

# Reformation: The Willingness to Grow *and* Change



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 John 2:1–9, Phil. 2:12–14, Matt. 26:31–35, John 20:24–29, Luke 15:11–21, John 5:1–14.*

**Memory Text:** “He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (*James 4:6, 7, NKJV*).

Before Pentecost, the disciples had significant spiritual needs. Their understanding of God’s plan was clouded. They failed to comprehend Jesus’ mission. After they were touched by divine grace, Christ’s love broke their hearts. They experienced revival and reformation.

A revival is simply a reawakening of deeper spiritual longings. It is an intensifying of our spiritual desires as our hearts are drawn closer to God through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Revival does not imply that we have had no previous experience with Jesus; rather, it calls us to an experience that is deeper and richer. Reformation calls us to grow and change. It appeals to us to move beyond the status quo, spiritually. It invites us to reexamine our lives in the light of biblical values and to allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to make any changes necessary in order to live in obedience to God’s will.

This week we will study the lives of New Testament believers who experienced growth and change in their own spiritual experience.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 7.*

## The Grace to Grow

The lives of the disciples showed constant spiritual growth as they walked with Jesus. When Christ first called His disciples, their attitudes and actions certainly did not reflect the loveliness of His character.

**Read** Luke 9:51–56 and Matthew 20:20–28. How do these passages reveal James’ and John’s thinking?

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James and John had some serious character flaws. They were not prepared to represent Christ’s love to the world. They were not qualified to proclaim a message of grace to others who had not changed their own lives.

In spite of their serious defects of character, James and John longed to reveal Jesus’ character more fully. They longed for transformation and reformation in their own attitudes. Growth and change are part of our Christian experience.

**Read** 1 John 2:1–9. What do these verses reveal about the great changes that came over John during the years following Jesus’ death? What do they teach us about what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

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**It’s so easy to get discouraged over our own spiritual growth, especially since we truly want to have revival and reformation in our lives. When discouraged, when feeling as if you are a spiritual failure and that you are going to be lost, what promises can you claim that will show you why you must never give up, and why, despite your faults, you can have assurance of salvation?**

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## The Power to Choose

Change comes at the point of choice. Reformation occurs as we choose to yield to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and surrender our wills to God's will. God will never force or manipulate our wills. He respects our freedom. His Spirit impresses our minds, convicts our hearts, and prompts us to do right, but the choice to respond to the Holy Spirit's appeals is, always and only, our own.

**Read** Philippians 2:12–14. How does this passage show the necessity of cooperating with God in our growth in grace? What does Paul mean by “work out your own salvation”? What does he mean by “it is God who works in you”?

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It is not possible for us to work out what God has not already worked in. As He works in us through His supernatural power, we are able to make the choices to “work out” through our lives the grace and strength that He has worked into our lives.

“As finite, sinful man works out his own salvation with fear and trembling, it is God who works in him, to will and to do of His own good pleasure. But God will not work without the co-operation of man. He must exercise his powers to the very utmost; he must place himself as an apt, willing student in the school of Christ; and as he accepts the grace that is freely offered to him, the presence of Christ in the thought and in the heart will give him decision of purpose to lay aside every weight of sin, that the heart may be filled with all the fullness of God, and of his love.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 134.

Reformation occurs as we cooperate with God by choosing to surrender to Him anything that the Holy Spirit points out as not being in harmony with His will. Unless we make those choices (sometimes very painful ones), then positive, spiritual change will not occur.

God will not rip some selfish thought out of our minds. He will not mysteriously snatch away unhealthful habits or secret indulgences. He convicts us of sin. He convinces us of right, but we must choose. Once we do, He empowers our choices, but it is we ourselves who have to daily, even moment by moment, make those choices.

**What does it mean to cooperate with God in the working out of our salvation? What doesn't it mean? When was the last time that you felt deeply convicted over something and, through God's grace, overcame, no matter how difficult the struggle?**

## Confidence and Doubt

**What** was wrong with Peter's attitude before the Cross? *Matt. 26:31–35.*

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Peter was no match for the wiles of the evil one. He attempted to face Satan's temptations in His own strength. Filled with a sense of self-inflated confidence, he had little idea of the crisis that was coming. In the high priest's courtyard and trembling at the sound of a servant girl's questioning, Peter denied His Lord (*Matt. 26:69–75*). Jesus had warned Peter earlier, " 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren' " (*Luke 22:31, 32, NKJV*). Jesus' statement provides a fascinating analysis of Peter's spiritual condition. Trusting in his own strength, Peter drifted from his Lord. This is why Jesus used the expression, "when you have returned to me." Peter needed a spiritual awakening. He needed a change of attitude. He needed reformation.

**Read** John 20:24–29. What does this passage reveal about Thomas? What lessons can we take from this for ourselves?

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Both Peter and Thomas had one striking feature in common. They approached faith from a very human perspective. Peter placed confidence in what he could do; Thomas, in what he could see. They depended on their faulty human judgment. But Pentecost made a difference. A transformed Peter fearlessly preached, and three thousand were baptized on Pentecost (*Acts 2:41*). Peter realized that he certainly had no strength to heal a lame man, but Jesus had that power and a miracle took place (*Acts 3:2–9*). When the authorities attempted to silence his voice, Peter proclaimed, " 'For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' " (*Acts 4:20, NKJV*). Peter was a changed man. Thomas was changed also. It is believed that he sailed to India to preach the gospel. Though not much more is said about him, we can be sure that he had become a new man after Pentecost, as well.

**Who are you more like in temperament, Peter or Thomas? What can you learn from their experiences so that you don't make similar mistakes?**

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## The Conviction to Return

**Read** Luke 15:11–21. What specific attitudes and actions led the prodigal to decide to return home? What principles of revival and reformation do we discover in this passage?

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Revival can be defined in different ways. However it may be defined, one factor ought not be missed: revival is coming home. It is a heart hunger to know the Father's love in a deeper way. Reformation is the choice to respond to the Holy Spirit's leading for change and growth. It is the choice to give up whatever stands in the way of this closer relationship with God. The prodigal could not have both the pigpen and the Father's banquet table.

Simply put, the young man missed home too much to remain where he was. There was an aching in his heart to return. It is this heartache for the presence of God that leads us to long for revival and reformation. It is this heart cry for the warm embrace of the Father that motivates us to make necessary changes in our lives too.

**As** the young man prepared to return home, he planned his apology in advance. He must have rehearsed it again and again. Read his speech in Luke 15:18, 19 and his father's interruption in verses 20–24. What does this interruption reveal about the father's attitude toward his son and God's attitude toward us?

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Although his son was far from the father's eyes, he was not far from his heart. The father's eyes searched the horizon for his son each day. The greatest motivation to make changes in our lives is the desire to no longer break the heart of the One who loves us so much. When the boy was wallowing around in the mud with the pigs, the father suffered more than his son. Revival occurs when God's love breaks our hearts. Reformation occurs when we choose to respond to a love that will not let us go. It takes place when we make the difficult choices to give up those attitudes, habits, thoughts, and feelings that separate us from Him.

**How is the statement “ ‘ “my son was dead and is alive again” ’ ” an insightful definition of true revival? What is it like to be dead and then alive again?**

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## The Faith to Act

Jesus revealed the Father’s compassion and love through the miracles that He performed. He healed palsied bodies in order to reveal an even greater ability to heal palsied souls. He restored twisted arms and legs in order to demonstrate His greater desire to restore twisted hearts and minds. Jesus’ miracles teach us something about how to exercise faith. They teach us valuable lessons about growth and change.

One of Jesus’ most powerful illustrations of the power of faith is found in the miracle of the sufferer at the pool of Bethesda. The poor man lay by the pool for thirty-eight years. He was hopeless. His life seemed doomed to wretchedness, poverty, and suffering until Jesus came.

**Read** John 5:1–14. Why do you think Jesus asked the man, “Do you want to be made well?” (*John 5:6, NKJV*). Isn’t it rather obvious that anyone suffering for so long would want to be healed? What was Jesus’ motive here? What was the man’s response? *John 5:7*.

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Jesus did not listen to the man’s excuse. He did not counter the excuse with an argument. He simply said, “ ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’ ” (*John 5:8, NKJV*). The essential question was, Would this poor sick man believe the word of Christ and act upon it in spite of what he was experiencing? As soon as the man resolved to act upon the word of Christ, He was made whole. Jesus’ gift of healing was in His word. Christ’s word carried with it the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish that which Christ declares.

“If you believe the promise,—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed,—God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic power to walk when the man believed that he was healed. It is so if you believe it.

“Do not wait to feel that you are made whole, but say, ‘I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.’”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 51.

**Why is it so important to believe God’s promises for forgiveness, especially when we feel so condemned and guilty for our sins? Why must forgiveness precede reformation in our lives? Why is it important to believe that we can overcome through Christ’s power in our lives, even now?**

**Further Study:** “Let no man present the idea that man has little or nothing to do in the great work of overcoming; for God does nothing for man without his cooperation. Neither say that after you have done all you can on your part, Jesus will help you. Christ has said, ‘Without Me ye can do nothing’ (John 15:5). From first to last man is to be a laborer together with God. Unless the Holy Spirit works upon the human heart, at every step we shall stumble and fall. Man’s efforts alone are nothing but worthlessness; but cooperation with Christ means a victory. . . . Never leave the impression on the mind that there is little or nothing to do on the part of man; but rather teach man to cooperate with God, that he may be successful in overcoming.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 381.

“All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

### Discussion Questions:

- ➊ Growth comes in the Christian life as we claim God’s promises by faith, believing that He will do just what He says. What are the promises made to us here? *1 John 1:7–9, Phil. 4:13, James 1:5–8, Rom. 8:31–39*. How can you learn to believe them for yourself? More important, what choices can you make that will help these promises to become more real in your life?
- ➋ Dwell more on this idea of working out your own salvation with “fear and trembling.” In class, talk about what that means, especially in terms of salvation by faith alone. What should we fear; what should cause us to tremble?
- ➌ When was the last time that, like Peter, you made a promise to God that you, however sincere at the time you made it, utterly failed to follow through on it? What did you learn from that mistake? What principles can we find in the Bible that will enable us to have the victories that we are promised?

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Philippians 2:12–16*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Compare the attitudes of the disciples before the Cross with the attitudes of the disciples after Pentecost and identify the reformatory changes.

**Feel:** Contemplate the transformations that took place in the disciples' lives as a model for his or her life.

**Do:** Grasp the Holy Spirit's power by faith and choose to surrender his or her life fully to Him.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Understanding Change**

**A** What were the disciples' attitudes before Pentecost, and how did they change after Pentecost? Why? What made such a dramatic difference?

**B** What role did choice play in bringing the prodigal back home? What role did love play in his acceptance? What roles do choice and love play in revival and reformation?

**C** What were the two major factors in the healing of the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda?

**II. Feel: Identifying With the Disciples**

**A** How would you feel if you were Peter, and you had just denied your Lord?

**B** What do you think was going through the prodigal's mind as he made the long journey home? How might he have felt when his father ran to meet him?

**C** Imagine the desperate state of the man by the pool of Bethesda. Describe how you would feel if you were that man.

**III. Do: Acting on His Word**

**A** What similar qualities did Peter, James, John, the prodigal, and the man by the pool of Bethesda all have that led to the changes in their lives?

**B** Are there times when Christ humbles you as He did Peter? Or He corrects you as He did James and John? Or He welcomes you home as He did the prodigal?

► **Summary:** Change does not occur without a spiritual battle. Reformation occurs as, by faith, we accept Christ's victory as ours and choose to surrender our un-Christlike habits and attitudes to Him.



## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Philippians 2:12–16*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Growth in our spiritual lives comes as we cooperate with God. He will not do the work for us without our cooperation, and we certainly cannot do it without Him. He will not violate our freedom of choice, but our choice alone does not carry with it power for change. As we choose to yield to the promptings of His Spirit and surrender our lives to Him, He will supply the power for change.

**Just for Teachers:** Help your class members to seize this vital concept for spiritual growth: God empowers our choices for change. Change does not come because we try harder. Reformation of character will not come because we diligently work at it. Character transformation occurs when we unite our weak, wavering will to His almighty unchangeable power.

A pastor friend of mine once told the story of his father’s battle with chewing tobacco. When his father was becoming a Christian, he longed to have victory over this vice. It was a real struggle. My friend remembers being a boy and seeing his father get up in the morning and begin chewing. Then Dad came to his senses and spit the chew into his hands, squeezed it into a ball, and threw it as far as he could out into the cornfield and declared, “I am done.” Then about noon, my friend said he saw his dad walking up and down among the rows of corn, looking for the tobacco. Do you think God would let him find it, or do you think God would hide it from him? Of course, God would let him find it! God respects our freedom of choice.

Have you ever said, “I am done! That is it. I am not doing that again” and then found yourself doing the same thing a few hours later? The issue is not God’s power to reform our lives and give us victory; it is about our choice. When we want victory over some besetting sin as much as God wants to give it to us, we will have it.

**Discuss With the Class:** Have you ever had a struggle with some habit or attitude for weeks that, finally, through the grace of God you overcame? Describe your struggle and final victory over that habit/attitude. What helped you the most to achieve victory?

## ► STEP 2—Explore

### Bible Commentary

**I. Working Out What God Works In** (*Review Philippians 2:12, 13 with your class.*)

Salvation is only and always through grace (*Eph. 2:8*). Christ is our Righteousness and our Redemption. He is our Savior and our Deliverer. He is our dying Lamb, our resurrected Lord, our living Priest, and our coming King. He initiated the plan of salvation in eternity past, consummated the plan of salvation on the cross, and will complete the plan of salvation at His soon return.

Jesus convicts us of sin, draws us to Himself, places the desire to respond to His grace in our hearts, saves us, and sustains us by His grace. Although salvation is all of Him, this truth does not mean that we do not have a role to play in receiving His grace and in being transformed by it. As the apostle Paul so forcibly states it, “work out your own salvation” (*Phil. 2:12, NKJV*). The Greek word here means “carry to completion” or “carry to a full conclusion.” In other words, Paul is saying, “Do not stop halfway in the Christian life. Let Christ finish what He has started in you.” As *The SDA Bible Commentary* so aptly puts it, “The Scriptures teach that each individual must cooperate with the will and power of God. One must ‘strive to enter in’ (Luke 13:24), ‘put off the old man’ (Col. 3:9), ‘lay aside every weight,’ ‘run with patience’ (Heb. 12:1), ‘resist the devil’ (James 4:7), and ‘endure unto the end’ (Matt. 24:13). Salvation is not of works, but it must be worked out. It springs from the mediation of Christ alone, but it is lived out by personal cooperation.” —Vol. 7, p. 158.

Paul does not end the passage with “work out your own salvation.” He continues by adding this vital spiritual truth, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (*Phil. 2:13, NKJV*). The Greek word for “do” is *energein*. Obviously, our word *energy* is derived from this word. William Barclay, in his *Daily Bible Study Series*, makes this insightful comment about this unique word. “There are two significant things about that verb; it is always used of *the action of God*; and it is always used of *effective action*. The whole process of salvation is the action of God; and it is action which is effective because it is the action of God. God’s action cannot be frustrated, nor can it remain half-finished, it must be fully effective.” —*Letters to Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Westminster Press, 1959), p. 51.

As we cooperate with God and allow Him to complete in us the work that He has started (as He did in the lives of James, John, Peter, the prodigal, and the man by the pool of Bethesda), Jesus will work amazing changes in our

lives. Day by day we will become more like Him, and that is what reformation is all about.

**Consider This:** Reformation comes, not because we try harder but because we experience God’s amazing grace. How can we allow God to work in us to do “His good pleasure”?

### ► **STEP 3**—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Help your students to understand what it means to cooperate with God in overcoming. Clearly explain how our choice places us in touch with the infinite power of Christ.

#### Thought Questions:

**1** What does it mean to work out our own salvation? How do we cooperate with Christ in the plan of salvation?

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**2** Review the story of the prodigal son. What lessons can we learn about cooperating with Christ and yielding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit?

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**3** What does it mean that He works in us to “will and to do for His good pleasure” (*Phil. 2:13, NKJV*)? Read Hebrews 12:1, 2 and Philippians 1:6. What promise does Christ make to us about what He will do in our lives if we consent?

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## ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The quotation below was written more than one hundred years ago by Ellen G. White. Share it with your class and invite them to gather in groups of two or three and answer the questions following the quotation. If possible, print out this statement and distribute it.

“In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan’s control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 466.

### Thought Questions:

1 What does it mean that “the expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself”?

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2 How does reformation, or change, actually take place in our lives? Describe the cooperation with God in overcoming sin, a cooperation that this statement explicitly details.

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