember Jesus’ words about asking God’s forgiveness in Matthew 6:14.

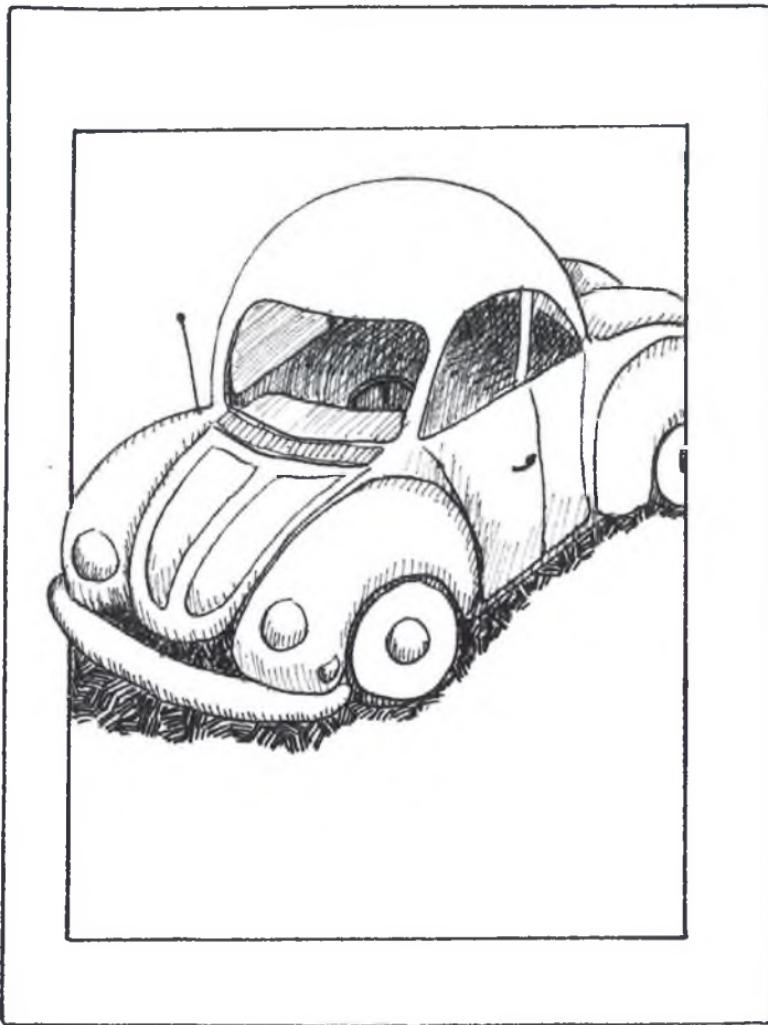
### CONNECT

Psalm 32; 51; 2 Samuel 11, 12; Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19; Matthew 6:14; 18:21-35.

*Steps to Christ*, pp. 23-41.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, chap. 4; Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray*, pp. 53-56; Kris Coffin Stevenson, *Delighting in God*, pp. 42-44.

# Solomon: prayer for God's dwelling



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"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14, NIV).

# Of Choosing and Being Chosen

## INTRODUCTION

2 Chron. 7:12-18

Yawn. "Hmm . . . good morning, Father. I'm really sorry about prayer time being on the way to work again. I know it was a bad choice to stay up late, but I really needed to unwind last night. Anyway, I'm choosing to give You my life today."

"*I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices'*" (2 Chron. 7:12\*).

I was wanting to ask You about a gift, not a sacrifice. I have a tennis match today, and the weather guy is predicting rain . . ."

"*I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain'*" (verse 13).

"Oh, Yes!"

"*If my people, who are called by my name'*" (verse 14).

"That's me! I'm a Christian, Lord!"

**"The weather guy  
is predicting  
rain . . ."**

"*Will humble themselves and pray and seek my face'*" (verse 14).

"Whoa! Uh, I struggle with humility, Father—and I wish I really could just see your face—just once! But I am praying. Does that count?"

"*And turn from their wicked ways . . .'*" (verse 14).

"I thought we were saved by grace alone!"

"*Then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin'*" (verse 14).

Sigh. "I'm confused. Does that mean it's going to rain? I know that I'm saved totally and completely by Jesus' choice to die for me, but I'm not sure about what happens next. Lord, I know I hurt You, and I really am sorry!"

"*My ears [will be] attentive to the prayers offered in this place'*" (verse 15).

"Even if I'm not perfect?"

"*I have chosen . . . this temple so that my Name may be there forever'*" (verse 16).

"You have chosen me? You mentioned that earlier, didn't You?"

"*My eyes and my heart will always be there'*" (verse 16).

"Your eyes will be in my head—and Your heart in my heart? Lord, I would do anything to be that close to You."

"*If you . . . observe my . . . laws, I will establish your royal throne'*" (verses 17, 18).

"If Your heart is in my heart, Father, how difficult can obedience be? Awesome! Here's a parking place. Gotta go! I'll trust Your choice on the rain, OK? Amen."

\*All scriptural references are NIV.

# An Architectural Digest Delight

## EVIDENCE

Exod. 25:29

When God created humanity in His own image, it is evident that He delighted to seek a relationship with us. "When God chooses Israel as his special people, he desires to dwell amongst them. 'And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.' God gave them an opportunity to have a special relationship with Him, to rely upon a covenant-keeping God. They enjoy his presence, care provision and love. They were to become a peculiar people, objects of his special oversight, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."<sup>1</sup>

They could offer praise and worship and then trust themselves totally to a wonderful God, confessing their helplessness and relying upon omnipotence. Seeking further, Jesus Christ became a man (Heb. 2:9-18) and after being tested in all, yet without sin, was able to say, "'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father'" (John 14:9, NIV). When Jesus reconciled us to God, He empowered us to become sons and daughters of God and thus a dwelling place for God.

When we receive Jesus as Savior, we open the doors of our hearts and let Him reside in us. However, committing Him as Lord is like transferring the title of our hearts to Him. He comes not only to dine but also to redesign, not only to reside but also to renovate.

"He goes through every room, not simply to spring clean our hearts with windewed works and pinesoled platitudes but to completely remodel them from ceiling to cellar. With the meticulous precision of an architect, He takes out a door here, puts a window there; erects a wall where there was once permissiveness, and takes out a dark closet where pet sins were once privately fed and nurtured. He rewires our thinking, re-plumbs our emotions and expands the square footage of our hearts to dimensions we never thought were possible. What was once a hovel, He transforms into a home."<sup>2</sup>

Whether a church, a home, or a soul, God dwells among people only if they abide in holiness and obey His commandments. What a wonderful thing for God to take residence within us! We become temples of God. Christ is the Chief Cornerstone, the apostles are the foundation stones, and we are the lively stones that make up a temple that is the body of Christ.

**"He takes out a  
door here, puts a  
window there."**

1. Alex W. Ness, *Pattern for Daily Living*, p. 32.

2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Jesus Our Lord*, p. 49.

# Does God Really Live in a House?

## LOGOS

1 Kings 8; 9:1-9; 2 Chron. 7:12-22

As King David laid plans to build the temple in Jerusalem, he collected the choicest of all building supplies. The actual building of the temple, however, was to be left to his son, Solomon. No expense was spared in its construction. No price was too great. No object was too precious.

### The Dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:1-11)

When the temple was finished, Solomon called the leaders of Israel together. This was to be a major political and spiritual statement to all the nations: There is a God above all others and He dwells in Jerusalem. Amid the pomp and ceremony, the songs and sacrifices, the ark of the covenant was put into place. When the priests left the Holy Place, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

### The Prayer of Solomon (1 Kings 8:22-53)

Solomon began with words of praise for a promise-keeping God of love. "But," queries Solomon, "will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" It was absurd to think of God living in a house on earth. Yet, that is what He had promised.

Solomon then begins a series of supplications that call upon God to hear and then to do something. These include: "hear . . . and . . . forgive" (1 Kings 8:30, NIV), "hear . . . and act" (verse 32, NIV), and "hear . . . and uphold their cause" (verse 45, NIV). In this series of requests Solomon portrays a number of bad circumstances in which Israel might find herself, and then God is asked not only to hear, but to take action.

**Isn't God supposed to have unconditional love, acceptance, and grace?**

Solomon further asks God to bless the foreigners. He knows that when other nations hear that there is a God who dwells in Jerusalem, they will come and pray to this God. "Hear . . . and do whatever the foreigner asks of you" (verse 43,

NIV) is Solomon's plea so that the name of God can be known over all the earth. This attitude stands in stark contrast to the exclusive attitude of the Pharisees in the time of Jesus.

### The Blessing of the People (1 Kings 8:54-61)

After finishing his supplications, Solomon turned to Israel and pronounced upon them a blessing. "Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses" (verse 56, NIV). Hence, with confidence, Solomon

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declares, “‘May the LORD our God be with us’” (verse 57, NIV). He then speaks a very interesting New Testament gospel-like phrase: “‘May He turn our hearts to Him’” (verse 58, NIV) Some who see Old Testament righteousness based on the works of the people in following the law would expect this phrase to say, “‘May we turn our hearts to him.’” Solomon must have understood the gospel concept that “‘apart from [Jesus] you can do nothing’” (John 15:5, NIV) and further understood that “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13, NIV).

### **God’s Response (1 Kings 9:1-9; 2 Chron. 7:12-22)**

After the dedication, God appeared to Solomon a second time. He stated that He had heard his prayer and had acted. The light shining from the temple was tangible evidence. The promised blessing, however, could remain a reality only under one condition. Notice the “if-then” construction of God’s response: “‘If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, *then* will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land’” (2 Chron. 7:14, NIV, emphasis supplied). Isn’t God supposed to have unconditional love, acceptance, and grace?

God accepts without condition all who repent and accept Jesus as Savior. Repentance means to change the direction of one’s life. Jesus paid the price for our sin on Calvary. He wants to change us from our sinful human selves into something that is akin to His image. If His people live in the kind of relationship that allows Him to be Savior and Lord, then He will give them the promised blessing. When His people go their own selfish ways, however, He has no choice but to withdraw His blessing. If He did not, He would be blessing the work of Satan, and the power of heaven would be used to indulge human selfishness. Further, if God’s blessing were poured upon those who abuse it, to live a life of selfishness and sin, they would never feel their emptiness and need for God again. We cannot continue to cling to both God and sinful ways. One will ultimately cause us to lose our grip on the other. When our grip on God wins out, then He will hear—and then watch Him go to work!

### **REACT**

1. To what circumstances in your life would you attach the “if-then” principle outlined in 1 Kings 8:22-53? Be specific.
2. When God called upon the people to turn from their evil ways, why did this not apparently include Solomon’s sexual exploits?
3. Why in the Old Testament was there an enclosure in which God dwelled; whereas in the New Testament His dwelling place is in the mind of humans?
4. We talk about the grace (no works involved) of a relationship with Jesus. Doesn’t the very word *relationship* suggest that both involved must do something? Explain your answer.

Tuesday  
February 6

## Heaven Can't Contain You

### TESTIMONY

1 Kings 8:27

"Oh, that men might open their minds to know God as He is revealed in his Son! Truth came forth from the lips of Jesus, uncorrupted with human philosophy. His words were from heaven, such as mortal lips had never spoken nor mortal ears ever heard. His heart was an altar on which burned the flames of infinite love. Goodness, mercy, and love were enthroned in the breast of the Son of God. He set up his tabernacle in the midst of our human encampment, pitched his tent by the side of the tents of men, that he might dwell among them and make them familiar with his divine character and love. No one could love Christ and pay homage to him without serving and honoring the infinite God. Those who had an appreciation of the character and mission of Christ, were filled with reverence and awe, as they looked upon him and felt that they were looking upon the temple of the living God.

**"In Christ was arrayed . . .  
the paternal grace and the  
matchless perfections  
of the Father."**

Officers were sent to take the Son of God, that the temple in which God was enshrined might be destroyed. But as they drew near and heard the words of divine wisdom that fell from his lips, they were charmed, and the power and excellence of his instruction so filled their hearts and minds that they forgot the purpose for which they had been sent. Christ revealed himself to their souls. Divinity flashed through humanity, and they returned so filled with this one thought, so charmed with the ideas he had presented, that when the leaders of Israel inquired, 'Why have ye not brought him?' they replied, 'Never man spake like this man.' They had seen that which priests and rulers would not see,—humanity flooded with the light and glory of divinity. Those who would behold this glory would be drawn to love Jesus and to love the Father whom he represented. Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, 'I have manifested thy name.' 'I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.' When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men."\*

\* *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890.

# Take Time Out

## HOW-TO

2 Chron. 7:14

Her first year in a Christian college was not going well. From her grades, which were slipping, to her boyfriend, who decided that he "needed some space," absolutely nothing was right in her life. What to do? She could step in front of a semi—but decided instead to call her mom. Mom always listened, always understood, always loved her unconditionally. The number was dialed, and soon her woes were tearfully spilling out. Just when her mom started to speak, she said, "Hey, no more time Mom, I gotta run," and hung up the phone. Sound foolish?

**Talk with God,  
not to God.**

Most of us talk to God in this one-way conversation mode.

Here are some ways to talk *with* God, not *to* God. John 15:15 tells us He no longer calls us servants, but friends. Talk with Him as you do any best friend, using plain everyday language. Allow Him time to respond.

**1. Find a quiet comfortable place to be alone with God.** This should be a place where you will not be interrupted. Early morning is best for me. I sit in an oversized chair where there is plenty of room to invite Him to be with me. We talk more intimately that way.

**2. Walking is another great time you can commune with God.** This is especially so if you walk in the quietness of early morning with no distraction. The busy to-do lists for the day haven't taken effect yet. It's you with God. He talks when you learn to listen.

**3. Don't work God into your schedule—work your schedule around God.** Some people aren't geared to spending large amounts of time (even 15 minutes) in prayer at one time. They find it better to pray often throughout the day. Do whatever it takes to develop the relationship to seek God.

As you seek God, don't always want things, don't always talk about you and your problems or even the needs of others. Instead tell Him your joys and desires, what makes you happy or sad. Tell Him how special He is to you, how much you love Him. Then just be quiet. Listen. Take the time to allow Him to reach out, to touch you, to love you. Soon you will find yourself anxious to meet with God each day.

## REACT

1. Where are you going to set up your special place to meet with God every day?
2. How will you learn to listen for His voice, His bidding?
3. Explain the seeming contradiction of these phrases: " 'even the highest heaven, cannot contain you'" (1 Kings 8:27, NIV) and, "'I will dwell among them [in the sanctuary]' " (Exod. 25:8, NIV).

Thursday  
February 8

## Prayer With a Friend Takes Fewer Words

### OPINION

Matt. 14:23; Luke 6:12

Experience says those who find it easiest to talk discuss prayer the most. We have been heavily influenced by Ellen White's quotation: "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend."\* This is translated as a multitude of words. Those finding it harder to use words feel guilty about not praying more, for they don't talk much.

Some are energized by people; others, by being alone. Conversely, the absence of people drains some and being with people drains others. This reality influences one's view of prayer.

Considering Jesus as a model for prayer, one is struck with His short-sweet-and-to-the-point prayers. Even at the resurrection of Lazarus He spoke only a couple lines.

**Even Jesus' longest known prayer takes less than ten minutes.**

On the cross, Christ prayed for the world in simple, one-sentence prayers. With the destiny of the world, one would expect longer statements. Even Jesus' longest known prayer (John 17) takes less than ten minutes.

All this suggests that God is not impressed with a multitude of words. It seems that what Jesus did was spend long periods of time with God, being quiet and getting in harmony with God before ever opening His mouth.

Observing people has led me to note that beginning friendships are built upon a multitude of words. There is a lot of chatter and little substance. The longer a relationship, the fewer the words, but, the more powerful the communication.

I recently observed two elderly women at a meal. One could tell they were lifelong friends. They both appeared to be widows and in their eighties. I was struck by their conversation, which was short, concise, full of meaning, and pertinent. Having known each other for decades (I assume), they were able quietly and meaningfully to make the most of their time.

I'm convinced that is how Christ related to His Father: no filling of time with endless chatter. He spoke meaningfully and powerfully. This type of communication was a result of hours, days, weeks of "being still and know(ing)" that God was God.

When we engage in prayer, then, why do we feel we must begin talking? Why could we not plan individually and corporately to have times for silence or, at least a minimum of words, to focus the heart, mind, and will on God? Some worship services might be planned and focused in such a way that at the end of the service, and only then, would anyone pray/speak to God.

\**Steps to Christ*, p. 93.

# What If . . . My People Pray?

## EXPLORATION

Psalm 9:1, 2

## CONCLUDE

Solomon sought God's physical presence in the temple. As Christians we must seek God's presence in our lives today. Our head knowledge tells us our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Too often our heart knowledge hasn't humbled itself enough to open the door to a living relationship with Jesus. When we are truly prepared to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, what changes will take place in our personal lives and in the church? What if God's people really prayed? It's time to view God as more than a glorified Gift Giver. We are God's chosen people, yet we are responsible for the death of His only Son. Take that more seriously, and God's people will *really* pray.

## CONSIDER

- Making a literal daily appointment with Jesus. Pencil in your devotion and prayer time with the King of the universe on your daily calendar.
- Analyzing your devotion quotient for one week. Keep track of the hours you spend at work, school, recreation, and sleep. Where does your worship time with God fit in? What percentage of your daily waking time do you spend building a relationship with Jesus? Do you need to make some adjustments in your time distribution?
- Writing a poem or a song on the theme of God living in your life. What are the highlights of God's daily presence that you want to share with those who are your audience?
- Organizing a prayer group. Find a group of five to seven friends who want to spend time on a weekly basis praying for specific needs and praises. As the group begins to grow larger, split off into smaller groups.
- Visiting this website: <[www.prayergroup.net](http://www.prayergroup.net)> to see if it offers any creative ways to enrich your personal prayer experience.
- Photocopying enlargements of several of the weekly illustrations in this quarter's *CQ* and placing them in locations where they will serve as reminders of the importance of prayer in your relationship with Jesus.

## CONNECT

Psalm 9:1, 2; 19:14; Isa. 25:1; John 4:23, 24.

John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, chap. 11; M. L. Andreasen, *Prayer*, chap. 1.

# Elijah: prayer for reformation



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“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’  
says the Lord Almighty” (Zech. 4:6, NIV).

# Checked Your Fuel?

## INTRODUCTION

1 Kings 19:14

Lillian Guild\* tells an amusing story of an occasion when she and her husband were driving along and happened to notice a late-model Cadillac with its hood up, parked at the side of the road. Its driver appeared perplexed and agitated. The Guilds pulled over to see if they could offer assistance. The stranded driver hastily and somewhat sheepishly explained that he had been in a great hurry to get to an important business meeting so he had not taken time to fill up his tank. The Cadillac needed nothing more than refueling. The Guilds happened to have a spare gallon of fuel with them so they emptied it into the thirsty Cadillac and told the driver of a service station a few miles down the road. Thanking them profusely, he sped off.

Twelve miles or so later they saw the same car, hood up, stranded at the side of the road. The same driver, appearing even more agitated, was pathetically grateful when they pulled over again. You guessed it: he was in such a hurry for his business meeting that he had decided to skip the service station and press on in the dim hope that the gallon he had received would take him to his destination.

Before we mock his stupidity, isn't that how many of us go about our business of Christian living? Is it possible to be so busy pressing on to the next item on our agenda that we choose not to pause for fuel? It is when we get too busy to refuel, too busy to pray, that we get discouraged easily when things are not going our way, when our prayers are not being answered as soon as we expect.

This week we look at the life and times of the great prophet Elijah. We study why he was the kind of man God used mightily to accomplish His purposes. See what you can glean from his life that you can use in your own life to glorify God.

We get too busy  
to refuel.

\*D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992).

## Praying for Reformation

### LOGOS

1 Kings 18; 19

Drought and famine grip the land nearly nine centuries before Christ. Thousands of children are dying from malnutrition and starvation. Ahab and his royal court ascend the sun-parched slope of Mount Carmel. Four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal take their place around the altar of their god. Close behind them, beneath the now leafless trees of their grove, stand four hundred prophets of Asherah, surrounding the sacred wooden statue of their goddess of fertility.

Opposite this imposing retinue stands one lone man—his dress simple, his features rugged. His name, *Elijah*, given him by unknown parents of the eastern province of Gilead, which means “Jehovah is my God.” He stands behind a simple altar of twelve stones. Elijah speaks, and his voice echoes to the thousands in Israel who have gathered around: “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21, NIV).

**The fire fell upon  
the innocent victim.**

King Ahab's disobedience to the covenant that forbade Israelites from marrying Canaanites had brought about this decisive encounter on Mt. Carmel.

The whole nation, beginning with the king himself, had turned away from God. They mixed and married freely with the pagans. Reformation was urgently needed. It was to this tragic situation that Elijah was sent.

This marriage of the Israelite King Ahab with the heathen Jezebel illustrates the union of God's people with the world—a union that always results in apostasy. That is why today God still needs Elijahs and prayers of reformation to halt the downward course of compromise.

### An Answer by Fire (1 Kings 18:36-39)

He had been branded as the one responsible for the drought. As long as he was around, Ahab and Jezebel did not feel comfortable. So shall it be for God's faithful. They will be branded as “troublers” because they follow the commandments of God. Elijah, nevertheless, risked his life that day for a greater purpose: to show everyone the futility of serving Baal. Many needed to be reminded, even if it was for the last time, that they should return to God.

Three and a half years of drought brought enough suffering to occasion this encounter between God and Baal. “The god who answers by fire—He is God” (1 Kings 18:24, NIV). Baal's prophets cry all day long, but no fire comes. When it is Elijah's turn, he rebuilds the altar, drenches his sacrifice with water, and offers a prayer. Not flowery or complicated, it is only about 30 seconds long. See the prophet kneeling beside the altar, hands outstretched. He pleads the merits of the blood at the time of the evening sacrifice to cover the sins of the people. Then, in answer to

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his prayer, the fire of the Lord falls from heaven. The marvel of the story is that the fire, instead of falling on the sinful people, fell upon the innocent victim. The shed blood of Jesus claimed at the altar covered the sinners and permitted the penitent to respond: "The Lord—he is God!" (verse 39, NIV). The test was complete.

### **Persistence in Prayer (Luke 11:9, 10)**

To make the vindication of God complete, Elijah prayed for rain. God did not answer immediately, though. Seven times Elijah had to pray before God showed the first indication that He was sending rain. "Elijah's faith was tested, but he persevered in making known his request to God. . . . Had he given up in discouragement at the sixth time, his prayer would not have been answered, but he persevered till the answer came. . . . God does not always answer prayers the first time we call upon Him; for should He do this, we might take it for granted that we had a right to all the blessings and favors He bestowed upon us. Instead of searching our hearts to see if any evil was entertained by us, any sin indulged, we should become careless, and fail to realize our dependence upon Him, and our need of His help."

"Elijah humbled himself until he was in a condition where he would not take the glory to himself. This is the condition upon which the Lord hears prayer, for then we shall give the praise to Him."\*

Our generation certainly needs to learn something more about persistence in prayer. When the Puritans exhorted "pray until you pray," they meant that Christians should pray long enough and honestly enough at a single session to get past the feeling of formalism and unreality that attends not a little praying. To enter the spirit of prayer, we must stick to it for a while, like Elijah. If we pray until we pray, eventually we come to delight in God's presence, to rest in His love, and to cherish His will.

### **REACT**

1. How would you respond if God does not answer your seventh prayer? Your twentieth? Why?

2. Often perhaps we feel prayer must be articulate, elegant, impassioned, and/or lengthy to be effective. What does this story about Elijah's successful prayer suggest?

3. The Israelites experienced drought and famine as a direct result of disobedience to God. What impact does disobedience have in our personal lives and in the world around us?

4. Why did Elijah make Ahab and Jezebel feel uncomfortable? Should a practicing Christian make those around him or her feel uncomfortable? Explain your answer.

5. What does it mean to you to "pray until you pray"?

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\**The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, pp. 1034, 1035.

## TESTIMONY

Mal. 4:5, 6

"The time has come for a thorough reformation to take place. When this reformation begins, the spirit of prayer will actuate every believer and will banish from the church the spirit of discord and strife. Those who have not been living in Christian fellowship will draw close to one another. One member working in right lines will lead other members to unite with him in making intercession for the revelation of the Holy Spirit. There will be no confusion, because all will be in harmony with the mind of the Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

"Earnest, persevering supplication to God in faith can alone avail to bring men the Holy Spirit's aid in the battle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in high places."<sup>2</sup>

**"The time has come  
for a thorough  
reformation."**

A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it. Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing."<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

1. How can I bring about revival and reformation in my life? In my local church? Be specific.
2. What hinders God from showering His blessings upon me? Upon my local church?
3. Often we may feel uncomfortable when fellow believers seem more fervent than we and ask or offer to pray with us. Why?
4. We are urged to make "revival of true godliness" our "first work." In busy lives, what are several practical ways to do this?
5. Explain each of the following: confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer. Why does God want us to experience each of these steps?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 251.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 431.

3. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 121.

# Rebuild Your Altar

## EVIDENCE

1 Kings 18:36

In his book *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, Tom Bisset shares the result of his research into this issue. He came up with four main reasons. People leave because they have troubling, unanswered questions about their faith; their faith is not working for them; other things in life become more important than their faith; and they never personally owned their own faith.

Bisset found that an ingredient common in all four reasons that people left was neglect of regular prayer and Bible study. They had allowed the prayer altar to gather cobwebs, as it were. In the end, there was nothing left to keep them back, nothing to hold on to.

Look into their faces, and you will read the tragic stories of those who have sought happiness at other altars; those who have worshiped money, lust, prestige, and pleasure. You will see the childless arms of parents who have sacrificed the lives of their children for the “good life” of the culture. We know about the broken marriages and broken hearts that abound in our communities.

In many homes the TV altar has displaced the prayer altar. Other gods have been allowed to creep in and exacerbate the rot that is already within. When Christians wonder why they have no power in their spiritual lives, why temptation so easily overcomes them, it is simply because they have neglected their personal and family devotions. The altar of the Lord is in ruins.

We must sense the dangers we face and claim the victory available for us in the blood of Christ. God will give the victory we need because we have repaired the altar of the Lord. Is it not time now to heed Elijah’s message and rebuild our personal and family altars for heart-turning within our homes?

**In many homes the TV altar has displaced the prayer altar.**

## REACT

1. What are the things in our lives that we too often let become more important than our faith? If those other pursuits seem more rewarding or fun, how can we think of our faith and our prayer life in new ways to cherish its rewards?

2. We’ve all known a few persons who truly “own their own faith.” When we observe them and talk with them about their faith, what do we learn?

3. What practical steps can you take to ensure that prayer and Bible study do not get crowded out of your life?

4. How can you deal with your own unanswered questions? How can you help others with their unanswered questions?

5. What transforms faith into something that is living and active?

## HOW-TO

Eph. 3:20, 21

Our focus this week has been on Elijah's encounter with the false prophets of Baal. That encounter helped in bringing about reformation in Israel. He prayed for fire, and down came fire. He prayed for rain, and down came rain. It was only after the people witnessed again a demonstration of God's mighty power that they repented and turned to Him.

As for us today, how can we be Elijahs so that we may be able to bring about the same reformation that took place on Mount Carmel?

From the example of Elijah, we learn these essentials:

**1. Humble yourself.** We need to humble ourselves before the King of kings as Elijah did, setting self aside, giving glory to God alone. We need to admit our worthlessness before God and acknowledge Him as the only true God.

**2. Pray fervently.** Just as Elijah did for rain, we must pray fervently and persistently for God's Spirit to rain down on us. He is only too willing to work in us to transform our lives. We need to go down on our knees in faith, asking for the Spirit to help us be victorious each day as Elijah was on that day at Mount Carmel.

**3. Keep the faith.** Once we have experienced firsthand God's power in changing our lives, we must not lose sight of Him or be deceived like the Israelites were by Baal's prophets. Instead we must stand firm, unashamed, unwavering, and develop the kind of faith that moved Mt. Carmel.

**He prayed for fire and  
down came fire.**

God can do it again. He can send His Spirit to transform our lives, and use us mightily in His work of reformation as He did for Elijah that day.

## REACT

1. What may be stopping God from using you to be an Elijah where you live?
2. In what ways does nurtured sin hinder prayer?
3. What are some concrete ways to practice humility in outward existence and in private prayer lives?
4. If humans and the world have failed to live up to our expectations, how can we be sure that God's promises are different?
5. We may desire that God "use us mightily in this work of reformation." Doesn't this sound like pride? How can we make ourselves "mightily" useful while we maintain humility?
6. What does it mean to "set aside self"? How does this fit with self-confidence?
7. Those who stand up for something are often regarded as fanatics. What is the difference between the fanatic and the Spirit-led hero?

# Is That You, God?

## OPINION

John 16:8-13

"You've got to see it to believe it! I was moved. I was touched. I really could sense the Spirit's presence. There was a different feeling in that place."

Such was Jan's excited account of her visit to a church recently disfellowshipped from its local conference. The pastor and some members of this local church decided to obey directly "the leading of the Holy Spirit." Believing there was need for revival and reformation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, they had been praying hard for the Spirit to direct their steps. After a time, they separated from the Adventist Church and went congregational. They seemed to be a very sincere and spiritual group. I found myself wondering, *Was that really the Holy Spirit's leading?*

**They separated from  
the Adventist Church and  
went congregational.**

God's fire power on Mt. Carmel was intended to turn His wayward people back to Him. The Holy Spirit's tonguelike fire on Pentecost was also to help turn people to God. The dragonlike beast's fire of Revelation 13, however, was to turn people away from God, through deception and force.

Could it be that this counterfeit fire power from Satan is working hard in many churches including the Adventist Church, to deceive people into believing they are following God when they are not?

Consider the following statements:

- The Holy Spirit works and leads in the lives of non-Adventist Christians, and in many cases with more power than in our own.
- Miracles, praise and singing, testimony sharing, material blessings, or feeling a sense of His Spirit, even in church, does not necessarily mean they are from God. They could very well be from Satan.
- Only those whose lives are rooted deeply in the Word of God and are walking with Jesus every day will not be misled by foreign fire. They will triumph together with Him.

## REACT

1. How can we discern the leading and working of the Holy Spirit?
2. Under what circumstances, if any, could it be possible for the Holy Spirit to move someone away from the remnant church?

## EXPLORATION

James 2:14-26

## CONCLUDE

Elijah began his life as a nobody—by the time someone got around to writing his story, no one could remember who his parents were. But because of the special connection Elijah had with his sovereign God, he became a somebody. He became the very hands, feet, and voice of God. God spoke through Elijah. He performed miraculous feats through Elijah. God brought about a revival through Elijah. Today you, too, can be a somebody for God. You can do it the same way Elijah did it: be connected, always, to your Savior through a humble lifestyle, fervent prayer, and an attitude of faith.

## CONSIDER

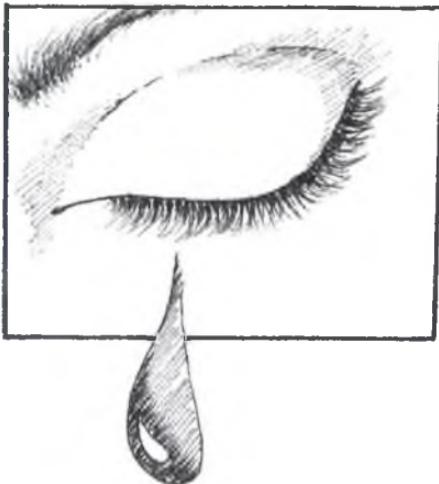
- Meditating on James 2:14-26. Ask yourself the following questions: How is my faith reflected in the things I do? In which part of my life is it most difficult to exercise faith?
- Listing the people in your life you trust implicitly. Then, write each one a note of appreciation this week for their influence in your life.
- Nurturing someone else's faith in the good of humankind. For example, leave a note of thanks and encouragement (along with your tip!) for the server when you eat at a restaurant.
- Collecting poetry on the subject of prayer. Then take the time to appreciate your collection and be blessed by it.
- Asking someone who knows you well to point out your strengths and weakness. Next, find specific ways to use your strength. Ask God for help in strengthening your weaknesses.
- Subscribing to a magazine (such as *Discipleship Journal*, 7899 Lexington Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80920) that will enrich your spiritual walk.
- Tracing your foot on construction paper. Next, as artistically as possible, fill it with statements that reflect your spiritual goals. Frame and hang it to serve as a reminder of where you want to go.
- Beginning a midday devotion time with a book such as Oswald Chamber's *My Utmost for His Highest*.

## CONNECT

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17; 2 Timothy 1:1-2:13; 2 Peter 1:1-11.

Arthur F. Miller, Jr., *Why You Can't Be Anything You Want to Be*, chaps. 7, 8; Corrie ten Boom, *Reflections of God's Glory*.

# Hezekiah: prayer of desperation



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"Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord" (Isa. 37:14, NIV).

## **INTRODUCTION**

Isa. 37:15; 38:2; Matt. 28:20

For a few weeks now people had kept commenting about his clothes. It must have made him feel really bad. He must have felt as if God didn't care. Matters got worse when his teachers began to scold him.

He mentioned that the worst incident was on the 10th. His teacher said that he was not serious in his work. It must have really bothered him. I have seen him work. I know he is really passionate about it. And to have some stranger throw an accusation like that at him must have made him cry.

He has been here for quite some time. Why are people picking on him now? If they wanted to make comments about him, why didn't they say it before? He did the same things during his first year, but no one complained. Why now, after two years?

And to think, I was complaining about my life.

That Sabbath must have been taxing for him. First, his friends ignored him. Then the teacher started picking on him during discussion. He mentioned that his week was terrible and that he was excited to be here to experience God's presence. He must have been very disappointed.

**Why are people  
picking on him  
now?**

I told him that humans make mistakes. I told him to pray. He mentioned that praying was all he had been doing. God, I know You are out there, but why didn't You answer? Are there any conditions that we must fulfill in order for our prayers to be answered? He has been suffering for a few weeks now. He feels as if You don't care anymore.

Can't You prove him wrong? He's giving up on You. He desperately needed to feel that You cared, but You seemed far away. He is giving You one last chance.

I heard him pray aloud during the pastoral prayer. He told You that he was sick of waiting for You for so long, that he's very lonely without You, that he's desperate. He told you that he was at the end of his line and he needed You to give him a new line. He told You that he is giving up. Despite his being so macho and all, I saw tears coming down his cheek. He was crying to You, dear Lord. He's at Your mercy.

After that I thought things would get better. They didn't.

But as he was leaving, I saw him smile. He smiled a smile that I have not seen for a long time. I asked him why. He said, "There is a promise in the Bible: the one about God always being there for us, even unto the end of the world. I finally know what it means."

# A Present Help in Trouble

## EVIDENCE

Ps. 46:1

Having come to the throne of Judah around 726 B.C. and at the age of twenty-five (2 Kings 18:1, 2), Hezekiah had quickly established a legacy as one of the few Jewish kings noted for fidelity to Jehovah. Scripture's verdict on him is as glowing as it is rare: "Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses" (2 Kings 18:5, 6, NIV). He brought about a spiritual reformation that in turn ushered in temporal prosperity for the kingdom.

Fourteen years into his reign, however, Hezekiah became a target of Assyria's war machine. Sennacherib minced no words in threatening Jerusalem: "Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, 'The Lord will deliver us.' Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?" (Isa. 36:18, NIV). In military terms, Hezekiah was no match for the Assyrians. In their arrogant challenge, they offered Hezekiah two thousand horses (Isa. 36:8), derisively adding that he could not get enough men to ride them! By all appearances a merciless massacre was in the offing.

Faced with this crisis, Hezekiah remembered the Lord, who is "our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1, NIV) and who "does not ignore the cry of the afflicted" (Ps. 9:12, NIV). Recalling that the battle was the Lord's, he prayed: "'O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God'" (Isa. 37:20, NIV). God sent His angel to the enemy camp, where he executed 185,000 men, forcing Sennacherib to retreat to Nineveh, where he was assassinated by two of his sons.

This national deliverance was repeated in Hezekiah's personal life when God, in response to a desperate prayer (38:14) not only healed him of an incurable illness, but added 15 years to his life! (verse 5).

Faced with the bleakest troubles and bereft of human hope or help, we can still turn to the Lord, and He is ever willing to intervene in our behalf. Whatever the need, He is still the Great I AM. He is here.

## REACT

1. What is your reaction to "scientific" or "historical" evidence that a particular situation is beyond help?
2. What message would you give a friend suffering from a terminal illness?

## Tears and Desperate Prayers

**LOGOS**  
Isaiah 36-38

It happens all the time. We believe a lot more than we often practice. It's always "easier said than done." We know that God will never give us more than we can handle. We know that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord. We know that trials make us stronger. We know that God will guide in our lives.

We know and believe all these things. But when a crisis hits, it's a lot harder to live those promises in faith. Rather, we usually question why and become depressed. It's human nature. Welcome to a sinful world. It's like the story of the Israelites on their way out of Egypt with Pharaoh's army fast approaching. These released slaves know God's power. They have just witnessed some powerful plagues from this God, yet the Bible shows us a people who didn't react in faith. Rather than turning to God, they panicked and turned to Moses to complain. We shake our heads at what appears to us to be a stupid response, but don't tell me that when the going gets rough in our lives we never panic and complain. From personal experience and stories in the Bible, we know that crisis will be a part of life and that Christians are not exempt. So we find Hezekiah experiencing just that—a desperate crisis.

### **Desperate measures call for desperate prayers.**

Let's face it: Hezekiah was desperate (Isa. 37:1). It's no wonder why. King Sennacherib of Assyria had just conquered the fortified cities of Judah and now he sends the threat to King Hezekiah that Jerusalem is next. And if that weren't a crisis already, the enemy doesn't cease the taunting and the attempt to bring doubt upon their God. Risking the life of his nation and the reputation of their God, Hezekiah shows his desperation in Isaiah 37:14-20. As opposed to the response of the Israelites, Hezekiah immediately turns to God. He knows there is nothing he can do by himself to save his country. The Assyrians boast that even if Hezekiah

**Our prayers become  
God's opportunities.**

could come up with two thousand horsemen in his entire army, they would be willing to give them two thousand horses to assist them (Isa. 36:8). The enemy is that confident of victory. Yet

Hezekiah didn't take it upon himself to find out a solution; he turned to God.

### **Impossible problems become possible miracles.**

And what about chapter 38? We just read about how this poor guy is facing the destruction of his nation, and then we read about him on his deathbed!

Here the prophet Isaiah tells Hezekiah, "Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover" (Isa. 38:1, NIV). I'm glad I wasn't there to advise Hezekiah, because I would have told him to accept the decision of God, but

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instead God accepts the prayers of Hezekiah. I don't know about you, but if the Lord told me that I was going to die, I would believe Him. But Hezekiah again shares a desperate prayer and pleads for his life. He pleads for what sounds impossible.

Our God is a God who loves to do the impossible—for that is when our self-sufficient attitude will finally surrender and let God do what He does best: “‘I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life’” (verse 5, NIV). Talk about a desperate prayer, a prayer offered in tears.

### **And the hardest part of all . . .**

You've read the whole story in the Bible—God saved the nation in one chapter and saved Hezekiah's life in the next. And we're not even surprised—awed, yes, but not surprised. We serve a God who throughout the Bible does the impossible and hears our prayers. Hezekiah writes a poem of praise to God: “Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish” (Isa. 38:17, NIV).

Those are hard words to say. But even James said them loud and clear, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4, NIV). May these words be more than something learned; may they change the way we live.

### **To a big God with big answers.**

Notice that James didn't say “if” in the previous verse. Rather, he said “whenever.” We know that we will feel desperate throughout our lives. For some of us it will be harder than others to give our impossibilities to God. We live in a world that thinks we can do everything on our own, and we value those who appear to be self-sufficient. But God has never encouraged that; rather, He begs us to surrender daily. Furthermore, He never asks us to go through any problem, big or small, without Him. In fact, He lovingly gave us His Son to die on the cross so that these words of Jesus would be true: “‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light’” (Matt. 11:28-30, NIV).

### **REACT**

1. What does Jesus mean when He says that He will give our souls rest and that the burden He gives us will be light? (Matt. 11:28-30).
2. Share a time in your life when only in retrospect could you thank God for the pain you experienced because of the growth that occurred (James 1:2-4).
3. Why did God change His mind and let Hezekiah live in Isaiah 38 when 1 Samuel 15:29 says that God does not change His mind?

## God's Will and Not Our Own

### TESTIMONY

2 Kings 20:1-3

I had fully prepared for my music practical exam. On the morning of examination day, I lost my voice, just when I needed it most. I have never experienced such fear as befell me on that day. I prayed, cried, and did all I could but I still had no voice at the time my name was called and I had to go and sing. As I opened my mouth to sing, however, I sang with a voice that I believe was not my own. God had answered my prayer!

**I prayed, cried,  
and did all I could.**

"In the midst of his prosperous reign, king Hezekiah was suddenly stricken with a fatal malady. 'Sick unto death,' his case was beyond the power of man to help. And the

last vestige of hope seemed removed when the prophet Isaiah appeared before him with the message [that he was going to die]."<sup>1</sup>

No other king had helped so mightily in the upbuilding of God's kingdom as Hezekiah. He could have asked, "Why me, Lord?" In my music exam experience, I asked many questions. I thought I had been a faithful believer, and I could not understand why God would let this happen.

Hezekiah cried to the Lord and poured out to Him all he had done (2 Kings 20:3; Isa. 38:10-22). God answered his prayer and added fifteen years to his life. Many times in life we utter prayers in need but how many times are we thankful for such situations? Scripture clearly indicates that in all things we should be thankful. If you were to be shown a clear picture of your life and it shows that after twenty-five years, you will turn to a sinful life and eventually die, would you choose to live longer and eventually lose eternal life or would you rather die now in the Lord? God's will is always best for us.

If we look for something to be thankful for, we will always find more than enough. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, . . . in our past history."<sup>2</sup> First Peter 3:17 states that "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." This should cheer us enough to endure whatever trials come our way.

### REACT

1. What would you do if you had the knowledge of your death at hand? Be specific.
2. Is it ever God's will that His children suffer? Explain your answer.

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 340.

2. *Life Sketches*, p. 196.

# Change the Course of the Heavens

## HOW-TO

Isa. 37:15-20; 38:2, 3; Matt. 6:5-13

We all experience times of stress and urgency in our lives; when the car breaks down, when all the assignments are due, when illness strikes, and much more. In these times we cry out, as did Hezekiah, "Remember me Lord, I cry!" Although this is not God's ideal of prayer, He still answers us for the following reasons.

**Who you believe in.** In Isaiah 36 and 37 we see the showdown of Sennacherib the Assyrian and the Lord God of Israel. Hezekiah and the people are given the choice of who to follow. We, too, are given that choice today, in a similarly threatening way—with peer pressure, advertisements, and popular culture. The basic point is, we need to have faith in *God!*

**What you've done.** It is most often that we use this as the reason God should answer our prayers. This can be dangerous, as we would then place ourselves above God. Prayers of desperation come from a faith relationship; if you do not believe in God and live a Christian life, then you will not bother even to pray.

**How you feel.** How desperate are you? Do you need a minor or major miracle? Sometimes we can really make a fuss about nothing. God knows the situation better than you do. This does not mean that God will not answer your prayer, but that the way He answers may not be the way you wanted Him to.

**Who God is.** God is love and mercy. That is the fundamental reason that we pray. It is why God answers our pleas for help. He will not leave us in pain or in danger. And when you look at this in the big picture of heavenly warfare, God may be seen as the Medic who heals and relieves all who call on Him. This leaves you still with one unanswerable question: Why do some of the faithful still suffer? You may be sure that the God of mercy has a good reason. Can you perhaps think of a time you have prayed and appeared to get no answer? Have you ever taken the time to look on the experience from an objective viewpoint and see what really happened? You may find that God works in strange and diverse ways.

**Why do some of the  
faithful still suffer?**

## REACT

1. When times got tough for Hezekiah, where did he go to pray? Why do you think he chose this spot?
2. In your own words, explain what it means to "spread it out before the Lord" (Isa. 37:14, NIV).
3. If God knows what we need before we ask Him for it (Matt. 6:8), why bother to ask?

# No Shine Without Polish

## OPINION

Isa. 38:17

"Wait!" I shrieked. "You're not thinking of throwing out that chair, are you?" Among the discarded boots and old schoolbooks in my parents' garage was a potentially glorious wooden swivel chair. Having recently completed a furniture-refinishing class, I was constantly on the lookout for hidden gems, and this chair certainly qualified. Sure, the surface was dull with years of built-up varnish. And yes, the wood was pitted and scratched. But this chair had *character!* Its high back and shapely curved arms were solid wood, not crumbling particle-board or cold aluminum tubing. And those nicks and scratches only added to its one-of-a-kind charm.

So I acquired the chair from my unresisting parents (gleeful that I had gotten my hands on it before my sister arrived), and began transforming the dusty discovery into a polished piece that would hold a place of honor in my study. Of course, it took quite some time to make that vision a reality. Despite the promises made on cans of paint

remover, a *lot* of elbow grease is required to assist those chemicals.

The work progressed in stages. First came the scraping of thick, slimy layers of varnish to reveal the wood grain. This was followed by hours of rubbing and sanding of every crevice with steel wool and progressively finer grades of sandpaper. Finally, the chair was bare and smooth, ready to receive the wood stain and layers of fresh varnish—which, of course, required still more rubbing and buffing. At last, the job was complete, and I savored not only the chair's warm glow and silky-smooth finish but also the satisfaction of seeing a tangible result of my work.

My prayer life often follows the same process. Though I would love to have my layers of doubt and occasional mutiny swept aside in one quick motion, my sincere prayers for instant insights and speedy solutions seem to go unanswered. Instead, God gently but repeatedly returns me to my knees. Bit by bit, He encourages me to re-evaluate my petitions, until I let go of my desired outcomes and surrender myself to His expert guidance. Only when I am ready and waiting can He give me a new coat and lovingly polish me until I stand shining and transformed.

## REACT

1. Is it "bad form" to tell God what we hope His answers to our prayers will be? Explain your answer.

2. Which is more important: the process of praying or the responses we receive from God?

# When the Going Gets Tough . . .

## EXPLORATION

Ps. 55:1-8, 16-19, 22

## CONCLUDE

From the experience of Hezekiah and many others in the Old and New Testaments, we have ample evidence that we can rely on God to see us through even the most trying episodes in our lives. Whether yours is like one of Hezekiah's problems—a crisis of faith among your fellow believers, an illness that threatens your life, or one of the myriad daily trials we each face—you know that you can say with David, "Listen to my prayer, O God. . . . I trust in you" (Ps. 55:1, 23, NIV).

## CONSIDER

- Writing a poem of lament. To help express your deepest emotions, try using the language and style of the King James Version of the Bible (see Lamentations 1:20, KJV).
- Acting out a scene from the Bible in which someone in spiritual agony calls upon God in prayer; this might be Moses after the golden calf incident or Samuel's mother when she thinks she'll never have a child, Mary at Jesus' tomb, or Peter after denying he was one of Jesus' disciples.
- Jotting down—with a permanent marker on bright green or yellow leaves—all the trials you are facing; then find a secluded outdoor spot where you can symbolically "cast your cares on the Lord" (Ps. 55:22, NIV) by tossing the leaves into the wind or a flowing stream.
- Looking through the hymnal for a musical "response"—such as "Hear our prayer, O Lord"—that is familiar and comforting to you; then try to call it to mind at every difficult time throughout the coming week.
- Using a puzzle—a word puzzle like a crossword or word search, or a structural puzzle with blocks or shapes—to represent a difficult problem you are facing; each time your prayer life brings a part of the answer or helps you cope, write in one answer or make one change in the structure, until the whole puzzle is solved.
- Making a poster that represents with pictures or symbols the last five difficulties you've overcome or the last five prayers that you've had answered.

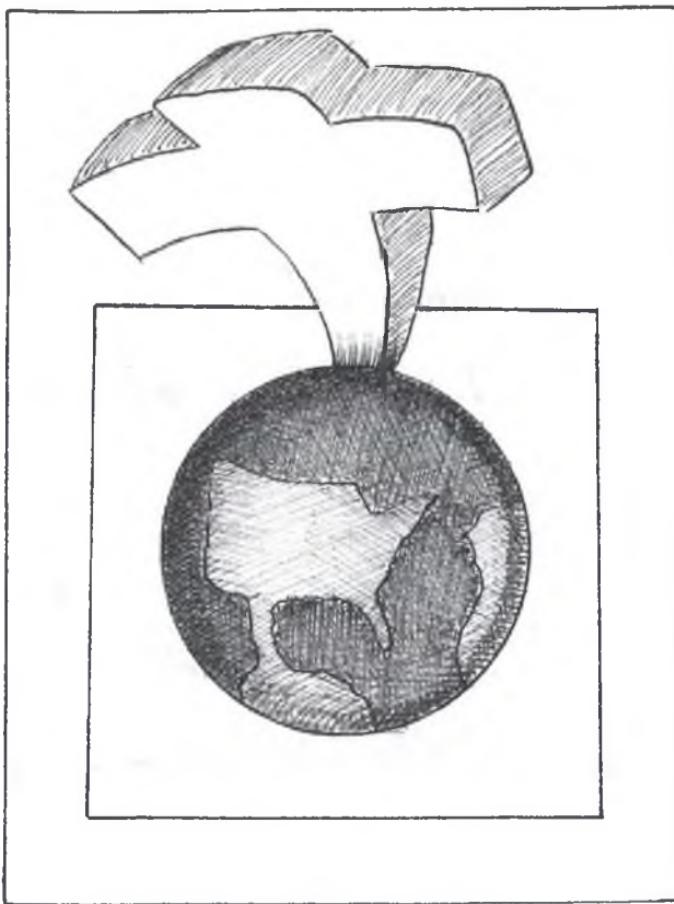
## CONNECT

Luke 22:39-46; 1 Samuel 1:1-28; 2:1-11; James 5:13-18.

*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 340-342; *Education*, pp. 253-261.

C. S. Lewis, "The Efficacy of Prayer," in *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 415-428.

# Daniel: prayer of intercession



“ ‘We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy’ ”

(Dan. 9:18, NIV).

# Praying for Another

## INTRODUCTION

Daniel 9; 10

"I'll be praying for you."

"Please pray for my son."

"We are all praying for her safe return."

"And, Lord, please bless Julie Hamilton."

If you have been a Christian for long, no doubt you will have heard or uttered phrases like these many times. But have you ever given thought to what these words mean? Who will benefit from these words so easily said—the person concerned, the pray-er, God, or all of the above? Sometimes I have wondered whether intercessory prayer was just to help one psychologically or whether God is spurred to action on the prompting of intercessory prayer. Being omnipotent, He shouldn't need a human to inform Him of a mortal's distress.

A dictionary definition of the term *intercede* is "to come between parties or act as mediator or advocate." Surely if God is the beneficent Being the Bible tells us He is, then we shouldn't need an advocate or mediator to convince Him that we need help.

Perhaps intercessory prayer is a device to make us less selfish, to make us think of others rather than ourselves all the time. After all, there is the well-known cliché, "Prayer doesn't change God, it changes the pray-er." But more than this, in praying for others, you are actually claiming some responsibility for their welfare. On the other hand, intercessory prayer might also work as a reminder that someone's needs are not completely your responsibility. Intercessory prayer could be a means of passing the unmanageable burden into God's more powerful hands. Many mothers, including my own, find comfort in this thought. But these are all, as I have already intimated, psychological justifications for intercessory prayer, theories that only affect the pray-er's peace of mind.

Apart from that, God wants to have people share in His work. Have you ever heard the theory that God might *need* "permission" to help? We've all heard stories of God's miraculous saving of lives in answer to the prayers of a human intercessor, but the other day I heard a story from "the dark side." A friend of a Satanist had been rude to him. In order to take revenge, demons had encouraged the man to pray to them and give them permission to kill the offending friend on his behalf. He had resisted the temptation, however, and the demons had not been able to act without his request for them to do so. Of course, the good God is more powerful than the evil one, but He can't just jump in whenever He wants to—or can He? If He can't, what about people who don't have any friends to pray for them?

**"Prayer doesn't change God,  
it changes the pray-er."**

## LOGOS

Daniel 9; 10

Captured as a young man by the Babylonians, Daniel was transported to a land far removed from his own. Surrounded by different customs, dress, languages, and food, it would be natural for someone to feel homesick. Yet in Daniel 9 the older, more mature government minister is not simply being nostalgic. Daniel's prayer to God is not that of a homesick child; rather, it is a cry from his heart pleading for God to intervene in the life of his people.

### Daniel 9:1-4

The forcible attempt to assimilate Daniel and the Jewish nation into an alien culture is one that many of us today can identify with. Here in Britain where I write from, only 7 percent of the population regularly attend a church. In this secular culture I find it easier to understand why Daniel looked back to Jerusalem and longed for its restoration.

Ever since the ark was given a permanent home and the temple was built in Jerusalem, it had played a central part in the life of the nation. Not only was it the

seat of power, but it was also a symbol of Judah's special relationship with her God. History shows that the Jewish nation realized that her idolatry had led to the exile, and it returned determined to follow the law and teachings.

To Daniel, from his place in exile, the restoration of Jerusalem meant the restoration of God's covenant with His people. Today when we often wish that the societies we live in would seem more accommodating and open to our beliefs, it is good to look at Daniel's prayer to God.

Daniel knew that God answered prayer. For evidence of this, read through the book of Daniel. He also knew, however, that serious prayer requires serious preparation (Dan. 9:3). Throughout the book of Daniel we see him earnestly and seriously approaching God even on pain of his life. With something as serious as the spiritual well being of a nation hanging in the balance, this wasn't going to be a quick "Hello" to God.

Although this is a private individual prayer, Daniel is praying a corporate prayer for his people. He is standing in the breach.

### Daniel 9:4-19

Central to Daniel's plea is the idea of covenant: because you have done x, then I will do y. Daniel openly admits that his nation has not kept its side of the covenant and has been justly punished. His understanding of Scripture, however,

This idea of grace  
may seem alien to  
that of a covenant.

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restoration of Jerusalem meant the restoration of God's covenant with His people. Today when we often wish that the societies we live in would seem more accommodating and open to our beliefs, it is good to look at Daniel's prayer to God.

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is that God is a merciful God whose grace will give a person and a nation a second chance. Rather than challenging God like a lawyer to keep His word and limit the exile to 70 years, he begs it as a friend. At first glance this idea of grace, receiving what we don't deserve, may seem alien to that of a covenant. It is, however, foundational to a covenant relationship. It says, "because of who you are, I trust you to do x" and replies "because I know you believe I can do it, I will."

This plea of Daniel's, referring to the restoration of Jerusalem, is reflected in our own cries for salvation. We believe that because of who He is, Jesus can save us, and because we believe Him and have a relationship with Him, our faith in Jesus will lead to salvation. Like the covenant, however, this is dependent on our relationship with Him.

### **Daniel 9:20-27; 10**

The answer to Daniel's prayer comes in different ways and at different times. We see God answer prayers in the same way today. Daniel is immediately given assurance that God has heard his cry and has responded in grace. Yet God does not fully explain to him how this will happen. It takes two more visions over the years before he has any real idea of how the future will unfold for his people. Daniel had stood between an alien culture on one side and compromised believers on the other. God had said that He would enter into a covenant relationship with His people again. This assurance is then followed by the hope given in the dreams.

We can have this assurance today too. We may not know how the future will unfold or even be sure how God will change our society, but Daniel's prayer shows that the prayer of a committed believer can change the course of a nation. Daniel stood in the breach for the spiritual well-being of his people. It may be that we are called to stand up and bring God and society together.

### **REACT**

1. How is the context of Daniel 9, 10 similar to your own? Be specific.
2. Daniel prepared to pray. How should this be done in a contemporary setting?
3. How can one make prayer relevant to the society one lives in?
4. If you could be visited by an angel who would give you "insight and understanding," what issue would you want to discuss?
5. Why don't most of us feel the burden for lost people around us that Daniel felt for Israel?
6. In what way could God bring you to a place where you would end up having to pray a prayer like Daniel's?
7. What's the use of a covenant if salvation boils down to trust and grace?
8. What is your best hope as to how God might use you for the betterment of the world—and your worst fear regarding this?

## Mother Prayed for Me Today

### TESTIMONY

Dan. 10:12

The Spirit of Prophecy frequently emphasizes the need to pray, not only for oneself, but also for others in need. The regular exercise of prayer is the secret to successful spirituality. There are a number of references to intercessory prayer; however, I would like to focus on a specific theme—mothers praying in intercession for their children.

"Among the Jews it was customary for children to be brought to some rabbi, that he might lay his hands upon them in blessing; but the Saviour's disciples thought His work too important to be interrupted in this way. When the mothers came to Him with their little ones, the disciples looked on them with disfavor. They thought these children too young to be benefited by a visit to Jesus, and concluded that He would be displeased at their presence. But it was the disciples with whom He was displeased. The Saviour understood the care and burden of the mothers who were seeking to train their children according to the word of God. He had heard their prayers. He Himself had drawn them into His presence."<sup>1</sup>

"When they went into the army, your prayers followed them. They were wonderfully preserved from harm. They called it good luck; but a mother's prayers from an anxious,

burdened soul, as she felt the peril of her children and the danger of their being cut off in their youth without hope in God, had much to do with their preservation. How many prayers were lodged in heaven that these sons might be

**"The power of a mother's  
prayers cannot be too  
highly estimated."**

preserved to obey God, to devote their lives to His glory!"<sup>2</sup>

"The power of a mother's prayers cannot be too highly estimated. She who kneels beside her son and daughter through the vicissitudes of childhood, through the perils of youth, will never know till the judgment the influence of her prayers upon the life of her children."<sup>3</sup>

As children of God, we are encouraged to care and pray for each other; for our parents, families, friends, classmates, neighbors, even those who sadden us.

### REACT

Why could Jesus draw the "little children's" mothers to Him, but not succeed in drawing the disciples close enough that they could understand Him?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 511.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 275.

3. *The Adventist Home*, p. 266.

# Listening to the Spirit

## EVIDENCE

Dan. 9:20-22

The prayer in Daniel 9:4-19 is an expression of total deprivation and depression. Daniel can present nothing in the form of merit to God. As an intercessor, he can offer neither a defense nor an excuse for the guilt of his people. "We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws" (verse 5, NIV). He can only admit that they have been treated as they deserved. "We are covered with shame—the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness" (verse 7, NIV). Daniel makes no plea for a mitigation of their guilt and shame. He does not take for granted the expected deliverance but pleads with God to fulfill His promise. He can only appeal to God's pity on the exiled nation and ruined city (verse 17).

This kind of prayer does not work like a vending machine.

To this rather depressive prayer, Daniel is given a swift answer (verses 20, 21). Yet the answer does not come in the shape Daniel has prayed for, i.e., instant redemption and salvation for his people. In one sense Daniel's prayer does not change anything. It does not produce a supernatural intervention from God that Daniel longed for. This kind of prayer does not work like a vending machine: put in 20 pence worth of prayer and God will change everything. Intervention will come, but in God's time, not Daniel's. Rather than a literal answer to his prayer, Gabriel gives Daniel further "insight and understanding" (verse 22, NIV). As a result of his intercessory prayer, Daniel himself becomes the main beneficiary. He prays for the people, but it is he himself who gains insight as he listens to the divine message. Nothing changes for the people. Only as he shares this message with them do they gain the benefit of his prayer.

The key is in Daniel's ability to listen; not to say the right prayer, not to do the right thing, but to listen to the Spirit speaking and then sharing the insight he gained. Daniel's willingness to open himself up to divine revelation makes the difference. This kind of sensitivity to divine revelation is spiritual work, and without it praying becomes vain repetition.

## REACT

1. Explain why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "This kind of sensitivity to divine revelation is spiritual work."
2. What kind of work is meant?

## HOW-TO

Dan. 9:15-19

"I couldn't get back to sleep until I'd prayed," reported a perturbed mother over the phone. "I can't explain it—yet I know my prayers were needed." And they were. I've heard similar testimonies of people being wakened in the night with a feeling that they have *had* to pray for someone without knowing why. Perhaps sometimes in your life you've done things without really knowing why—something spiritual. As we humans are so self-driven, the Holy Spirit must impress these convictions upon our hearts. Once or twice in my life I have felt a longing to pray for certain people. This is strange, because I don't have a deep enough spirituality to be driven to pray seriously for others unless God does something big inside me.

Daniel felt deeply convicted to pray for the whole nation of Israel. Though his discipleship lies on a different plateau of authenticity from my own, I believe that God must have placed this burden upon his heart. How else would Daniel, a man born with a sinful nature identical to our own, have had the desire, and perhaps the audacity, to get down on his knees and petition God on behalf of the Israelites?

**The Israelites weren't interested in being brought back to God.**

Someone *had* to do it. The Israelites obviously weren't interested in being brought back to God, but God loved them so much that He chose to find someone to pray *for* them, so that they could be brought back to Him.

What principles can we see in Daniel's prayer that we can use to enrich our own prayer life?

**1. Remember what God has done for you in the past.** Daniel looked back on God's faithfulness to His people in delivering them from the Egyptians (verse 15). Looking back often allows us to trust God in the future.

**2. Make confession.** Admit that you've done wrong and ask God to forgive you for the ways in which you have made His name look bad (verses 15, 16). This removes the barrier of sin that lies between us and God.

**3. Ask God to convict your heart.** Only when God convicts our hearts can we feel any desire to pray for others. We are not righteous, but God is merciful (verse 17). God loves those who do not love Him and wants someone to pray for them in the same way that Daniel was called to pray for the Israelites.

## REACT

1. How is your prayer life diminished if you take away praise? confession? intercession?

2. If God sometimes has to entreat us to pray, why doesn't He do so always? Or does He?

# The Dual-Beneficiaries Principle

## OPINION

Num. 14:1-25

Each intercessory prayer is different and is prayed for a different reason. But all have one principle: one person prays for another person or group for a specific reason; hence we conclude that the beneficiary of the prayer is the other individual or group. There is, however, a side to the intercessory prayer that has been under-emphasized: its dual benefits.

When I was a teenager, a baby was born in our congregation in Zwolle, Holland. The baby, however, was born with numerous complications, one of which was cancer. For several weeks our church conducted regular prayer sessions despite the little hope doctors gave. But the prayers worked: the doctors called it a miracle and at this moment the little girl is a teenager herself, completely cured from cancer and complications. Intercessory prayer works.

This magnificent answer to an intercessory prayer has always stuck in my mind and I realized the "dual-beneficiaries principle" of intercessory prayer. The little girl was cured and I had a better understanding of God's healing power.

This dual-beneficiaries principle is also illustrated with Moses' marvelous intercessory prayer on behalf of the Israelites (Num. 14:1-25). In these verses Moses pleads with God not to kill all the Israelites after they complained about their situation. And Moses lists several reasons that God should spare the Israelites:

- God would be seen as incompetent in delivering His people (verses 13-16).
- God should not forget His promises and character (verses 17, 18).
- God offers continuing forgiveness (verse 19).

As an answer to his prayer, God forgives the Israelites. These reasons, however, were not unknown to God. He didn't need Moses to tell Him these reasons, but Moses needed to tell God these reasons. Both Moses and the Israelites were the dual beneficiaries of the intercessory prayer. The Israelites were spared, and Moses realized that this trip through the desert was to show the power of God and His mercy toward His people.

This dual-beneficiaries principle can be applied to all intercessory prayers. It is not often that I pray an intercessory prayer. Very often I am too busy laying all my problems and struggles before God, and to pray for someone else's problems and struggles is the last thing on my mind. But perhaps this principle helps us not to stop praying for each other.

**The doctors called it a miracle.**

## EXPLORATION

Daniel 9; 10

## CONCLUDE

When the prophet Daniel realized from studying Scripture that his people had to endure a "time of desolation" for 70 years, he immediately went to God. Fasting and praying, he begged God not to give up on the Israelites and to forgive them for turning away from God's laws and commands and for ignoring His prophets. Daniel cried to God, "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act!" (Dan. 9:18, 19, NIV). As a result of his prayers, Daniel did receive an answer from God. We also should act as intercessory prayer warriors on behalf of the people around us. Intercessory prayer not only benefits the person prayed for, it strengthens the faith of those who pray.

## CONSIDER

- Listening to the National Day of Prayer album called "Let Us Pray," which features 11 artists performing songs about prayer. Think about what each song is trying to convey.
- Beginning an "Intercessory Prayer Journal," in which you list people and situations you will pray for. Be sure to record the dates you begin praying for something as well as the dates you see answers.
- Listing barriers that prevent you from having a powerful, effective prayer life (sinful habits, distractions, etc.). Then write down some steps you will take to eliminate those barriers.
- Logging on to the following Web site: <[www.christianity.net](http://www.christianity.net)>. Key the word *prayer* into the search engine to explore what is available there.
- E-mailing distant friends, asking them to pray for a specific situation that is weighing on your heart.
- Talking to someone whose prayers especially touch you. Ask them to tell you about their prayer life.

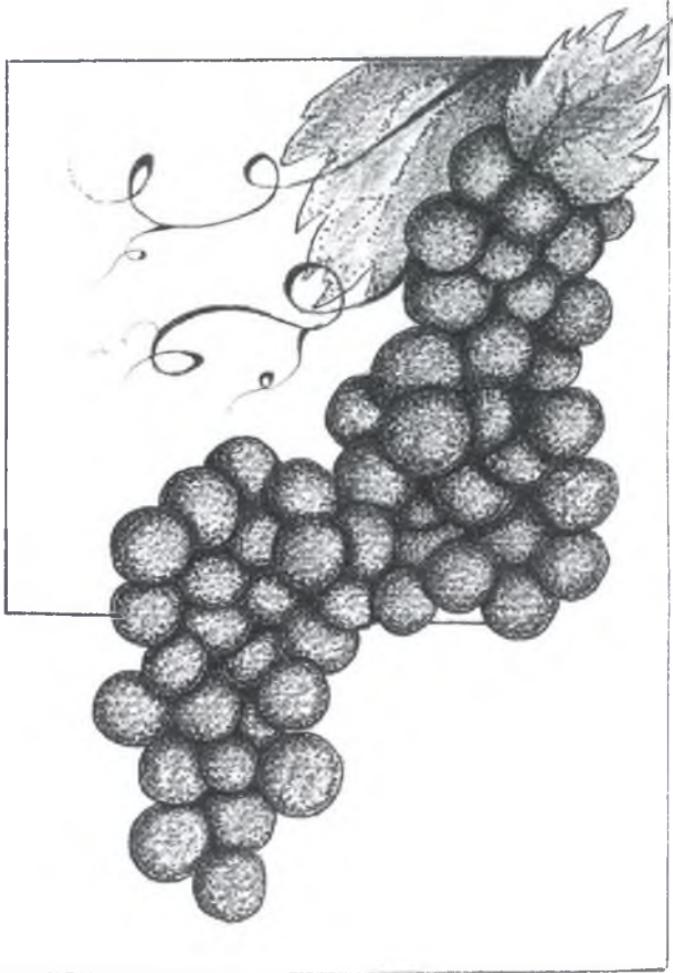
## CONNECT

John 17; Ephesians 6:18-20; James 5:13-20.

*Steps to Christ*, pp. 93-104; *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 38.

Roger J. Morneau, *The Incredible Power of Prayer*; Joe Engelkemier, *30 Days to a More Powerful Prayer Life*, chaps. 3, 6, 19, 20; C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, p. 66.

# Jesus: prayer of listening



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“ ‘Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me’ ” (John 15:4, NKJV).

## INTRODUCTION

Ps. 46:10

It was one of those nights. Hour after hour I sat alone in my dorm room, totally absorbed in an almost-due assignment. Outside, there was a faint glow of light. Another day was dawning. One glimpse out the blind, and I knew the assignment could wait!

The dormitory was silent. Accustomed to the constant noise of hundreds of students, I found it a welcome relief. I turned away from the campus, and walked into a small field sloping down behind the dormitory. Mist floated in the air, and fog wrapped a veil over the tall eucalyptus trees bordering the stream. The leaves hung still and silent, diamonds of dew suspended from their tips. Above the horizon of treetops, streaks of light streamed onto the world. The fog was slowly lifting.

I pushed my cares to one side and drank in the silence, the pleasure of peaceful solitude shared only by a few birds. Alone before God, I had nothing to say. The silence was filled with the melody of His voice. And I worshiped Him.

In the silence of Your majesty  
In the splendor of Your holiness  
In the stillness of Your glory  
Let me hear Your voice  
The gentle whisper of Your voice.

With the power of Your presence  
And Your beauty all around me  
As the heavens stand in awe of You  
Let me hear Your voice  
The gentle whisper of Your voice

Father, I long to stand before You  
And lay my life before You  
I come to worship You alone, Oh my God  
I reach my hands toward You  
With all my heart adore You  
Let me hear Your voice.\*

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\*Paul Iannuzzelli, "In the Silence," Hillsongs, Australia, 1993.

# I Can't Hear You, God

## EVIDENCE

John 15:7

OK, God, I know You saved me from that plane crash. How could I doubt it? Even the surgeon operating on my broken body said, "Son, I don't know if you believe in God or not, but He's the One who saved you because you're supposed to be dead." Those words just kept ringing in my head, "He's the One who saved you . . . saved you." Why did You save me? What do You want with my life? I've prayed for answers, for a direction, but nothing. It's very frustrating when you get seemingly put on pause, waiting, and listening for a voice to tell you what to do.

For nearly seven years, there was what I thought was silence. Little did I realize that God was utilizing nonverbal communication. All along I was attempting to hear with my ears, when He was telling me to see with my eyes. Unbeknownst to me, God in His infinite wisdom had been laying the foundation that He was building my life upon, showing me the very reason that He saved me and what He fully intended on using me for.

Once that foundation of learning was ready, it was time for God to reveal His plan to me. At 4:00 A.M. Sabbath, God spoke to me in the stillness of the morning saying, "Alden, there is much work to be done and the workers are few." At first I wasn't quite sure what was going on, much like little Samuel, so the very next morning God spoke those same words.

**"You're supposed to be dead."**

I understood the second time what God was saying. He was calling me to work with young people—not just in Sabbath School but full-time. As the words soaked in more, the questions began to come out: me a pastor? Certainly, God, You're not wanting me to be a pastor. I tried to ignore the calling but found it impossible to run from God, especially when I'd prayed for Him to direct in my life.

During the months that followed, I witnessed God working in my life regardless of the fact that I had put ear plugs in and played dumb, but He took me as a blind person and appointed people to direct me to where He wanted me to go.

Through the power of prayer this same Jesus will do wonders for you if you are willing to listen with more than your ears.

## REACT

1. When listening to God, how does God speak to you? Through His voice? Through people?
2. In John 15:7, the NIV translation says to ask for whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. Does that truly mean anything whatsoever?
3. Also in John 15:7, what does it mean to "remain in me"?

Monday  
March 5

## LOGOS

John 14; 15

# The Way, the Truth, and the Life

Imagine how frightening it would have been to be one of the disciples hearing the words spoken by Jesus in John 14:1-4. They had given up everything to follow this great Teacher. Now, what was that He just said? He's leaving? "Don't be troubled"?

Thomas asked, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (verse 5, NIV).

Jesus was saying, "Stick with me. I am the way. If you're with me, you're as good as there. If you're in with me, you're in with my Father—we're a lot alike!"

Seeing the disciples' fear, Jesus assures them, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (verses 16-18, NIV).

Like the disciples, we need to realize that we are not alone. We have the same access through prayer to the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27, NIV).

How refreshing! Humans have a hard time understanding things that are not evidenced in the present world. Here Jesus reminds the disciples and each of us

We have 24-hour  
access to the power  
of the Holy Spirit.

that the world cannot offer the peace that He gives. What does this world have to offer in the way of peace? Financial security? Power? Fame? Good times? All these things may seem to give peace, but they are all temporal. They offer a pseudo-peace, a brittle and porous

outward shell of peace, at most. But what Christ has to give is an enduring inner peace, the kind of peace that surpasses all human understanding (Phil. 4:7).

In the hustle and bustle of today's society, it is natural to be afraid. Troubled hearts are natural products of a sinful existence. We must listen to the words of Jesus, embrace the comfort that they hold, and apply them in a practical way to our lives. Jesus knows when we are afraid. He wants us to come to Him with our fears, to realize that help is just a prayer away. He will give us peace, but we must seek it.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. . . . My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:5, 12, NIV).

Jesus makes it clear that, apart from the True Vine, we are dead. So often it

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seems we try to bear fruit on our own, trying so hard to be good Christians, but forgetting from where the true power comes. Apart from Christ, we can do *nothing*, but through Christ, we can do all things (Phil. 4:13). It is so easy to forget that we have 24-hour access to the power of the Holy Spirit. Anytime. All the time. The prayer lines are always open. No busy signal, no getting kicked offline, our Service Provider is perfect!

When we are connected to Christ, the true Source of righteousness, we will naturally bear the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will be part of us as an extension of He who lives in us, and through whom we live (Gal. 5:22, 23).

*"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you"* (John 15:18, 19, NIV).

Sometimes it is easy to desire the luxuries of this world, but we must always keep in mind that this world is not our home. The greatest material treasures this world has to offer are but refuse compared to the wonders we have to look forward to in heaven.

We are here for only a little while. The trials and troubles of our earthly abode, as well as the pleasures and riches here, are only temporary. Our focus must remain on the eternal. Soon this life will end. Soon this world as we know it will be no more. Soon we will be going home.

We know Jesus. We know the Way home.

## **REACT**

1. How do we remain connected to the Vine? Be specific.

2. How can we alter our prayer lives so that our prayers are more interactive?

3. What are some things in our culture that prevent us from experiencing peace?

What aspects of the Christian (Adventist) lifestyle encourage the experience of peace?

4. What evidence do you see in the lives of mature Christians that they don't belong to the world?

5. Is there any important difference between Thomas asking Jesus questions and you seeking answers to life through prayer? Explain your answer.

6. You know when you're connected to the right telephone number and speaking with the right person on the other end, but how can you know that God is listening to your prayers?

## TESTIMONY

John 14; 15

Prayer is not just sharing joys, sorrows, praises, and requests with God. While these are vital, and often what come to mind first, prayer is also allowing God to share with us. "If we come to Him in faith, He will speak His mysteries to us personally."<sup>1</sup> We do not serve a cold, remote, silent God, but One who cares and reaches out to us. Jesus assures us, saying, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18, NIV).

In order to survive as Christians, we must be open to hearing what Jesus has to say when we pray. "The communication of life, strength, and fruitfulness from the root to the branches is unobstructed and constant. Separated from the vine, the branch cannot live. No more, said Jesus, can you live apart from Me. The life you have received from Me can be preserved only by continual communion. Without Me you cannot overcome one sin, or resist one temptation."<sup>2</sup>

**We do not serve a cold,  
remote, silent God.**

"Everyone needs to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait

before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Ps. 46:10."<sup>3</sup>

The image of a vine with branches is familiar and useful when discussing prayer as listening to Jesus. It demonstrates our total dependence on Jesus and the necessity of a connection with Him. " 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' Abiding in Christ means a constant receiving of His Spirit, a life of unreserved surrender to His service. The channel of communication must be open continually between man and his God. As the vine branch constantly draws the sap from the living vine, so are we to cling to Jesus, and receive from Him by faith the strength and perfection of His own character."<sup>4</sup>

Communication with Christ, rather than simply talking to Him, is what keeps us strong. "The root sends its nourishment through the branch to the outermost twig. So Christ communicates the current of spiritual strength to every believer. So long as the soul is united to Christ, there is no danger that it will wither or decay."<sup>5</sup> What a wonderful promise.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

2. Ibid., p. 676.

3. Ibid., p. 363.

4. Ibid., p. 676.

5. Ibid.

# To Know Him Is to Love Him

## HOW-TO

John 14; 15

Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus left a lot for His disciples to think about. In fact, it took some of them many years to understand. And now we too continue to grapple with some of these things.

One of these confusing issues concerns listening to Jesus and discerning what He wants for us. After all, Jesus lives in heaven, and we on earth. How can we possibly be expected to know His will for us?

Throughout John 14 and 15, Jesus promises to abide in us and in this way make known His will for us. But how can this happen? Three simple things, as given to us by Jesus, provide the answer:

**1. Withdraw.** Whenever Jesus wanted quality time to listen to His Father, He withdrew from the hustle and bustle all around (e.g., Luke 5:16; John 6:15). By being alone with the Father, Jesus was able to listen for the "still small voice" of God (1 Kings 19:12, KJV). Also, God did not speak to the prophets amidst babbles and noise. Instead He waited for the distractions to disappear so that there could be no confusion on who was speaking.

How can we possibly be  
expected to know His  
will for us?

**2. Love Jesus.** In John 14:23 Jesus promises that if we love Him, He will come to us and make His home with us. What better way to listen than for Him to live in us? To do this we need to have more than a head knowledge of Jesus, to do more than *appear* to love Him. We need actually to allow Him into our hearts to live, dwell, and change our lives. By doing so we become receptive to His will and are prepared to listen.

**3. Know and Keep His Word.** Further in the promise of John 14:23, Jesus also says that if we love Him, we will want to keep His Word. "Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind."\* By immersing ourselves in God's Word, we open the way for Him to speak to us. Keeping His Word is more than just reading it. There is also searching, treasuring, memorizing, and applying.

## REACT

1. When and where do you feel closest to God? Why?
2. In what ways has God spoken to you in the past?

\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

## OPINION

Matt. 6:6, 7; 11:28

Prayer is a powerful tool to cope with daily living on this earth. It not only frees our minds from worries or fears, but it guides us through the darkest moments of our lives and makes us lean closer to God. We have to be humble to pray in earnest; true praying does not adhere to time restraints, repetitious words, or an audience (Matt. 6:6, 7).

Praying should be done for the Lord to hear, and that is our time to disclose our private thoughts to Him. Praying voices true feelings and forces us to admit failures and hardships. When we pray, we are calling on the power of the Cross, casting

### It may not be an immediate answer.

away selfishness to put on the yoke of Christ, and trusting Him to deliver us. When we are truly in need of Divine intervention, He is there to lift us up and direct us the way we should go.

It may not be an immediate answer; it may not even turn out the way we expect. However, God sends the Holy Spirit to provide us with peace and tranquility, so that even when we are waiting for our prayers to be fulfilled, we are embraced with the promise of His Word and made patient in seeing what His outcome will be. When praying, it is important to ask for His will to be done, not ours. When we look inside ourselves for answers to questions that we cannot comprehend, we will ultimately fail. When we try to ponder what we should do about matters at hand, we only fill our minds with even more worry. Jesus does not want it to be that way. In fact He said that if we go to Him, He will give us rest (11:28).

As soon as we commit everything into His hands, He eases our minds and takes the worst on His own shoulders. He knows that trusting in ourselves causes us more pain than we can bear, so He urges us to go to Him, believing in His power to control our lives. He can show us the right choices to make and turn us away from the darkness of sin, opening our minds to the error of our ways. Each time we ask forgiveness of sins, each time we ask Him to help us, He hears and promises an answer. It is just that simple: by constant prayer and communion with the Lord, only then are we able to be like Him.

## REACT

1. Is it possible to ask for God's help with only certain decisions you make and still be trusting in His will, not yours? Explain your answer.

2. Is it better to give a situation to God in prayer and then stop mentioning it, or continue to bring it up? Why?

# Love = Obedience = Peace

## EXPLORATION

John 14; 15

## CONCLUDE

John 14; 15 present many mysteries: "I go to prepare a place"—where? "I am the way"—how? "If you love me, you will obey my commands"—what is the relationship of love and obedience? "Peace I leave with you"—what is peace? "I am the vine you are the branches"—how do we abide? We should spend significant time reading and contemplating the words of John 14; 15. In these chapters the disciples are asking penetrating questions, and Jesus is giving answers. Will we will find answers?

## CONSIDER

- Coming up with metaphors of our relationship with Jesus (John 15:5) from modern culture. Do they have the richness of the vine/branch metaphor that Jesus employs?
- Taking a walk alone or sitting alone for an hour. Write a brief summary of what it was like. Was it peaceful? Is peace defined by externals or is it a state of mind?
- Drawing "My Father's House." Read John 14:2, 3. What does this house look like? Is it one house? Does "preparing" suggest actually building a physical place?
- Going to a playground, a restaurant, or some other place where you can observe parents and their children. Observe the relationship between how loving the families are and how obedient the children are. Be prepared to share your conclusions.
- Getting together with a group of friends for lunch. Discuss what it is that makes you friends. Jesus calls us friends (John 15:15). Are there similarities between our friendships and His friendship?
- Recalling as many personal prayer requests as you can remember. What was the outcome for each request? Is John 14:12-14 to be understood literally?

## CONNECT

John 16; 17; Philippians 4:13.

*The Desire of Ages*, chap. 7.

Max Lucado, *When Christ Comes*, chap. 1.

# Jesus: High Priestly prayer



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“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ ” (John 17:20, 21, NRSV).

# Story-Prayers

## INTRODUCTION

Matt. 6:7, 8

"Jesus, You know, when Mother came home from shopping yesterday she gave four pajamas to Spencer, and she gave me only three. I think Mother loves him more than me, doesn't she, Jesus?"

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"Jesus, You know, a while ago Spencer pushed me. So I pushed him, too. He cried and cried. Later I was sorry for what I did. So I hugged him. He hugged me back."

\*\*\*

"Jesus, You know, Mother just read a wonderful bedtime story. It was about heaven. She said when I get there I can ride on a lion. I said I'd prefer the giraffe or the deer. But she added that I should be good first. Will this really happen, Jesus?"

So go some innocent prayers my 4-year-old daughter, Pamela, sends to heaven almost every night because she has a story to tell Jesus. Other nights it would be the usual thank-you-for-my-family-and-relatives prayer. These story-prayers, as my daughter calls them, always touch my heart. I sometimes ask, "Would you like me to answer for Jesus?" With her permission, I carefully explain the reasons. (e.g., those large-size pajamas were sold three pieces for P100; the small ones, four for P100.)

I always enjoy Pamela's story-prayers.

As a working mother, I look forward to her prayers as my windows to her heart. If she begins with, "Jesus, thank You . . ." I know her day was routine. And I'd also know how she'd end it. But if it opens with "Jesus, You know . . ." then I know I'm listening to a child's simple, unedited, and straight-from-the-heart prayer.

I would like to believe that, like me, Jesus also is either thrilled or disappointed with our prayers. I would like to believe, too, that He'd rather look forward to story-prayers than to request-prayers. As our prayers are our links to God, the contents of our prayers reveal the kind of relationship we have with Him.

My daughter can beautifully express her sentiments to God without qualms. It is as if she is conversing with her mother—and not with the God of the universe. Me? Many times I just can't carry a conversation with God. Could it be that I'm simply not used to talking with Him?

Do we pray as if we're conversing with a friend? Or are we so formal, so straight faced we don't feel comfortable talking with Him? Are our prayers so routine Jesus already knows what to expect? Jesus' prayer in John 17 pictures Him in easy conversation with the heavenly Father. Let us follow His example.

**"I said I'd prefer the giraffe or the deer."**

# One Prayer, Many Beneficiaries

No doubt Jesus often prayed. He probably prayed more than He preached, more than He told stories, more than He spoke with people. Interestingly we have many of His sermons, parables, and conversations—but not many of His prayers.

In John 17 we find the only long prayer uttered by Jesus and recorded by the apostle. I submit that it was preserved for our learning and benefit.

Whether it was said just before Jesus and His disciples left the room where they had the Last Supper, or as they made their way out of the city, enroute to the Garden of Gethsemane, the prayer was offered by the second Person of the Trinity, our High Priest, who makes intercession for His people. It was offered after a discourse (13:31–16:33)—and more importantly just before His betrayal and crucifixion—as His earthly ministry drew to a close.

In this supplication to the Father, Christ prayed concerning Himself, the disciples, and future believers.

### Prayer Concerning Himself (John 17:1-5)

One plea: That He be glorified—through death on the cross. In seeking such glory, was Jesus thinking only about Himself? Not at all. He was, in fact, trying to bring ultimate glory to the Father.

You and I  
are included  
in this prayer.

It is as if Christ were saying, “Glorify Your Son, by seeing Him through the cruel cross and the terrible tomb, to a victorious completion of the work He came to do. Do this, that He may glorify You. Do this, that He may bring fresh glory to Your holiness, justice, mercy, faithfulness. Do this, that He may prove to the world that You are the one and only great God—holy, just, merciful, One who keeps His word.”

### Prayer Concerning His Disciples (John 17:6-19)

Two pleas: That they be kept safe, and sanctified. Surely the Lord does things for His disciples which He would not otherwise do for the unbelieving. He intercedes in a special way in their behalf.

The disciples are daily watched, thought of, and provided for with unfailing care, by One who never sleeps, by One able to save to the uttermost, because He ever lives to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25).

Christ does not wish His believers to be taken out of the world, but to be kept from the evil of it. Rightly so. Pleasant as it might be for flesh and blood to be shielded from conflict and temptation, it would not be profitable. If taken away from the world, how could believers become light amidst darkness, and salt amidst

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corruption? How could they exhibit the power of grace and make proof of faith in a crucified Lord? How could they live holy lives, and prove that Christianity is for real?

I don't know of any other pleas not granted to saints, recorded in Scripture, except the requests of Moses (Exod. 3:11; 4:1, 10), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), and Jonah (Jonah 1:1; 3:1-3; esp. 4:3), to be "taken out of the world."

### **Prayer Concerning Future Believers (John 17:20-26)**

It is heartwarming to know that you and I are included in this prayer. It is something when we hear our name in the prayer of another—especially in the prayer of One called the Son of God.

Two pleas: That believers be united, and be with Him in glory. As to the believers' unity—which must be modeled on the oneness of the Father and the Son—its basis should be the truth (verses 17-19), truth as it is in Christ and in His Word. When we hold on to the truth, the truth will hold us together. This unity is needed for evangelism (verse 21) and so that the world may know of His love (verse 23).

The painful truth is that divisions have shamed religion and weakened the church of Christ. How often Christians have wasted their strength, someone said, in contending against their brethren, instead of contending against sin and the devil! This has given the world the occasion to say, "When you have settled your own internal differences, we will believe!"

This unity is not mere conformity. "In commenting on our passage," someone remarked, "I'm not saying that there should be mindless agreement or that there are not places where we must draw a line in the theological sand. There may be ideas that should be opposed with every fiber of our being. But I am urging that we not personalize our differences and build caricatures of those who disagree with us."\*

The other plea of Jesus concerning His believers is that they may at last be with Him and behold His glory. What an unspeakable source of encouragement and comfort to those who first heard these words, to those who needed strength and reassurance as they face their impending parting with the Lord. For us who read it now, this portion of Jesus' prayer is full of the same sweet and unspeakable comfort.

### **REACT**

1. In death, many great individuals have found their glory. *When and how they die* show people their majesty. How true is this with Jesus?

2. In the light of Luke 23:34, in which Christ prayed for forgiveness for His murderers, how would you consider His prayer in John 17:9, which excludes nonbelievers? Why would He do special work for those who believe that He does not do for others?

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\*Gordon Bietz, *Adventist Review*, July 22, 1999, p. 13.

## The Strength of Being One

### TESTIMONY

John 17:20, 21

The church is made up of people with diverse gifts, talents, and temperaments. However different the members may be, they should be united in spirit, objectives, and beliefs.<sup>1</sup> "The true children of God are bound up with one another and with their Saviour. They are one with Christ in God."<sup>2</sup>

Even Jesus, in His infinite power, fervently prayed for unity with His Father. He prayed because His unity with the Father was "a constant joy to God, for He knew that there was in the world One who would not misrepresent Him."<sup>3</sup> It was the kind of unity that believers should emulate: in our oneness with Him, we will represent Him.

Does unity among believers just happen? No. We are counseled to "strive earnestly for unity. Pray for it, work for it."<sup>4</sup> For "when men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence."<sup>5</sup> God's Spirit brings about harmony, love, and unity.<sup>6</sup>

**"The golden chain of love . . . makes the connection perfect."**

As we near the end of the world's history, we are enjoined to work harmoniously with each other. "The oneness and unity of God's truth-believing remnant people carries powerful conviction to the world that they have the truth, and are the peculiar,

chosen people of God. This oneness and unity disconcerts the enemy. . . . The present truth, believed in the heart and exemplified in the life, makes God's people one, and gives them a powerful influence."<sup>7</sup>

"The golden chain of love, binding the hearts of the believers in unity, in bonds of fellowship and love, and in oneness with Christ and the Father, makes the connection perfect, and bears to the world a testimony of the power of Christianity that cannot be controverted."<sup>8</sup>

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1053.

2. *The General Conference Bulletin*, January 7, 1900, p. 15.

3. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14, p. 220.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 188.

5. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 678.

6. *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 497.

7. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 327.

8. *That I May Know Him*, p. 173.

# He Who Intercedes

## EVIDENCE

Rom. 8:34

In Romans 8:34, the Greek word *entugchanei* ("makes intercessions") explains that Christ's work of interceding is synonymous with the pleading of the Holy Spirit; that is, "to move us to pray, to teach us what to say, and even to speak through us."<sup>1</sup> In a sense, nothing impossible is required of us. We allow Him to work through us; He is doing things on our behalf.

Just as the priest of old ministered on the altar of incense (whose perpetual fragrance represented the prayers and petitions of the saints), so Christ our High Priest intercedes before His Father, bringing with Him the prayers of those who believe in His name.

Thus Paul gives us an inspiration and a challenge: "Since we have a great high priest . . . Jesus the Son of God, . . . who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16, NIV). One important Greek word Paul used here is *sumpathesai* ("to suffer with"). Simply, Paul says that "we are to come to the throne of grace (where Jesus is interceding) with confidence because He does sympathize and suffer with our pain."<sup>2</sup>

**Jesus went through what we are going through now.**

Jesus went through what we are going through now. He was incarnated and lived among humankind so that He might know all our sorrows. And indeed, He understands our woes. Even now, up there in His throne, He is working on our behalf.

Things are possible only through Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). When Jesus declared that He is the Way, He is saying He is the *only* Way. "Every blessing we receive from God, every answer to prayer, bears this divine stamp upon it: 'Through Christ's intercession.'"<sup>3</sup> (Italics supplied.)

Our miserable life on this earth sometimes leads us to doubt God's love for us. In our hardship we question His ministry for us. But the fact that He promises to intercede for us because He completely sympathizes with us is enough to make us say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV).

Praise God, we have Jesus, who intercedes!

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 573.

2. Wesley L. Duewel, *Mightily Prevailing Prayer* (Manila: Christian Growth Ministries, 1993), p. 40.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

## HOW-TO

Matt. 21:22

As a young girl, I was told that when I ask God for anything in prayer, He will surely answer that prayer—and that when God replies, He will say or do it in several ways.

I remember asking someone about what I should do to ensure that God would say Yes to my every request. Getting a mere smile for an answer, I made up this theory that if people ask God for good things for other people, He would surely respond positively. So I started asking God for good things for other people, and started asking people to ask God for good things for me!

**God is not restricted by busy signals and password authentication.**

Now that I am older, I realize that there is no secret formula to make God respond positively to my every wish. Instead I have learned that God's replies—whether they be Yes, No, or Wait—prove to be for my benefit.

What is more, I have learned that:

● **We can freely communicate with God as we do with our dearest friends.** As any good friend, He is interested in the things we are interested in. He is eager to hear about how our day at work or school went, the people we met, the challenges we faced, the things that make us happy, our hopes and fears.

● **We cannot run out of things to tell God.** As He does not expect us to tell Him everything in one prayer, we can talk to Him about certain subjects at one time and other subjects some other time.

We are encouraged to pray and talk to God whenever we have the impulse to do so. When impressed to pray for someone, we are urged to pray for him or her at that instant, lest we forget about it and waste the opportunity of communing with God.

● **God is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.** The advent of e-mail has made communication between individuals faster, but nothing beats prayer when it comes to communicating with God. Jesus made it possible for us to have direct access to God anytime. Because of Jesus, our line to God is not restricted by busy signals and password authentication errors. All we have to do is close our eyes, feel His presence, and begin talking.

## REACT

1. How can one know for sure that his or her prayer has been answered by God?
2. What role does faith have in prayer that produces results?

# Beyond Making Requests

## OPINION

1 Chron. 29:11-13

A gray-haired man in his sixties walked into my clinic one morning. Thinking that he had missed registering with the secretary, I handed him a patient's card to fill out. He declined, saying, "Doctor, I am here not for a consult but to personally thank you." He smiled, then handed me a neatly wrapped box.

Sensing that I didn't quite recognize him, he went on to say, "Do you recall the lesion on my neck?" He showed me a brownish, healed patch.

Then I remembered. He was the lawyer in the government's finance department whom I saw while on duty one afternoon at the emergency room, as resident physician in my senior year. He had consulted because of a very pruritic skin lesion, an allergic reaction to hair dye. He had come back just to say thanks. A beautiful surprise.

As Christians, we are nurtured in the confidence that our heavenly Father is always ready to answer our requests for most, if not all, of our needs. Through prayer we approach Him when we are in serious straits. We pray to Him for specific material and financial needs. Surely God honors our prayers. He gives us according to our present need and for our good. He is ever faithful.

But what about our prayers? Have they gone beyond presenting God with requests? Oftentimes we miss out on the fact that prayer allows us the special privilege of sharing the company of the King of the universe, talking to Him, sharing ourselves. Even more often, we fail to realize that it is a very appropriate instrument for praise and thanksgiving.

Of the personal prayers of thanksgiving and praise in the Bible, those written by David inspire me most. He often visited with God in prayer, offering prayers of praise and gratitude for deliverance from his enemies, guidance and blessings, and the forgiveness of sins. David's awe and personal recognition of who God really is inspired him to sing the best of his songs.

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Ps. 139:14, NIV). This is one of his praises that I love to repeat, one that fully expresses my own gratitude to the Creator and King who made me and allowed me to grow in His care.

## REACT

How, with more prayers of thanksgiving, could our love for God grow? What difference will they make in our lives?

**Have our prayers gone beyond presenting God with requests?**

## EXPLORATION

Luke 11:1-13

## CONCLUDE

As believers, we have the privilege and honor of speaking to the God of the universe as our Friend and Father. He is genuinely interested in engaging us through prayer. Jesus prayed to God the Father, not only for Himself, but also for His followers and for all who would believe in Him. Jesus prayed for us while He was on earth, and He is still interceding on our behalf in heaven today. Let us follow His example. We can pray, "Dear Jesus . . ." anytime, anywhere. Let us come to Him with our praises, confessions, heartaches, needs, and gratitudes.

## CONSIDER

- Beginning a weekly prayer group with one to three other people. Discuss your week and share the praises and requests you wish to set before God. Keep a group prayer journal to reflect on your journey.
- Placing pictures of individuals you want to remember in prayer where you will see them frequently. Send up quick prayers each time you look at the pictures throughout the day.
- Using a concordance to study the references to prayer found in the Gospels.
- Using a local newspaper or newscast to guide you in prayers for your community and its leaders.
- Journaling your prayers. In the evening, reflect on your walk with God that day. Follow the acronym **ACTS** - **A** - adoration, **C** - confession, **T** - thanks, **S** - supplication (prayer requests).
- Praying with a friend by telephone.
- Setting aside a two-hour retreat with God in a natural setting. Take your Bible, hymnal, and a journal. Begin by singing "Open My Eyes That I May See," *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 326, or another song of your choice.

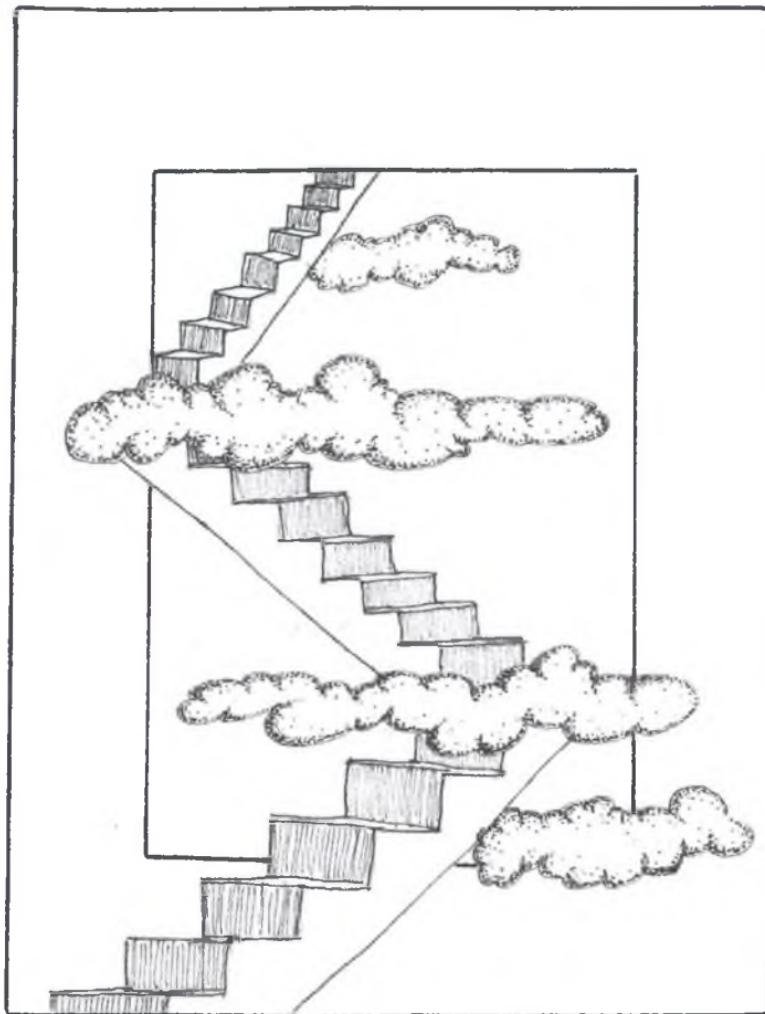
## CONNECT

Philippians 1:4-7; Hebrews 4:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12; 3:1-5; James 5:13-18.

*Steps to Christ*, pp. 93-104.

Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray*, pp. 39-60; Donald H. Postema, *Space for God*.

# Paul: prayer for the church



"God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6, 7, NIV).

## Because Daddy Prayed

### INTRODUCTION

Eph. 3:14, 16

Let me reach down in my memories  
I'll paint a picture so that you can see  
Why I kneel before the Lord every day  
It was nineteen seventy-eight  
A day I now celebrate  
And a warm memory that I carry  
It wasn't the way my new baby brother glared  
But while Mother cradled the little one  
Daddy prayed to "the Man Upstairs"  
Well, I was very small back then  
But it made me the man I am today  
"Remember the Great Provider," Daddy said  
"In everything you do  
It wasn't very long ago when  
Your Mom and I were young kids too . . .  
Your Grandpa is my Daddy  
Just the way I am yours"  
He told us of how the Heavenly Father  
Can open many doors  
In time, I learned just what Daddy meant  
To cherish life with great sentiment  
You see, several years later Grandpa died  
With a tear in his eye Daddy cried  
Before the Heavenly Father again  
With his head bowed low  
When into the room I crept  
He prayed the Lord to watch over us  
In the dark of night we slept  
and every morning at the table  
He thanked the Lord above  
For many were the blessings He gave  
Through His infinite mercy and love  
And in the best and worst of days  
No matter how narrow seemed the way  
All fear would disappear  
When we kneeled down to pray  
Saying grace wasn't just for a meal  
For everyday, whether good or gray  
Is a day I learn to kneel

# Picture This!

## EVIDENCE

Ephesians 1–3

It is A.D. 62. In Rome, Nero is on the throne. His palace is steeped in murder, deceit, sexual immorality, and extravagance. He avenges the murder of Senator Secundus by a slave by putting all the senator's four hundred slaves to death. The revolt of Boudicca is taking place in Britain, where over seventy thousand Romans have died, as well as several thousand on the rebel side. Events like these are common throughout the empire.

Not far from Nero's palace, Paul is under house arrest for doing the Lord's work. He is shackled to a Roman guard. Still awaiting sentence, he doesn't know whether he will live or die. If we were to visit Paul at this time, we would assume to find him melancholy and distressed. But the contrary is true. Full of joy, life, and love for his Savior, Jesus Christ, Paul is busy writing letters of exhortation and encouragement to the Christian churches in Asia. In particular, he writes a letter to the church at Ephesus.

A thousand miles across the Mediterranean Sea lies the city of Ephesus, notorious for its worship of the fertility goddess Diana, and for her splendid temple—Diana of the Ephesians. "Ephesus was not only the most magnificent, but the most corrupt, of the cities of Asia. Superstition and sensual pleasures held sway over her teeming population. Under the shadow of her temples, criminals of every grade found shelter, and the most degrading vices flourished."<sup>1</sup>

"In the midst of such confusion, and as a result of deep thought and inspiration, the apostle produced one of his noblest utterances concerning the faith that alone could restore to man peace and unity. It has been called 'the Alps of the New Testament.'<sup>2</sup> He tells the people that he is praying for them and recounts his two prayers in the letter. His first prayer is for their understanding of Christ and His headship of the church. Second, he prays for the unity of all believers. His prayers show a great vision of the church, empowered by Jesus Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Can you picture our church so united, working fervently to hasten the coming of our Savior? It can happen. It will happen when our love for Jesus becomes so full within our hearts that it daily drives us to our knees in submission to His will.

We would assume to  
find him melancholy  
and distressed.

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 286.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 994, 995.

# Location, Location, Location

## LOGOS

Ephesians 1-3

Paul's prayers in Ephesians (1:15; 3:14) anchor our lives in Christ, a Christian's vertical life address. Dynamic Christian living defines our horizontal life address—home and community.

Notice the powerful pattern for our vertical address:

### Ephesians 1

verse 1	in Christ:	faithful
verse 3	in Christ:	blessed beyond this world
verse 4	in Him:	chosen
verse 6	in the Beloved:	accepted
verse 7	in Him:	bought back and forgiven
verse 9	in Him:	a Yes! to You!
verse 10	in Christ:	ultimate point of reference
verse 11	in whom:	inheritance
verse 12	in Christ:	we trust
verse 13	in Him:	you're included
verse 13	in Him:	done deal
verse 15	in Jesus:	religion made real
verse 20	in Christ	mighty power

### Ephesians 2

verse 6	in Christ:	sitting in heaven already!
verse 7	in Christ:	God's kindness
verse 10	in Christ:	you're here for good reasons
verse 13	in Christ:	magnetic attraction
verse 21	in whom:	form-fitted by design
verse 22	in whom:	God: Can I move in?

### Ephesians 3

verse 6	in Christ:	no outsiders
verse 11	in Christ:	life's only guarantee
verse 12	in whom:	backbone

Our vertical address in Christ results in a phenomenal reversal: Christ in turn claims His address in *our* hearts. The product? A vibrant church on earth (3:17, 21). This vertical relationship leads to our second address: our homes and communities, where religion meets reality. Chapters 1-3 contain zero imperatives; chapters 4-6 boast 35! Paul moves from first to second address in a simple yet powerfully provocative cause-and-effect sequence:<sup>\*</sup>

<b>1-3: Vertical Emphasis “in Christ”</b>	<b>4-6: Horizontal Emphasis “in Ephesus”</b>
Spiritual Wealth Belief Privilege Position Heaven	Spiritual Walk Behavior Responsibility Practice Home

Only altitude avoids crash-landings in Christian living. Only spiritual height prompts prayer to burst into the fertile ground of down-to-earth Christianity. The real estate folks have it right: *location, location, location!*

## **REACT**

1. If your life was an address, what address would it be? School? Friends? Party? Habits? Home? Lost in space? Explain your answer.
2. How does one live “in Christ”? Be specific.
3. Practically speaking, how do you live in the world yet not be a part of it?
4. How do my personal habits and disciplines help me to experience the spiritual dimensions of life?
5. What does the lack of imperatives in the first half of Ephesians, compared with the abundance of imperatives in the second half, suggest about the relationship between grace and law, loving acceptance and ethical behavior?
6. How do you respond to Paul’s bragging about his prayers on behalf of the Ephesians (1:15-18; 3:14-18)?
7. What did Paul mean by his repeated references to predestination in Ephesians 1; 2? How would you explain your interpretation to someone believing in predestination and “once saved, always saved”?
8. Give examples of how Paul’s prayer life is reflected in his words to the Ephesians in chapters 1–3. Have there been specific instances when your prayer life has been reflected by your actions on a practical level?
9. Would Paul have been able to write with such vision and feeling had he not been persecuted and confined? Why or why not?

**Only altitude avoids  
crash-landings in  
Christian living.**

\*Adapted from *The New Open Bible, Study Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), p. 1385.

# He Really Does Listen

## TESTIMONY

Eph. 1:19; 3:20, 21

I remember as a child being taught to pray; as I grew older prayer became such a routine. I prayed in the morning, at meals, and before bedtime. I began to drift away from prayer; it just seemed as if my prayers were never answered. Eventually prayer became nonexistent in my life, until what started out as an ordinary night of hanging out on the strip turned into a nightmare.

I remember saying, "Melissa, let's get out of here. I don't feel safe." But Melissa was too busy experimenting with cocaine. As I got into the driver's seat and closed the door, a line of cars passed and began to shoot. Everyone who was parked with us left, but our car wouldn't start. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the car started. I drove to a nearby service station to make sure everyone was OK. While we were there, the cars passed by and spotted us. I drove as quickly as possible to the expressway. That, however, didn't seem to matter. They followed us and began shooting at us for several miles. Suddenly, everything I had been taught as a child came back to

me. I began to pray aloud, asking God to spare my life. Needless to say, God answered my prayer; maybe He always had but I never noticed.

### Hanging out on the strip turned into a nightmare.

Prayer had never been easy for me. I often felt like the nobleman. "The nobleman wanted to see the fulfillment of his prayer before he should believe; but he had to accept the word of Jesus that his request was heard and the blessing granted. This lesson we also have to learn. Not because we see or feel that God hears us are we to believe. We are to trust in His promises. When we come to Him in faith, every petition enters the heart of God. When we have asked for His blessing, we should believe that we receive it, and thank Him that we *have* received it. Then we are to go about our duties, assured that the blessing will be realized when we need it most. When we have learned to do this, we shall know that our prayers are answered. God will do for us 'exceeding abundantly,' 'according to the riches of His glory' and 'the working of His mighty power.' Eph. 3:20, 16; 1:19."<sup>\*</sup>

## REACT

1. How do you know when prayers are answered and not mere coincidences?
2. How can one maintain prayer as a routine in one's life while preventing it from becoming rote and meaningless?
3. What would you do if an atheist dared you to put your God to the test by praying for a visible sign? What are some biblical stories where this happened and what were the results?

\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 200.

# We Need Us

## HOW-TO

Eph. 3:14-19

When you read from Ephesians 1-3, it is obvious that Paul has great care for his church. He knows how the power of God can work. So he prays for his people. He uplifts the minds of his people to how God can potentially glorify the church. I believe, if I were in Paul's day, it would bring that extra motivation to hear how he believed the church can be in Christ. He gave us a whole new revelation of the glory of the church.

Paul loved his church. Do we love our church?

Paul prayed for his church. Do we pray for our church?

Paul knew the great meaning of the church. Do we?

The word *church* comes from the Greek word *ecclesia*, meaning "called-out ones." Called out to show the world the salvation of Christ. And the church is the body of Christ, of which we are a part. What a privilege! Paul masterfully pictures how Jesus looks upon His virtuous bride.

How can we instill or revive that awesomeness that Paul saw?

**1. Prayer.** Let's pray for our church, not just our local congregations, but Christ's body as a whole—worldwide. Jesus said that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18, NKJV). Though people may fail, Christ's mission, love, purpose, embodied in His church will press on.

**What a joy it is to work with God and not just for God!**

**2. Help build your church.** Just as our key thought states, through the great power of God working in the lives of His people, the church can be "filled with all the fullness of God." Allow God to work in your life. Strengthen your bond with Jesus. A great way to do this, besides personal prayer and Bible study, is to be involved actively in God's service. You not only benefit, but the body of Christ benefits as well from your labor of love. What a joy it is to work *with* God and not just *for* God!

**3. Love your church.** Fear is not a proper motivator. Let's get closer as a family now before those troublesome days come when we're forced to come together because the world outside is caving in on us. How? Love Christ, He'll do the rest (1 Tim. 4:15, 16).

This week let these three steps sink into your thinking. Ponder how you can implement them into your walk. "Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. . . . And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Eph. 6:16, 18, NIV).

## OPINION

Eph. 2:19, 20

Do we live in a divided world or what? Rodney King was a black man who was beaten by several white officers from the Los Angeles police department. The whole incident was caught on tape. The policemen were put on trial but found not guilty. This verdict sparked a riot in Los Angeles. When King was interviewed by the media, he asked, "Can't we all just get along?"

Sometimes it seems that the world has answered King's question with an emphatic No! Satan has been working to divide humanity into warring factions. He is using our differences—racial, religious, financial, sexual, or national—to separate us. He has us so focused on our differences that we fail to see the things that we

have in common. The results are that families, communities, and nations are falling apart. It appears that nothing can stay together. Does God have a solution, or has love at last thrown in the towel?

**The world has answered  
King's question with  
an emphatic No!**

God certainly has a solution for the world's divisiveness. The apostle Paul presents a wondrous vision of God's plan in Ephesians 1–3. The church is to be the unifying institution for humanity. God has placed His Son Jesus Christ at the head of the church (1:22). Through Jesus we enter into the church, which represents the body of Christ. We receive salvation by grace and become filled with the fullness of Jesus (verse 23). We are then reconciled not only to God, but also to each other. We are filled with that peace that only Christ can give us. No longer are we "objects of wrath" (2:3, NIV) satisfying the dictates of our sinful natures. Our differences melt away and we are united in fellowship.

The church should be a beacon of unity to a dark and divided world. Inside the church we are placed on equal footing with each other. We cannot be proud or boastful when our true selves have been revealed to us. As Christians, we have too many things in common. We are all God's children. We share the joy of salvation and forgiveness. We share in the power God provides us through the Holy Spirit. We share the hope of eternal life in heaven. We share in the knowledge that God gives to us. We share in the moral and ethical standards Christ has established for His church. Most of all, we share in the divine love that Jesus gives to His children.

By standing together in peace and harmony, the church reveals the wisdom of God to heavenly as well as earthly beings (3:10). God proves again that His way is better than our way. That we can come together despite our differences is a beautiful ideal, especially when the world says that we should fear and hate those who are different. Jesus Christ is Someone we can come together over.

# More Than We Ask or Imagine

## EXPLORATION

Eph. 3:20, 21

## CONCLUDE

Paul's prayers for the believers at Ephesus reflect his deep love for these fellow Christians and his vibrant faith in God. These prayers model a powerful intercessory prayer that celebrates God's work in the lives of our fellow church members, and that holds them up before Him, pleading for grace, strength, and power in their lives. Paul's confident assurance that God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" is the basis for his belief that we can know "glory in the church . . . throughout all generations" (Eph. 3:20, 21, NIV).

## CONSIDER

- Going (alone or with friends) on a prayer walk through an area of your town or city where many of your church members live. As you pass a member's house or neighborhood, pray for that person and his or her needs.
- Making postcards to send to fellow church members with the message "I'm praying for you." Design your own cards using hand-drawn or computer-drawn artwork and lettering, and add a short note explaining what you've asked the Lord to do for that person.
- Creating a prayer scrapbook of your fellow church members (or, if your church is very large, a select group within your church you'd like to pray for—perhaps your Sabbath School class or fellowship group). Give each person or family a page and include pictures, clippings, etc., that remind you of them. Leave space to record your prayer requests and answers on their behalf.
- Writing a prayer poem for your friends or fellow church members. Use Ephesians 1:15-23 or Ephesians 3:14-21 as a general guideline, but experiment with a style that suits what you have to say. Consider sharing it by reading it at a church program or printing it in a church newsletter.
- Singing the hymn "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"—alone, with the congregation, or as a performance piece. Really meditate on the familiar words: What are the ties that bind you to your fellow church members?
- Praying for Christian friends you've found on the Internet. Let them know you're praying for them and that they are part of your cyber-church family.

## CONNECT

Romans 1:8-10; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9; Philippians 1:3-6.

*The Acts of the Apostles*, chap. 45.

Kris Coffin Stevenson, *Delighting in God*, pp. 56-75; An Unknown Christian, *The Kneeling Christian*, pp. 102-116.

# Revelation: prayer of Praise



“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Rev. 5:12, NIV).

# Are You Rehearsing?

## INTRODUCTION

Revelation 5

When I was a child, my father often took me with him to his Bible studies. Even though I was small, I was fascinated by the way he was able to interest people in studying the Bible.

Once, when the subject was life in heaven, the conversation came to a scene in Revelation 5:9: "They sang a new song" (NKJV). I imagined scenes of choirs composed of millions of singers. Fantastic!

Furtively I tried to sing this song repeated in the verses of chapter 5. But I did it silently, in order not to disturb, but I was out of tune. I wondered whether the Lord would accept me, as I did not know how to sing. After concluding the Bible study, my father assured me that in heaven we would all be able to sing beautifully. What a relief for me to know that I would not be left out.

Growing up I have asked myself many times why the Lord took the pains to transmit this wonderful picture of the multitude of persons that praise Jesus for His extraordinary gesture of love. This is not just simply information!

In reading Revelation 7 again, I realize that this gesture of God is a real and proper invitation, a claim for our attention and a sorrowful calling. In other words, God says, "Look what is waiting for you. Are you able to see this multitude of persons that, together with the angels, sing praises of thankfulness and gratitude to Jesus, my Son?"

The whole universe now breaks into song: "Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them" (Rev. 5:13, NIV), joining their voices with the immense chorus of angels, echoing their last words, but in reverse order. The angels had sung: "'strength and honor and glory and praise!'" (verse 12, NIV); the creatures of the earth now answer: "'praise and honor and glory and power'" (verse 13, NIV), in harmony with the preceding chorus.

Finally, the four beings conclude with a powerful "'Amen!'" (verse 14).

"The scene closes on the elders falling down and worshiping. The service concludes with silence. Words are not enough. Only silence may express the inexpressible."\*

Do you hear the harmony of this choir, the special music that was composed for this occasion? Above all, will you be in this great multitude that sing these marvelous words?

I wondered whether  
the Lord would  
accept me.

\*Jacques Doukhan, *Le cri du ciel: Etude prophétique de l'Apocalypse* (Dammarie-lès-Lys, France: 1996).

## LOGOS

Revelation 4; 5

Night had just fallen, and the Holy Supper had come to an end.

The disciples explored with each other the obviously important message the Master had wished to leave with them as He washed their feet. And I, I wanted to be washed completely. "He illuminated my life," I said, "I will be forever His best companion."

At the same time, with tears in His eyes, Jesus looked at us. I couldn't tell whether He was about to cry or whether He was touched by a great joy. At this moment I felt called, but I did not know why. It was cold, and the countryside was sparsely illuminated by the little fires of the pastures.

We walked with great difficulty among the knotty olive trees and could hardly find our way. Did the Master want us to pass the night outside? I did not know what the Master's intention was, but I was here, still with Him.

To pray with Jesus gave me a sense of a holy privilege. As before, a pleasant feeling of peace came from the conviction that I was able to do my part. No matter what kind of prayer I said, it would serve for something. I was very sure of this. The Eternal was not hard of hearing, and after all, Jesus knew how I prayed. He heard me often before eating . . . but then why was Jesus about to leave us?

With each step the Master advanced, this place took on an atmosphere of desolate solitude, even though I was with my friends. I looked beyond the Master. I looked at His footsteps and I tried to follow in them. How could I protect myself against the cold that was creeping slowly into my soul?

Jesus invited me to be watchful. He spoke of temptation and traitors. It seemed as if He wanted to tell me something. At the time, I did not understand the necessity to stay awake and to pray with fervor to be able to resist temptation.

I had not been able to watch with Him, I had not prayed even after His first call.

**My small and  
mediocre life  
becomes glorious.**

Jesus asked of me a spiritual, physical, and existential contact, and I had not understood. "Abba" I heard His fine murmur, and I discovered that in the face of prayer everything is secondary—my confession of Christian conviction does not count. "To fulfill the rites of the church does

not mean that we have a real spiritual life: How can I have true faith without being in contact with Jesus?" "If religion is a relationship, prayer is the most explicit expression of this relationship."\*

What had I lost? Today I had had the opportunity to show that my relation with God was solid, that my faith was strong, without any hierarchy or conviction of superiority. Being separate from Jesus, who was shedding tears of blood, I lost the

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fundamental union with my traveling companions. The Lord had called us to watch and to wait for Him until His return—and I slept!

An opportunity missed. Now I see my situation clearly: I gave in to *my* wisdom and I abandoned myself. In reality, prayer is being available for a living relationship with God, always having an open ear for His communication with us, listening to His whispering. The Master wants me to be close to Him, and He wants to talk with me. He calls to give me all the attention I need. And now, after having denied Him, I understand why in this night He asked me to pray to conquer my temptation, and He told me with regret: "You have not been able to watch not even for one hour." After all that, He woke me up several times showing me the road to return.

A true and heartfelt prayer is not a coded text to be recited, but it is a living encounter. In this transcendent dimension in which God erases any distance between Him and me, my small and mediocre life becomes glorious. Our needs and temptations are clear in the eyes of our heavenly Father, and even if we feel He is away from us and silent, the only attitude is never to stop praying (1 Thess. 5:17). We have to keep a strong relation with the Person who will help us to transform our life into the fullness of His joy until the day of His salvation.

## **REACT**

1. Why is it so difficult to pray to God continually or for long sessions?
2. Peter, James, and John had an opportunity to pray with Jesus at the most critical point in Jesus's ministry, but fatigue robbed them. At what times in your life did you need friends to sit up with you and pray all night? What difference would praying with a friend all night make in your life?
3. Thinking of your personal prayer life, which of the 12 disciples do you best relate to? Why?
4. What do you feel about public prayer (in restaurants, before tests, etc.)? What might be some benefits? Drawbacks?
5. What would you tell someone who wanted to learn how to pray? What's the most important thing for someone to know about prayer?
6. Since Jesus knew He was going to be arrested, what difference would it have made if the disciples *had* stayed awake and prayed that last night?
7. Why did Jesus come to die on the cross? Was it about humankind or Himself? Explain your answer.
8. How did the life experiences John had with Jesus affect his view of Christ as shown in Revelation?
9. If you were studying with a new Christian, how would you explain the images used by John in Revelation 5?

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\*Roberto Badenas, *Incontri con Cristo* (Florence, Italy: Edizioni ADV, 1998), p. 74.

Monday  
March 26

## The Lion and the Lamb

### TESTIMONY

Rev. 5:5, 6

"John, the writer of these words, by the providence of God was spared till old age came upon him. He had been a disciple of Christ from the beginning of his ministry, he had listened to the teaching of Christ, and had witnessed his miracles. He had followed him through the different stages of his missionary work on earth, and had seen his agony in Gethsemane, his betrayal, trial, rejection, condemnation, his suffering and death on Calvary's cross. He had looked upon him after his resurrection, and had witnessed his ascension, and he had a message to repeat everywhere that was present truth to the world then, and will be present truth as long as the world shall stand. John declared to the people that which he had seen and heard, that which his hands had handled of the word of God."<sup>1</sup>

"The Saviour is presented before John under the symbols of 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah' and of 'a Lamb as it had been slain.' (Revelation 5:5, 6). These symbols represent the union of omnipotent power and self-sacrificing love. The Lion of Judah, so terrible to the rejectors of His grace, will be the Lamb of God to the obedient and faithful."<sup>2</sup>

**"He had a message  
to repeat  
everywhere."**

"Before the universe has been clearly presented the great sacrifice made by the Father and the Son in man's behalf. The hour has come when Christ occupies His rightful position and is glorified above principalities and powers and every name

that is named. It was for the joy that was set before Him—that He might bring many sons unto glory—that He endured the cross and despised the shame. And inconceivably great as was the sorrow and the shame, yet greater is the joy and the glory. He looks upon the redeemed, renewed in His own image, every heart bearing the perfect impress of the divine, every face reflecting the likeness of their King. He beholds in them the result of the travail of His soul, and He is satisfied. Then, in a voice that reaches the assembled multitudes of the righteous and the wicked, He declares: 'Behold the purchase of My blood! For these I suffered, for these I died, that they might dwell in My presence throughout eternal ages.' And the song of praise ascends from the white-robed ones about the throne: 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.' Revelation 5:12."<sup>3</sup>

1. *The Signs of the Times*, May 23, 1895.

2. *The Acts of Apostles*, pp. 589, 590.

3. *Maranatha*, p. 346.

# The Cross of Christ

## EVIDENCE

Rev. 5:12

The angels by the thousands are uniting in the mighty choir of praise of the four beasts and 24 elders in a wonderful crescendo. What is the reason for this praise? The Lamb is worthy to open the sealed book that He has already taken from the hands of Him that sat on the throne. This scene occurs when Jesus ascends to the heavenly seat, where He is seated on the throne to receive adoration.

There is a strong contrast between the beginning of Revelation 5 (where we find a moment of crisis, affirmed by John's weeping when he discovers that nobody is worthy to open this book) and the verses that are describing the appearing of the Lamb (an overflowing joy expressed in a crescendo of hymns of love). The 24 elders and the four beasts are the first. In verse 11 they are joined by thousands of angels, and in verse 13 every creature in heaven is giving glory to God and to the Lamb.

What makes the Lamb worthy to open the seals? It is by virtue of the blood He poured out to ransom humankind from sin and death. It is important to underline that Christ is worthy not only by virtue of what He has done, but also by virtue of what He is: the Son of God. If His humanity is manifest by His having been slain, His divinity is attested by the glorification He receives from all the universe.

The cross of Christ is the theme that permeates John's vision. If we read attentively the angels' words, we will discover that they say that the Lamb is worthy to receive seven titles. This number certainly is not incidental; in fact, we know that in the Bible the number seven is a sign for perfection, of completeness. Thus, by the Cross, the Lamb receives the fullness of the glory and power.

"From that scene of heavenly joy, there comes back to us on earth the echo of Christ's own wonderful words, 'I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.' John 20:17. The family of heaven and the family of earth are one. For us our Lord ascended, and for us He lives. 'Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.' Heb. 7:25."\*

**The cross of Christ is the theme that permeates John's vision.**

## REACT

How would you respond to someone who felt a Christian's belief in a Savior who died for a single individual is pure arrogance?

\* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 835.

# The Creator and the Lamb

## HOW-TO

Rev. 4:11; 5:9-12

In the vision of Revelation 4 and 5, John witnesses the worship by all the creatures of heaven and earth in glorifying God the Creator and Christ the Lamb. It is said that both are worthy of glory, power, and honor. What does this vision mean in one's practical prayer life? We shall deal with two points: What does it mean to praise God as Creator and Christ as the Lamb?

**1. To praise God every day as the Creator.** It is clear that this vision will help us to understand the importance of glorifying God as the Creator of all the universe. To worship Him as Creator means to me to find the right place as a creature among all creation; without overestimation or underestimation, keeping a sober concept of ourselves. It means to acknowledge our dependence on Him and at the same time discover again our roots in Him, being created in His image and likeness. To adore the Creator means that only God is worthy of praise and that there are no other gods. "What makes God worthy of praise as king and judge is the fact that He is the Creator of the universe, our Creator. Otherwise, the adoration

has lost its sense and becomes idolatry. Either we praise the Creator, or we idolize the creation."<sup>1</sup>

### What does this vision mean in one's practical prayer life?

personal Creator will be saved and will be behind the throne of God as one saved (Revelation 4).

**2. To praise Christ every day as the Lamb.** In chapter 5 John witnessed the ascent to the throne and the adoration of Jesus Christ, and the context of this chapter helps us understand that we are at the time of Pentecost.<sup>2</sup> To adore the Lamb every day means to accept salvation, to accept the freedom that Christ has offered to me, and to recognize that He is the only Person worthy to offer me salvation since He is victorious.

To participate with my prayers in the adoration of the Lamb means to be overjoyed by the release from the enemy and to rejoice in the rights offered to us: to become king and priest as He Himself (5:10). It means also to receive daily the gift of the Holy Spirit (verse 6) that will be with us every day till the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ, as He Himself promised (John 16:7, 13).

1. Jacques Doukhan, *Le cri du ciel: Etude prophétique de l'Apocalypse* (Dammarie-lès-Lys, France: 1996), p. 78.

2. Ibid., pp. 81, 82.

# Heavenly Atmosphere

## OPINION

Revelation 4; 5

Chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation are an introduction to the scene of the seals that we will find in chapter 6, but also to all the book of Revelation. Here we find many references to the Old Testament (Daniel and Ezekiel), but first of all, the presence of some elements helps us to think that we are in the heavenly sanctuary, of whom we breathe the atmosphere. And the sanctuary is implied. For this reason, and since John avoids carefully all terms that in a certain way can evoke a time of judgment (*krima*, *krisis*, the verb *krino*, that he will instead employ in the second part of the book), we can identify the vision with the description of the service of dedication and inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary (see Exodus 40). All this suggests to us to place the events described when Christ, after His ascent to heaven, unveils the heavenly sanctuary.

Five hymns of praise are growing in intensity.

In the vision, then, heaven is not presented to the prophet as a desert site, but inhabited and organized in a perfect way, a place of joy, purity, and faithfulness to Him seated on the throne. The throne is the first thing that John can see, and the word *thronos* appears 14 times in chapter 4, so as to underline and confirm that the right to reign belongs to the Creator of everything. This chapter revolves around the picture of God the Creator.

In chapter 5, instead, we find the Cross as the center, with the images of the redeemer God and, above all, of the slain Lamb, the only one worthy to open the seals. As readers we are literally conscious of the joy that is drastically increasing to the point that it involves the entire universe. There are five hymns of praise that are growing in intensity, because the number of the participants increases progressively: first of all the 24 elders are singing, then the four living creatures, the thousands of thousands, and finally the whole creation. It is interesting that the first two songs of praise are addressed to the Father (Rev. 4:8, 11). That which follows is addressed to the Lamb (5:9-12), and the last is addressed both to the Father and to the Lamb (verse 13), projecting into the future till the end of time.

## REACT

1. When we pray, why do we present our petition in the name of Jesus?
2. What can we learn from the prayers of praise that we find in this chapter?
3. What is the difference between the significance of certain numbers in the Bible and the popular study of numerology? If numbers are so important throughout Scripture, why are Christians warned to avoid the study of numerology?

# Revelation: More Than Plagues and Beasts

## EXPLORATION

Revelation 5

## CONCLUDE

Many see the book of Revelation as the book of plagues, doomsday prophecies, and beasts. In its symbolic language the story of salvation can be found. Revelation helps us experience the entire universe praising God. The elders, the creatures, the angels, and all other beings bow down in worship and acknowledgment that God is the Creator and the Lamb. What despair John feels when he finds no one worthy to open the book. What ecstasy when the Lamb is deemed worthy to break the seals. And we're invited to be a participant! What are we waiting for—let's go!

## CONSIDER

- Drawing the scene found in Revelation 5. How do you envision the elders, the living creatures, the angels, and other beings?
- Memorizing Revelation 5. Choose a contemporary Bible version, such as The Clear Word.
- Comparing Revelation 5 in different Bible versions. How does the language of the King James Version differ from that found in The Living Bible. What type of language draws word pictures for you?
- Composing a song. What would you sing at the foot of the throne of God? What words would you use to say "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain"?
- Conducting a Friday evening "Worthy is the Lamb" party. Gather your friends for a time of sharing why the Lamb is worthy. Make your meal a simple one of fruits, vegetables, and nut breads. Spend your time celebrating Jesus' victory over Satan. Make a mural of the things you are sharing together.
- Sculpting a scene from Revelation 4 and 5. How would you show John's despair and his rejoicing as described in these chapters? What other elements would you include? Why?
- Beginning a book exchange. Meet your friends at a local donut shop once a month to swap books that will help you grow in your connection with the Lord.

## CONNECT

*The Acts of the Apostles*, chaps. 56, 57; *The Great Controversy*, chap. 42.

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## **Next Quarter's Lessons**

### **BIBLE BIOGRAPHIES Actors in the Drama Called Planet Earth**

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for second quarter 2001, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

#### **Lesson 1: Christ and Satan: Contenders for Control**

*Scriptures:* Isa. 9:6; Ezek. 28:12-15; John 1:1, 2; Rev. 12:9.

*Key Thought:* The two forces contending for control of planet Earth had both existed in heaven's perfect environment. Satan's jealousy over Christ's authority, however, began a controversy that would involve every member of the human race. Bible biographies are, in essence, a holy record of the choices some people made in this conflict.

#### **Lesson 2: The Betrayers—Peter and Judas**

*Scripture:* Matt. 26:69-75; 27:1-9.

*Key Thought:* First the good news: both Peter and Judas were capable, aggressive members of Jesus' elite twelve. Now the bad news: both betrayed (or denied) Jesus within hours of each other.

To order your personal copy of *CQ*, contact your Adventist Book Center or write:

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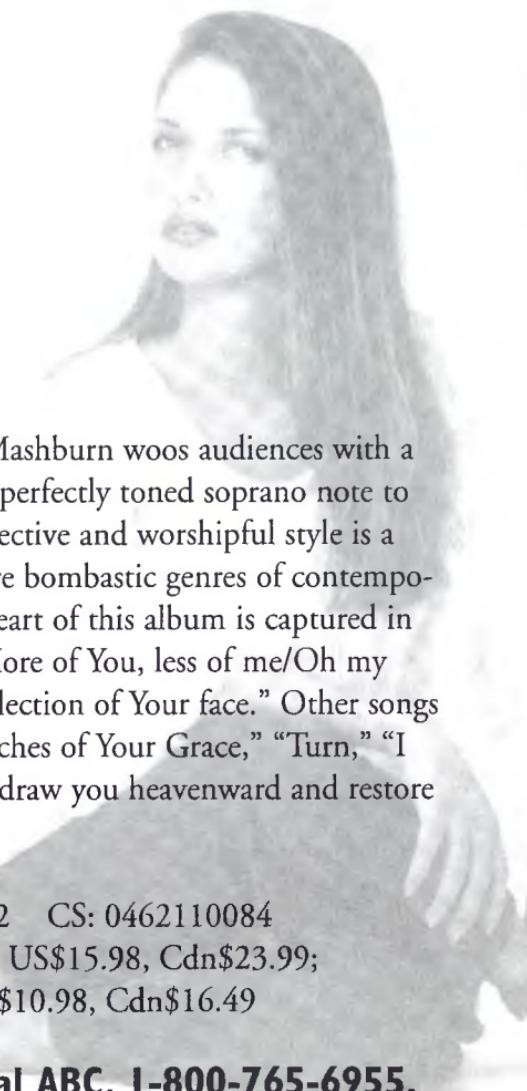
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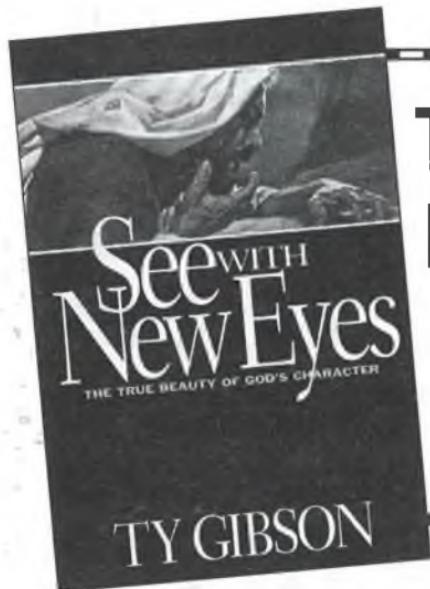
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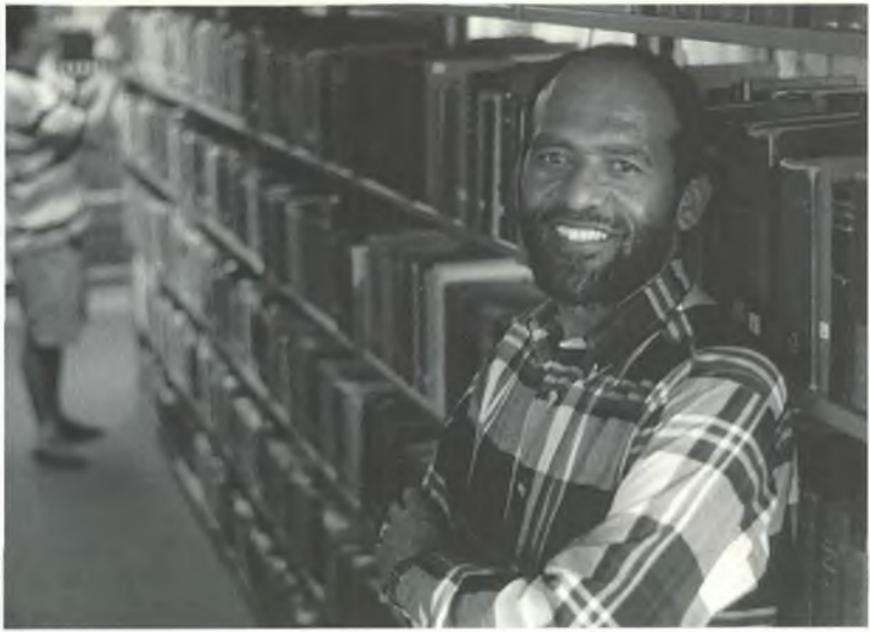
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# M I S S I O N



**NAME:**  
Aba Salam, from  
a Muslim country



Southern Africa  
Union Conference

## BACKGROUND:

We can't tell you his real name or where he is from, so we'll call him Aba Salam. He grew up in a Muslim country. When he entered college, he met a Christian classmate who invited him to a meeting. Aba Salam attended out of curiosity. The idea of knowing God as a personal friend intrigued him. Soon he found a way to learn more about Jesus. He wanted to be baptized, but he knew it was too dangerous, both for him and for the pastor of the small group of Christians in his country. How did he become baptized? Read *Mission* to find out more about this amazing new story.

# L E

## THE THIRTEENTH SABBATH OFFERING:

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help build churches for many congregations in the rural areas of the Southern Africa Union.