

Discipleship¹ and Prayer



SABBATH—JANUARY 11

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Daniel 9:2–19; Matthew 14:22, 23; Matthew 26:36; John 17:6–26; Hebrews 2:17; 1 Peter 4:7.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I do not pray only for them. I pray also for those who will believe in me because of their message. Father, I pray that all of them will be one, just as you are in me and I am in you. I want them also to be in us. Then the world will believe that you have sent me’ ” (John 17:20, 21, NIV).

WE WORK FOR SOULS. We plan outreach programs. Every time we do these things, we are to pray hard for the people we are trying to reach. This is an important part of being a Christian. But it is even more important to a disciple-maker.² Great changes might be made if Christians would use prayer as a very important part of making and keeping disciples!

“Let the workers claim the promises of God. They are to say, ‘You have promised, “Ask, and ye shall receive.” I must have this soul converted to Jesus Christ.’ Pray for the souls for whom you work. Also ask the church to pray for them. . . . Choose another and still another soul. Pray daily for God’s leading. Put everything before Him in serious prayer, and work in His wisdom.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, pages 244, 245.

1. discipleship—the practice of accepting Jesus and following Him.

2. disciple-maker—a person who makes disciples for Christ.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 12**TIME-TESTED COMPASSION
(MERCY) (Daniel 9:2–19)**

Often believers pray for themselves. They give their wish lists to God and hope to get what they ask for. It is true that we are told to offer our prayers to God. But sometimes our reasons for praying are not pure. After all, our hearts are sinful. Sometimes our prayers might show the sinfulness inside of us.

Intercessory prayer³ focuses on (pays attention to) another person's needs. So, it removes selfish reasons for praying from our hearts. These prayers show selflessness, mercy, and a real desire for the salvation of others without any desire for personal gain.

Read Daniel 9:2–19. What burdens Daniel in this prayer? What important part does confession have in the prayer? Also, because he is old, Daniel does not expect to see Jerusalem again. So, what is the real reason for his prayer?

Seventy years have passed since Jeremiah gave the prophecy⁴ that Daniel is now praying about. After so many years, Daniel's friends from Jerusalem have died. If Jerusalem was rebuilt, it would not bring back Daniel's personal riches either. There is nothing in Daniel's prayer that suggests selfish desires. The old prophet (special messenger) prays to God only

about the future of the Jewish nation. And he also prays about the reputation of God Himself. But Daniel has a long confession that comes before the things he asks for. He confesses that he is among the people who disobey. In other words, the prophet does not want to say that he is innocent. He accepts responsibility for his actions while he prays for Jerusalem to be rebuilt for the good of others.

Think about your prayer life. What do you pray for? Why do you pray? For whom do you pray? How much death to self is involved in your prayers? How can you be less self-centered in your prayer life? How can your prayers be less selfish, even the ones for yourself?



Intercessory prayer focuses on another person's needs.

3. intercessory prayer—prayer for the needs of others.

4. prophecy—a special message from God often explaining what will happen in the future.

MONDAY—JANUARY 13**TIME FOR PRAYER****(Matthew 14:22, 23)**

Stop to think about this: fallen sinners who are worthy of death can quickly pray to the Creator of the universe—our Holy God.

When God became a human, He accepted our limitations. He also felt the need for prayer. Jesus was not standing before the Father in the same way that we as fallen sinners do. But when He was a human, He still felt the need for prayer.

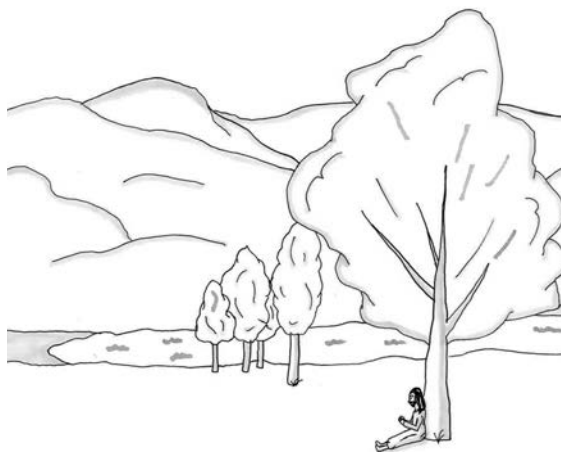
Read Matthew 14:22, 23; Matthew 26:36; Mark 1:35–37; Luke 5:15, 16; and Luke 6:12, 13. What was so important about the personal prayer life of Jesus? Describe the events around Jesus' praying. What lessons can we learn from Christ's prayer life?

Christ's prayer life certainly was a good example of the prayer life that He encouraged His disciples to have. Jesus prayed in the mornings, evenings, after preaching, before preaching—whenever it was possible. Jesus prayed in gardens, mountains, and solitary places. Whenever everything was quiet, Jesus prayed.

As a human, Jesus was separated from the Father's presence. But He was united (joined as one) with the Father spiritually through prayer. Christ's spiritual lifeblood (what gives one life) came through prayer. Christ's

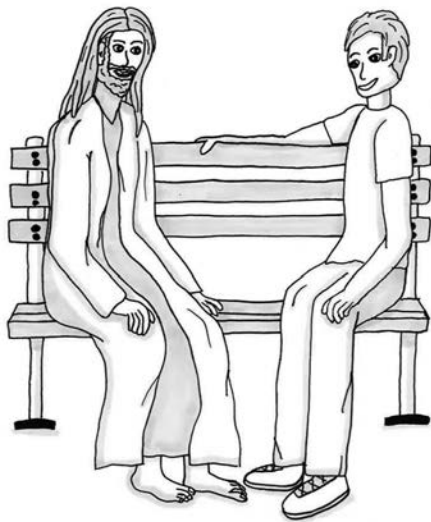
modern followers, on the other hand, have been weakened by sinful temptations. They have been choked by worldly cares. They have been frustrated by failures. Should they try to do anything less than Jesus did while praying?

“Prayer is the opening of the heart to God in the same way as you would to a friend. Prayer is not necessary to let God know what we are. But it helps us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us. It brings us up to Him.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 93.



As a human, Jesus felt the need for prayer.

Read Mark 11:22–26; Luke 11:13; and John 14:12–14. How should we understand the promises written here about prayer? How have you experienced what Jesus said here? At the same time, how have you learned to accept unanswered prayers?



Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.

TUESDAY—JANUARY 14

TIMELESS TEACHING (Matthew 6:7, 8)

By a miracle, prayer unites (joins) limited souls with their unlimited Creator. It acts as spiritual glue. United then with the heavenly Father through prayer, believers rise above their earthly natures and sinful desires. This change separates believers from the world. Suppose Satan could successfully change prayer into a self-centered act and stop prayer from changing us spiritually. Then we would be very different. We would not be separate from the world. And our witness would become powerless.

Read Matthew 6:7, 8; Matthew 7:7–11; and Matthew 18:19, 20. What do these verses teach us about prayer?

The sincere believer trusts in God's ability to honor His promises. No prayer could ever challenge God's power. His authority is unlimited. And His strength is without equal. In other words, the prayers of God's people reach heaven with full trust that the Lord will do what is best for us. Even though we may not understand it at the time, faith is not simply trusting in what we can see. True faith means trusting God when we cannot experience the results that we want and expect (read Hebrews 11:1–7). No doubt, as long as you walk in faith, you will have to trust in God, even when things do not work out as you want. Even a quick reading of the Bible will show you that the people in it had the same experience.

Read Matthew 6:9–15 and Matthew 26:39. What do these verses teach?

Trust should not mean that you should be boastful while praying. God does not give you special favors if you are bold when you approach His throne. When the believer prays, he or she should be bold but still humble. At the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ clearly showed what He wanted. But He always added, "Not My will, but Yours." Complete surrender and a forgiving spirit are examples of being humble. After all, we ourselves have been forgiven for so much. And so we must forgive others.

Are you angry with someone and find it hard to forgive him or her?

Take it to the Lord in prayer. Pray that you will learn to forgive. Pray for that person. What do you think will happen after a while?



We should pray as Jesus prayed, “Not My will, but Yours.”

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 15

TIMELESS COMPASSION (MERCY) (Luke 22:31, 32)

Christ was the perfect Example of everything. All of God’s perfections were shown in Him. Was anyone ever more compassionate (merciful) than Christ? No! Who had a stronger desire than Jesus to take away human suffering? No one!

We ask, How did Christ’s compassion and intercession⁵ relate to discipleship?

Read Luke 22:31, 32 and John 17:6–26 (read also Hebrews 2:17). How did being a human and work-

ing with others influence the intercessory prayers of Jesus? What are the real goals of Christ’s intercessory prayers?

Jesus could work well with His disciples. This is because He was also a human and was involved in their lives. So, He fully understood them. And He wanted so much to work for their good. Intercession must work in the same way today. The disciple-maker in the twenty-first century will drop anything in life that will keep him or her from working with lost souls. Making money or becoming famous or well educated is not as important as working for the salvation of others. This is an important truth that is so easily forgotten. This is because we are so often busy with daily living.

Jesus invested Himself in the lives of His disciples. He visited their homes. He got to know their relatives. He spent leisure time with them. And He worked beside them. For this reason, He never failed to notice anything important in their lives. Disciple-making today is no different. It requires more than passing out tracts (religious pamphlets) and sharing about Bible verses as proof of God’s truths. Like Jesus, we must remember to pray for others, as well. Praying for others is a way of recognizing their suffering. It shows a strong desire to lessen that suffering. Intercessory prayer is still an important part of disciple-making.

5. intercession—prayer that is made on behalf of others.

“People care little about what you know until they know how much you care.” This may be a simple sentence. But there is a lot of truth in it.

THURSDAY—JANUARY 16

TIMELESS COMPASSION COPIED (Acts 1:13, 14)

The sincerest offering of praise is imitation (copying what someone does). Christ’s earliest disciples copied their Master’s prayer life. Naturally, they prayed for personal safety, for their daily needs, and for spiritual leading. But intercessory prayer became an important part of their discipleship.

Read Acts 1:13, 14; 1 Timothy 2:1–4; James 5:13–16; 1 John 5:16; Jude 20–22; and 1 Peter 4:7. What part did prayer play in the early church? What were some of the special events its members prayed for? What can we learn from these examples?

Prayer made the early church strong. Whenever Paul left for missionary work (work done for God), he was sent on his way with an offering of prayer (Acts 13:3; Acts 14:23). Even farewells (goodbyes) involved prayer (Acts 20:36; Acts 21:5). And often the church members’ prayers were intercessory. They prayed for government leaders, fellow believers, and everyone! Paul prayed for the father of Publius, the governor

who suffered from dysentery (stomach illness). Stephen prayed for his murderers even when he was dying. Prayer was a very important part of the earliest believers’ lives. The early church grew rapidly through prayer combined with the teaching of the apostles (teachers and leaders), strong preaching, miracles, and loving fellowship. Christianity spread all over the empire even when the church was strongly attacked. Thousands upon thousands of people accepted the gospel. Changed lives burned as living lights all the way from Caesar’s palace to unknown places. But is any of this surprising? After all, the Bible says that prayer pleases God because He desires salvation for everyone, and He wants truth to be spread among people.

How much time do you spend in intercessory prayer? Think about your answer. Or perhaps the question should be, How much more time should you spend in intercessory prayer?

FRIDAY—JANUARY 17

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “A Reformatory [Bring About Change] Movement,” page 126, in *Testimonies⁶ for the Church*, volume 9; “By Personal Efforts and Living Faith,” pages 244, 245, in *Medical Ministry*.

“He who does nothing but pray will

6. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

soon stop praying. Or his prayers will become only routine. When people take themselves away from Christian duty or stop working hard for Jesus, they lose the real reason for prayer. Then their prayers become personal and selfish. They cannot pray about the needs of people or the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom. They cannot pray for strength to do God's real work."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 101.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Why does the church fail to grow without intercessory prayer? How does an active intercessory prayer life encourage disciple-making activity? What are the things that make intercessory prayer work well? How can the person who does intercessory prayer know what to pray about?
- 2 What should church members do for the people they pray for? How can members build relationships with

the neighbors, relatives, and coworkers for whom they pray? Why should private prayers for others always be made with the desire to be friends with those same people?

- 3 What steps should today's Christians take so that they can experience powerful prayer lives? What is the relationship between successful disciple-making and God's involvement in prayer? Must the life of a person who takes part in intercessory prayer be changed first before he or she can pray to change the lives of others? Why? How might prayer be changed by having a great desire to see lost souls saved? What influence does personal holiness and prayer have on the soul winner's ability to share the truth?
- 4 What can believers do to reach those who have not accepted Christ? What can Christians do to befriend people? And how will befriending others help the believer to know how to pray for them?