

Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Prayer



SABBATH—MAY 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 2:25–32; John 16:5–7; Luke 23:46; Luke 11:1–4; Matthew 7:21–23; Luke 11:9–13.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘So here is what I say to you. Ask, and it will be given to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks will receive. He who searches will find. And the door will be opened to the one who knocks’ ” (Luke 11:9, 10, NIV).

DEFINITIONS

1. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

OF THE FIRST THREE GOSPELS (MATTHEW, MARK, AND LUKE), Luke speaks more often than do the others about Jesus' relationship to the Holy Spirit. Matthew speaks of the Spirit 12 times. Mark does so 6 times and Luke does 17 times in his Gospel and 57 times in the book of Acts. From the time of Jesus' birth as a human (Luke 1:35) to the command about His worldwide mission (Luke 24:44–49), Luke sees a strong working connection between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This connection is important in understanding the ministry (work) of our Savior. Luke also shows the importance of prayer in Jesus' life and mission. Fully God, equal with the Father and the Spirit, Jesus in His human form left us an example of prayer.

If Jesus saw the need for prayer, how much more must we need it?

“Without watchful prayer, we are in danger of growing careless and of straying off the right path. The enemy [Satan] tries continually to block the way to the mercy seat. He does this so that we may not receive grace¹ and power to keep away from temptation through prayer and faith.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 95.

JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT (Luke 1:35, 41)

Luke was a Gentile (non-Jewish) believer. He was also a missionary who traveled with the apostle (teacher and leader) Paul. Luke carefully wrote of the history of Jesus, starting with His birth to His entry into heaven and to the spread of the church. Luke saw this period as a miracle from God with the Holy Spirit's leading. In Jesus' life we see the whole Godhead (three-in-one God) at work in our salvation (Luke 3:21, 22). Luke also makes a strong point about the Holy Spirit's leading during this period.

What do Luke 1:35, 41 and Luke 2:25–32 tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ's coming here as a human?

Jesus' mission began with several examples of the Holy Spirit's work. According to Luke, John the Baptist foretold that he baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize with the Spirit (Luke 3:16). At Jesus' baptism, both the Father and the Holy Spirit announced their support of Jesus' mission as Savior. God the Father announced from above that Christ is His beloved Son sent to save all people. Meanwhile the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove (Luke 3:21, 22). From then on Jesus was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1, NKJV). And He was ready to face the enemy (Satan) in the desert. At the same time, He was beginning His ministry (Luke 4:14).

The opening words of Jesus' Nazareth sermon brought the attention of the people to Isaiah's prophecy (special message from God) about Himself as the Messiah (Chosen One). "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me" (Luke 4:18, NKJV). The Spirit was with Jesus all the time and was His strength. The Holy Spirit also was among His followers when Jesus went up to heaven (John 16:5–7). Not only that, Jesus promised that God would give the gift of the Spirit to those who ask for it (Luke 11:13). The Spirit that connected Christ to His Father and His mission is the same Spirit that would strengthen the disciples in their journey of faith. So, the leading of the Holy Spirit is very important in Christian life. For this reason blasphemy² against the Holy Spirit is the most serious of all sins (Luke 12:10).

What are wise and useful ways we can open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit? How can we be careful that our choices are not hardening us to His voice?



The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in the form of a dove.



Jesus promised to give the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who ask for it.

DEFINITIONS

2. blasphemy—rebellious against the Holy Spirit's leading and work.

THE PRAYER LIFE OF JESUS (Luke 3:21)



Awake or sleep, prayer must keep us in permanent connection with God.

DEFINITIONS

3. discipleship—answering the call to follow Jesus and to complete His mission.

4. transfiguration—the time when Jesus' body shone with heavenly light and became glorified for a while.

Among the many times that Jesus prayed, some are written only in Luke. Note the following events that show Jesus in prayer during great moments in His life.

1. *Jesus prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21)*. “A new and important period was opening to Him. He was now entering into the battle of His life.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 111. Jesus dared not begin that important part of His public ministry—which would lead Him to the cross—without prayer.

2. *Jesus prayed before choosing His 12 disciples (Luke 6:12, 13)*. “Their [the disciples’] position was the most important to which human beings had ever been called. And it was second only to that of Christ Himself.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 291.

3. *Jesus prayed for His disciples (Luke 9:18)*. Discipleship³ requires full faithfulness to Jesus and an understanding of who He really is. In order that the Twelve might know who He is, Jesus “was alone praying.” Then after that He challenged them with the important question: “‘Who do you say that I am?’ ” (Luke 9: 20, NKJV).

4. *Jesus prayed before His transfiguration⁴ (Luke 9:28–36)*. He received for Himself Heaven’s second endorsement (acknowledgment; recognition) that He is God’s “beloved Son.” Nothing could change the close connection between the Father and the Son. The prayer also resulted in the disciples becoming “eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16, NKJV).

5. *Jesus prayed in Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–46)*. This is perhaps the most important prayer in the history of salvation. Here we have the Savior connecting heaven and earth close together. By so doing, Jesus sets up three important principles (rules): the importance of God’s will and purpose; the obedience to do God’s will even at the risk of blood and death; and the strength to overcome every temptation while doing God’s will.

6. *Jesus prayed, putting His life into God’s hands (Luke 23:46)*. In His final words on the cross, “ ‘Father, “into Your hands I commit [give] My spirit” ’ ” (NKJV), Jesus gives us the most important purpose of prayer. At birth or at death, before enemies or friends, while asleep or awake, prayer must keep us in permanent connection with God.

What do these examples from Jesus’ prayer life tell you about your own prayer life?

THE MODEL PRAYER: PART 1 (Luke 11:1–4)

Read Luke 11:1–4. How do these verses help us to understand how prayer works?

“Father” is Christ’s favorite way of describing God. And it is written at least one hundred seventy times in the four Gospels. In addressing God as our Father, we accept that God is a Person who can enjoy the closest relationship with humans. God is as personal, real, loving, and caring as a human father. But He is the Father *in heaven*. He is different from our earthly father, for He is all-powerful, all-seeing, everywhere, and perfectly holy.

The wording “Father in heaven” forever reminds us that God is holy and personal and that Christianity is not just an idea or the belief in a god who is in everything.

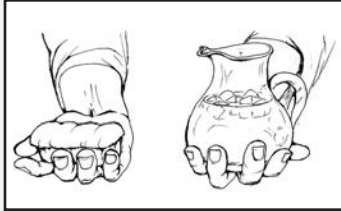
“ ‘Hallowed be Your name’ ” (Luke 11:2, NKJV). Here we have another reminder that God is holy. Those who claim to follow the Lord must keep His name holy in word and deed. To claim to follow Him but to still sin against Him is to dishonor that name. The words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21–23 can help us better to understand what it means to keep God’s name holy.

“ ‘Your kingdom come’ ” (Luke 11:2, NKJV). The Gospels speak of the kingdom of God more than one hundred times: nearly forty in Luke, nearly fifty in Matthew, 16 in Mark, and 3 in John. Jesus came to show the truth that the kingdom of grace (on earth) and the kingdom of glory (in heaven) are real. Without entering the first kingdom, there would be no entry into the second. So, the Savior hopes that His disciples should experience the first, while expecting the second.

“ ‘Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ ” (Luke 11:2, NKJV). The will of God is recognized and obeyed in heaven. Jesus accepts that fact and changes it into a hope that it will be true on earth too. Let the will of God be done on earth, but let it begin with each one of us as a person.

Do you know the Lord, or just about Him? In what ways can your prayer life bring you closer to Him?

THE MODEL PRAYER: PART 2 (Luke 11:9–13)



The plea “give” forces us to recognize that God is the Giver of every gift.

“ ‘Give us day by day our daily bread’ ” (Luke 11:3, NKJV). The Lord’s prayer begins with the word *give*. From the lips of a millionaire or a poor orphan, the prayer suggests dependence on God and admission of trust. We are all dependent on God. The plea “give” forces us to recognize that God is the Giver of all gifts. He is the Creator. In Him we live, move, and are given life. “It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3, NKJV).

God is the Father who gives us all that we need. From this promise, what wonderful message can you find in Luke 11:9–13?

“ ‘Forgive us our sins’ ” (Luke 11:4, NKJV). The prayer to forgive as “ ‘we also forgive’ ” (verse 4, NKJV) highlights the fact that if we truly have accepted God’s forgiveness into our hearts, we will be willing to forgive others. It also means that if we do not forgive others, then we have not really accepted God’s forgiveness (Matthew 6:14). “God’s forgiveness is not just a judicial (fair; just) act by which He sets us free from condemnation (judged guilty). It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 114. Instead, because we are forgiven, as disciples we have the joy of living within the growing group of people who have received God’s grace and at the same time show His love and forgiveness to others who may have hurt us.

“ ‘Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us’ ” (Luke 11:4, NKJV). Two facts need to be noted. First, temptation is not sin. The Greek word for “temptation” is *peirasmos*. Greek nouns that end in *-asmos* describe a process (method), not an end result. The Bible does not look at temptation as a last result. Instead, it is a method used to get a certain result. Temptation is not sin, but if you give in to it, it is. Second, God does not start temptation (James 1:13). God may let temptations come. But He never leads us into sin. So, the prayer helps us to recognize that God has the strength to help us refuse to fall into Satan’s traps.

Review Luke 11:1–4. Think about all the issues it covers. In what ways can your experience with each of these issues be enriched and deepened through prayer?

MORE LESSONS ON PRAYER (Luke 18:9–14)

Right after giving His disciples a model prayer, Jesus gave them the parable⁵ of a friend at midnight (Luke 11:5–13). From this parable Jesus taught them the need to be faithful in prayer. Then, as Jesus neared the end of His ministry He reminded His followers that they needed to feel sorrow for their sins and to be humble in prayer (Luke 18:9–14). Both of these parables show that prayer is not just a religious habit but also faithful walking, talking, and living with the Father.

Read Luke 11:5–8. Jesus told this parable to encourage people to always pray. Prayer should not become just a habit. Instead, prayer should be the foundation of a relationship with full dependence upon God. Prayer is the breath of the soul. Without it, we are spiritually dead. Jesus tells the parable of a neighbor who refuses to be neighborly. The continuous pleas of his friend for a loaf of bread to meet a midnight emergency fail to move his heart. But finally, even such a hard-hearted neighbor gives in to the knocking at midnight that does not stop. How much more open would God be toward someone who is very faithful in prayer? Such faithfulness is not to change God’s mind but to make our trust stronger.

Read Luke 18:9–14. What’s the important lesson about prayer?

The Pharisee (Jewish religious leader) expected God to accept him on the basis of his “good” works. The publican (tax collector) threw himself on God’s mercy and begged to be accepted on the basis of God’s grace. God’s acceptance comes to us not on the basis of who or what we are but through His grace alone. Only those who are truly sorrowful, humble, and broken in spirit can receive that grace.

“Being humble and lowly are the conditions of success and victory. A crown of glory [honor] awaits those who bow at the foot of the cross.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets [Special Messengers] and Kings*, page 590.

People who have not known the Lord like to compare⁶ themselves to those who seem to be worse than they are. They do so to make themselves believe that they are not so bad. Why is this such a bad idea? What does it matter if others are worse than we are?

DEFINITIONS

5. parable—a very short story that teaches a spiritual lesson or truth.

6. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The soul that turns to God for its help, its support, its power, by daily, serious prayer, will have more noble feelings, clearer understandings of truth and duty, higher purposes of action, and more hungering and thirsting for Christ’s perfect character [thoughts; feelings; acts]. By keeping a connection with God, we shall be able to share with others the light and peace that rule in our hearts. Prayer serves to help a person to receive strength and trains the mind in organizing what to say while praying. These two things prepare the person for daily duties and keep the spirit in peace at all times.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 85.

“In calling God our Father, we recognize all His children as our brothers and sisters. We are all a part of the great family. In our prayers we are to include our neighbors as well as ourselves. No one prays in the right way when he prays for a blessing for himself alone.”—Adapted from *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 105.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Luke writes that the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit does not end with his Gospel. Suppose a person reads the book of Acts, Luke’s second volume, to understand the history of the Christian church. Then he or she will notice many examples of the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of the Christian community, its missions, and its ministers. Only Luke writes about Jesus’ instruction to His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they “ ‘are endued [filled] with power from on high’ ” (Luke 24:49, NKJV). That was before they could go everywhere on the earth with the message of the crucified (put to death on the cross) and risen Savior. Luke then begins the book of Acts with Jesus making again the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:7, 8) and the promise being fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2). What does all this tell us about the important work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church?

② In what ways is the very act of prayer itself an admission of our dependence on and need of God? Read Luke 18:9. What deep spiritual problem was Jesus explaining in the parable that followed (Luke 18:9–14)?