

Partnership With Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 1:21–35; Luke 4:31–42; Matt. 6:14, 15; 25:34–46; 26:36–44; Ps. 31:24.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me’ ” (*John 15:4, NIV*).

In recent years, research has pointed to the positive effects that religiosity, faith, spirituality, prayer, forgiveness, hope, and church attendance can have on health, including mental health. Numerous prominent scientific publications have reported a connection between religious faith and positive mental and emotional well-being. Surprise of surprises!

Yet, this is not magic; the faith factor applies only to those who are deeply committed to their religious principles. Psychiatrist Montagu Barker, an expert in the interface between religion and mental health, states that religion is a potent safeguard against mental illness, but only when believers possess a strong commitment to their beliefs. If not, religion may become a source of guilt and the cause of emotional, mental, and behavioral disturbances.

This week we will look at our best Example, Jesus, to learn how we can be strong in faith. By studying His life and maintaining a close relationship with Him, we can build solid mechanisms for spiritual growth, which itself can lead to better mental health.

Prayer and Bible study, worship, the practice of forgiveness, service to others, and hope and trust in God are sure pathways to spiritual development and mental health. With Jesus as our Example, we surely can't go wrong.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 26.*

The Praying Lord

Read Mark 1:21–35 and Luke 4:31–42. What lessons can you learn about His habits of prayer? What should this say to us about our need to pray?

Jesus is found going to the synagogue on that Sabbath in Capernaum, teaching the Scriptures to an amazed group of people who recognized His authority and that He healed a demon-possessed man. After the meeting, Jesus and His disciples went to the house of Peter and Andrew, and, there, He healed Peter’s mother-in-law. At sunset, many (“the whole town” [Mark 1:33, NIV]) congregated around Jesus and brought all sorts of ill and demon-possessed to be healed.

“Never before had Capernaum witnessed a day like this. The air was filled with the voice of triumph and shouts of deliverance. Not until the last sufferer had been relieved did Jesus cease His work. It was far into the night when the multitude departed and silence settled down upon the home of Simon.”—Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 86.

That must have been an exhausting day for Jesus. However, He did not sleep late the next morning. He needed to be in communion with His Father; so, He got up before dawn, went to a solitary place, and spent time in prayer. Jesus, the Son of God, He who had been with the Father before the world began (*John 17:5*), He who had created the entire universe (*John 1:3*), nevertheless felt the need for prayer. The concept is remarkable.

After stressful days, we tend to postpone prayer and communion with God. But it is precisely during those moments of psychological drain that we most need the soothing balm of prayer and time in the Word of God. Jesus knew this and practiced consistent closeness with His Father. If this was necessary for Jesus, how much more should it be for us?

Prayer is a positive factor in well-being and mental health. However much we don’t understand about prayer, about how it works or even about why it works, we are admonished to pray (*Luke 18:1, 21:36, Rom. 12:12*). Who hasn’t felt the positive impact this can have on our spirit and mind when spending time in communion with the Lord through prayer and reading the Word? We don’t have to understand all the mysteries of prayer in order to know how crucial it is to have a close relationship with God.

What kind of prayer life do you have? How much time do you spend in the Word of God? What are ways you can make your devotional time more meaningful and life-changing? However important that we spend time in prayer and reading the Word, time alone isn’t the only element. What other factors are needed?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Ephesians 4:15, 16*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the health benefits of a spiritual relationship with Christ and His body, the church.

Feel: Experience the hope and peace that comes from a daily walk with God, as well as the emotional support that comes from fellow believers.

Do: Offer forgiveness and service to others as part of your practical religious experience.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: A Healthy Spiritual Life

A What are the health benefits of an active prayer life and relationship with God?

B What are the health benefits of church attendance and strong, caring relationships with fellow believers?

C Why are forgiveness and service also important for health?

II. Feel: Spiritual Blessings

A What blessings have you felt from meeting with fellow believers?

B What positive emotions result from a relationship with God?

C How do healthy Christians deal with guilt?

III. Do: Forgiveness and Service

A Is there anyone in our present or past life that we need to forgive? What are the first steps we can take to committing to forgiveness?

B How can we increase the outward focus of our lives? What needs in the church or neighborhood can we help to meet this week?

C How has Christ modeled unyielding faith in God, even when He felt abandoned?

▶ **Summary:** Strong relationships with our fellow believers and Christ, the Head of the church, help to create emotional stability. Trust in God brings not only peace and comfort now but confident hope in eternal life, as God has promised it, with no evil and no death.

Worship and Church Community

Jesus went regularly to the synagogue on Sabbath (*Luke 4:16*). His example should speak to us of the importance of community. The concept of “a lone Christian,” independent of the body, is not biblical. That there are some occasional examples of this in the Bible doesn’t prove that this is God’s plan. All through the Scriptures we see the model of God’s people as a community, a group working together for the mutual benefit of each other and for the church as a whole.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 and Ephesians 4:15, 16. What do these verses tell us about our role and place in a larger church community?

How interesting, too, that in recent years reputable studies are showing that those who attend and participate in church services (compared to those who don’t) on a regular basis are:

- less likely to suffer from substance abuse
- more likely to be sexually responsible
- less involved in risky behaviors
- more likely to practice business and work-related ethics
- more likely to enjoy a richer social network and group support
- more likely to display higher levels of self-esteem and personal efficacy
- more likely to cope better with losses (death of dear ones, calamities, health complications, and so on)
- more likely to harbor positive emotions (love, forgiveness, contentment, and so on)
- less likely to harbor negative emotions (guilt, fear, hostility, anger, and so on).

Belonging to a church can be a great source of blessing. Such an environment can be therapeutic for soul and body. True, at times problems arise in the community, leaving some angry and bitter; but more often than not, those who work through their problems can find in the church support and fellowship and encouragement that they might not get anywhere else. Think about what church could be like if every member took to heart these words from Paul: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (*Gal. 6:2, NIV*).

What is your relationship to your local church body? Are you a giver or a taker? Why, at times, might you need to be a taker? At the same time, if we all went to church with the attitude of giving ourselves when and where we could, what kind of community would we have?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The keys to successful living are forged through divine partnership.

Just for Teachers: In 1979 the Chrysler Corporation was staring bankruptcy squarely in the face. Unable to rescue themselves, they sought a partner with vast reserves. Eventually, a partnership was forged with the federal government of the United States. One-point-five billion U.S. dollars were advanced to the moribund corporation. Without this partnership, Chrysler would have disintegrated into a historical footnote, and thousands of families would have fallen into unemployment. Partnership was crucial for viability.

Partnership is also crucial for spiritual viability. Scripture repeatedly states that humans are spiritually bankrupt when evaluated for themselves. Nevertheless, this does not imply worthlessness. Even while facing bankruptcy, Chrysler owned vast assets. Their condition, however, demonstrated that they owed infinitely more than they can ever repay. Likewise, our human race owes infinitely more than we could ever repay. Our spiritual bankruptcy demands a partnership with Someone possessing unlimited resources to cover our indebtedness. Enter the Heavenly Government of the Universe.

In Jesus Christ, heaven advanced us righteousness, salvation, justification, redemption, sanctification, and eternal hope. Lifeless apart from Christ, we become eternally viable with Jesus as our controlling partner. Our current study focuses our attention on how that divine partnership is forged.

Opening Activity: Discuss the mechanisms of business partnerships and the reasons acquisitions and mergers occur. Technical language is unnecessary, but basic concepts like the following undoubtedly will emerge from the discussion: (1) Often, companies accrue debt that they cannot handle alone *or* have aspirations that they cannot attain without additional capital; (2) another party, deeply interested in the distressed company, agrees to fund the indebtedness or the capital needed to achieve their goals; (3) the party funding the indebtedness becomes the controlling partner; and (4) in gratitude the party receiving the financial assistance provides worthwhile returns on the investments.

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Forgiveness

“ ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’ ”
(*Luke 23:34*).

Read *Matthew 6:14, 15*. What powerful message is Jesus giving to us here? What is He saying that is so full of eternal consequence for all of us?

Jesus taught His disciples to pray: “ ‘Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors’ ” (*vs. 12, NIV*). Then He insisted (*vs. 14, 15*) that if we do not wish to forgive, God will not forgive us.

The thought is terrifying. After all, we all are sinners; and thus, we all need divine forgiveness. Thus, we all must learn to forgive if we want to be forgiven ourselves!

Forgiveness is so important because it’s foundational in repairing and maintaining good relationships. The Lord knows how painful the burden of sin is and how its burden must be released through forgiveness—through the forgiveness that we get from God and through the forgiveness we give to others.

The experience of forgiveness is helpful, not only to those receiving it but also to those granting it. The feeling of grace and generosity experienced by those granting forgiveness brings them closer to God and contributes to character building.

A study conducted among recently divorced individuals showed the difference between those willing and those unwilling to forgive. Mark Rye of the University of Iowa recruited 199 divorced individuals from community singles’ organizations and church-based divorce recovery groups. Not surprisingly, researchers found that those who extended forgiveness to their former spouses enjoyed higher levels of mental health. When compared to those unwilling to forgive, forgiving persons experienced higher levels of well-being and religious satisfaction and lower levels of anger and depression.

This is not an isolated experience. Studies over the past decade are clear. Forgiveness reduces depression and anxiety and increases self-esteem and overall emotional well-being. In sum, forgiveness is good for many things; holding grudges, meanwhile, is dangerous for body and soul.

Is this so unexpected? Who among us hasn’t experienced the healing and relief that come from offering forgiveness to those who have hurt us?

How can you practice Paul’s counsel: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (*Col. 3:13, NIV*)? What choices must you make in order to forgive those who have hurt you?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: Think of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Was the landowner harsh in expecting a return on his investments? How does the attitude of the first two recipients contrast with that of the final recipient? What will the sincere believer's attitude look like?

▶ **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary****I. The Praying Lord** (*Review Mark 1:21–35 and Luke 5:16 with the class.*)

Prayer is divine communication. Could major corporations effectively exist without viable communication? Although perfect in every respect, Jesus constantly prayed. Christ valued communication with His heavenly Father, His Partner for the enterprise of redemption.

Ironically, feeble, frail human beings often appear less inclined toward prayer than did Christ, although we desperately need the direction of our Controlling Partner. Jesus opened and closed each day with such divine communication. Anyone who sincerely desires to reward the investment God has made in him or her, anyone who genuinely appreciates his or her release from spiritual indebtedness, anyone who understands the importance of our Controlling Partner's wisdom, cannot help but communicate with God through prayer and Scripture reading.

Consider This: How does prayer fortify the believer in the battle against evil?

II. Worship and Church Community (*Review Luke 4:16 with the class.*)

Not only is passive partnership unfounded in Scripture, “independent partnership” is inimical to biblical Christianity. Indeed, “independent partnership” is an oxymoron. Jesus Himself regularly fellowshiped with believers every Sabbath. Although the embodiment of perfection, Christ did not consider interaction with His disciples or the uncultured masses beneath His dignity. He reserved time for communing with His Father, but He was constantly about the Father's business of reaching lost souls with the gospel. Christians today need to gather strength from one another to successfully perform the work that God has given them to reach others with His love.

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Service

The Seventh-day Adventist outreach to the world historically has held two basic branches of ministry: teaching/preaching and healing/helping. They represent the two major tasks of Jesus' ministry (*see Matt. 9:35 and Acts 10:38*). Furthermore, for many people throughout the world, Seventh-day Adventists are known by their health and humanitarian work.

At the same time, these powerful branches have become quite institutionalized in many places. As a result, the ordinary member may fail to engage directly in these ministries. Some provide financial support; others leave these ministries to the professionals; and some, unfortunately, even view them with indifference. In the end, many do not become directly involved in the task of going around "doing good" and thus miss a tremendous blessing. Why? Because there is a great personal blessing that comes from ministering to the needs of others. The simple practice of directly sharing with the needy, or of helping someone who is sick, or simply of attentively listening to others' problems will result in great blessing to the one doing the ministering. There's something wired in us, something not totally eradicated by six thousand years of sin, that makes us feel good, even whole, when we serve others.

Read Matthew 25:34–46. What is Jesus saying to us here? What does this mean in the light of Ephesians 2:8, 9?

Salvation cannot be achieved by works. If it were, nobody would be saved. God's grace manifested by the sacrifice of Jesus in our behalf is the only means of salvation. At the same time, personal acceptance of God's grace does produce good works, and these works reveal the reality of our walk with God. The good works we do should be a direct result of knowing that we already have salvation in Jesus, as a result of His works for us. Works are the natural outgrowth of being saved, not a means of getting saved. How crucial that we keep that important distinction always before us.

Meanwhile, there's a tremendous emotional and spiritual blessing for those who, out of thankfulness to God for the salvation they have in Jesus, give of themselves to others. Many people struggling with emotional issues would feel so much better merely by directing their thoughts away from themselves and toward others.

Unhappy, unsatisfied? Most likely it's because you're too self-absorbed. Get involved in helping others and see what happens.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: What practical means may we employ for the purpose of supporting and strengthening one another?

III. Forgiveness (*Review Colossians 3:13 with the class.*)

Any human organization, including the church, is susceptible to misunderstandings, erroneous judgments, and flawed perceptions. Realistically speaking, the church also is susceptible to self-promoting ambition, selfishness, avarice, unethical conduct, harassment, dishonesty, and apathy, often cloaked in the apparel of righteousness. Sometimes, religious organizations suffer from naiveté regarding certain unethical behaviors not even countenanced by secular organizations because they take sinful conduct more seriously than does the church. Since our expectations of church life may become unrealistically high, doses of reality often wound sharply, and disillusionment may overwhelm even the veteran believer. Forgiveness is the only certain antidote for such disillusionment.

Forgiveness never excuses nor minimizes sinful behavior but, rather, recognizes the frailty and sinful propensity of all human beings. Forgivers recognize their own desperate need for forgiveness. Forgiveness ultimately releases those indebted to the forgiver from the just condemnation that should accompany their misdeeds. Ironically, releasing those who sin against us releases us, as well.

Consider This: How could the church, or any organization for that matter, function for any length of time without considerable doses of forgiveness? Why do forgiving people, generally speaking, experience better health (physically and mentally), fulfilling social networks, and lower incidence of depression? Whom should we forgive this coming week?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Successful partnerships develop ways of minimizing the ambiguities of role expectations. When both parties assume the role of chief executive officer (CEO), conflict is inevitable. Human organizations attempt to minimize unnecessary conflict by using job descriptions and titles. Scripture attributes certain titles and “job descriptions” to God; likewise, Scripture defines our role in redemption. Read the following texts to discuss God’s part and ours.

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Hope and Trust in God

“Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord” (*Ps. 31:24, NIV*). What reasons do we have for putting our hope in the Lord?

Studies show that hope is a critical factor in mental health. An attitude of hope found in hostages makes a difference in survival. Hope is a great motivator and a source of mental and physical endurance. Most depression treatments work well in patients convinced that their mood can improve significantly and that they can be helped. Indeed, depression and anxiety often afflict those whose outlook on life is pessimistic, catastrophic, and hopeless. A hopeful attitude can make a big difference in our entire mental outlook.

But there is more than the general hope that whatever your present trial is, it will end well. Religious hope transcends the finite and focuses on the eternal. It points us to realities and truths and promises that the world, in and of itself, can never offer. It’s a hope found in the Creator God, who alone can give us what nothing else in the world can.

Read Matthew 26:36–44. What can we learn about trusting in God, even in terrible times, from Jesus’ example here?

The passage tells us of the Savior’s disheartened state. Carefully chosen words are used to describe Jesus’ painful emotions: troubled, exceedingly sorrowful, deeply distressed. Heartbroken and disregarded by His friends, He fell not only on His knees but on His face and asked His Father for relief. When relief did not come, He asked again. And again. Note that every time He posed His request, He asked for God’s will to be done. In the end, Jesus put all His trust in the Father. Regardless of what would happen, He sought to be surrendered to His Father. That was His way, and it must be ours, as well.

It’s one thing to trust in the Lord in good times. But how can we learn to trust Him in bad times? How do we learn to trust when our prayers are not answered as we wish?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Controlling Partner: *Gen. 1:1; John 3:16; 5:27; 14:1–3; 15–18; 15:1–3; 16:7, 8; Deut. 5:6; Isa. 9:6, 7; 35:4, 10; 44:6–8; 53:1–12; 55:3; 65:17, 18; Amos 3:7; Ps. 139:1–6; 1 John 3:20.*

Junior Partner: *Luke 9:23–27; Rom. 1:1; 12:1, 3–6; Matt. 19:13–15; 16–21; 22:37–39; Acts 2:38; John 14:15; 21:17; Deut. 5:7; 6:1–7; Mic. 6:8.*

Thought Questions:

- ❶ What generally characterizes the role of the controlling partner?
- ❷ While the junior partner is naturally subordinate, what valuable contributions might he or she make to the partnership?
- ❸ What disastrous results might occur if junior partners try to assume roles assigned to the controlling partner (for example, the role of judge)?
- ❹ What dangerous consequences happen when junior partners attempt to strip the controlling partner of his role of chief executive officer?

▶ **STEP 4—Create**

Closing Activity: Develop a group definition of success. Guide the discussion so that no one individual dominates the exchange. Once an acceptable definition has been reached, discuss how the major emphases of the lesson (prayer, corporate worship and community involvement, forgiveness, service, and trusting God) influence our partnership with God. Can we unequivocally state that these elements contribute to our success in life? Why, or why not? Is there a “compounding effect,” meaning that these various elements reinforce one another rather than merely stand alone? What are the common threads linking this matrix together? Worthwhile scientific experiments consider the total body of evidence—that which appears to support the hypothesis and that which does not. Allow freedom of expression for those whose life experience does not apparently support the hypothesis. Disappointments with prayer or the church community or something else may have led them to other conclusions.

Further Study: “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. Here alone can true rest be found. And this is the effectual preparation for all who labor for God. Amid the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, the soul that is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. The life will breathe out fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men’s hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

“Every ray of light shed upon others will be reflected upon our own hearts. Every kind and sympathizing word spoken to the sorrowful, every act to relieve the oppressed, and every gift to supply the necessities of our fellow beings, given or done with an eye to God’s glory, will result in blessings to the giver. Those who are thus working are obeying a law of heaven and will receive the approval of God. The pleasure of doing good to others imparts a glow to the feelings which flashes through the nerves, quickens the circulation of the blood, and induces mental and physical health.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 56.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What have prayer and Bible study done for you in your walk with the Lord? Where would you be spiritually were you to cease doing them? Write out a testimony as to what these practices mean to you and why they are so important in your walk with the Lord.
- ❷ What has been your own experience with your local church community? How can you improve that experience? How can you work with your church to make it a place where all people would feel comfortable coming, where all people could be welcomed, where all people could learn about salvation and the present truth message we have for the world? In what areas is your church strong, and in what areas must it improve?
- ❸ What has been your own experience in regard to giving and getting forgiveness? What have you learned that could help those who are in need of learning to forgive?
- ❹ Suppose someone were to come to you and say, “Yes, I believe in God, in Jesus, in salvation, but I just don’t know how to walk in faith. I just don’t know how to trust God.” What practical advice would you give?