

Partnership With Jesus



SABBATH—MARCH 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 1:21–35; Luke 4:31–42; Matthew 6:14, 15; Matthew 25:34–46; Matthew 26:36–44; Psalm 31:24.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Remain joined to me, and I will remain joined to you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain joined to the vine. In the same way, you can't [cannot] bear fruit unless you remain joined to me' ” (John 15:4, NIV).

RECENT RESEARCH HAS SHOWN that faith, spirituality, prayer, forgiveness, hope, and church attendance can have positive results on the health of our bodies and minds. Many well-known scientific articles and magazines have reported a connection between religious faith and positive mental and emotional¹ well-being. Surprise of surprises!

This is not magic. Psychiatrist² Montagu Barker is an expert on the relationship between religion and mental health. He states that religion is a powerful tool for fighting mental illness. But this happens only when believers are very loyal to their beliefs. If they are not, religion can cause guilt and emotional, mental, and behavioral problems.

This week we will look at our best example, Jesus, to learn how we can be strong in faith. By studying the life of Jesus and keeping a close relationship with Him, we can build solid bridges for spiritual growth. This can lead us to better mental health.

Prayer, Bible study, worship, the practice of forgiveness, service to others, and hope and trust in God are sure to lead to spiritual development (growth) and mental health. With Jesus as our Example, we cannot go wrong.

1. emotional—having or showing a strong feeling, such as love, anger, joy, hate, or fear.

2. psychiatrist—a doctor who treats mental or emotional disorders.

SUNDAY—MARCH 20**THE PRAYING LORD
(Mark 1:21–35)**

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

Jesus was going to the synagogue (Jewish house of worship) on that Sabbath in Capernaum. He taught verses from the Bible to a group of people who recognized His authority (power). He also healed a demon-possessed man. After the meeting, Jesus and His disciples (followers) went to the house of Peter and Andrew. There, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. At sunset, many ("the whole town" [Mark 1:33, NIV]) grouped around Jesus and brought all kinds of ill and demon-possessed people to be healed.

"Never before had Capernaum witnessed a day like this. The air was filled with the voice of victory and shouts of freedom and joy. Not until the last sufferer had been relieved did Jesus stop His work. It was far into the night when the people left. Then silence settled down upon the home of Simon."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, page 86.

That must have been a tiring day for Jesus. But He did not sleep late the next morning. He needed to pray and talk with His Father. So, He got up before dawn, went to a quiet place, and spent time in prayer. Jesus, the Son of God, had been with the Father before

the world began (John 17:5). He had created the entire universe (John 1:3). But He still felt the need for prayer. This is a wonderful lesson for us humans.

After days of stress, we may want to put off prayer and communion (talk) with God for another time. But it is during those moments of psychological weariness (tiredness) that we most need the quiet and comforting time of prayer and the Word of God. Jesus knew this and spent quiet time being close to 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. We do not understand much about how prayer works, or even about why it works. But we are encouraged to pray (Luke 18:1; Luke 21:36; Romans 12:12). Who has spent time in communion with the Lord through prayer and reading the Word but has not felt the positive influence³ it can have on our spirit and mind? We do not have to understand all the mysteries of prayer to know that a close relationship with God is very important.



If prayer was necessary for Jesus, how much more should it be for us?

3. influence—the power to change or affect someone or something.

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? Time in prayer and reading the Word is important. But time alone is not the only thing we need. What other things are needed?

MONDAY—MARCH 21

WORSHIP AND CHURCH COMMUNITY (GROUP) (1 Corinthians 12:12–31)

Jesus regularly went to the synagogue on Sabbath (Luke 4:16). His example should tell us how important church community is. The idea of being “a lone Christian” does not follow the Bible principle (guideline) of fellowship together. There are some examples of worshiping alone in the Bible. But this does not prove that this is God’s plan. All through the Bible we find community as the model for God’s people. This is a group working together for the good of believers and for the church as a whole.

What do 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 and Ephesians 4:15, 16 tell us about our part in a larger church community?

It is interesting to note that in recent years research has shown that those who regularly attend and take part in church services (compared to those who do not) are:

- less likely to suffer from alcohol and drug abuse.
- more likely to be sexually responsible.
- less involved in risky behaviors.
- more likely to practice business and work-related principles of honesty.
- more likely to enjoy a richer social life and to have stronger group support.
- more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem (self-worth).
- better able to set goals and successfully meet them.
- more likely to deal better with losses (death of dear ones, hardships, health problems, and so on).
- more likely to have positive emotions (love, forgiveness, satisfaction, and so on).
- less likely to hold on to negative emotions (guilt, fear, bitterness, anger, and so on).

Belonging to a church can be a great blessing. The environment can be positive for soul and body. True, there will sometimes be problems in the community. Some people may leave angry and bitter. But most of the time, those who work through their problems and stay in the church can find support, fellowship, and encouragement. Think about what church would be like if every member took these words from Paul to heart: “Carry each other’s heavy loads. If you do, you will give the law of Christ its full meaning” (Galatians 6:2, NIV).

What is your relationship like with your local church group? Are you a giver or a taker? Why might you need to be a taker sometimes?

Then again, if we all went to church with the attitude (feeling) of giving when and where we could, what kind of community could we have?



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TUESDAY—MARCH 22

FORGIVENESS (Luke 23:34)

What powerful message is Jesus giving us in Matthew 6:14, 15? What is He saying that has eternal (without end) importance and value for all of us?

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “ ‘Forgive us our sins, just as we also have forgiven those who sin against us’ ” (verse 12, NIV). Then Jesus said (verses 14, 15) that if we do not forgive, God will not forgive us.

The thought is terrifying. After all, we are all sinners. We all need the forgiveness of God. So, we all must learn to forgive if we want

to be forgiven ourselves!

Forgiveness is so important to repairing, and keeping, good relationships. The Lord knows how painful and heavy a load of sin is on the heart and soul. He also knows that the load must be released through two kinds of forgiveness. One is the forgiveness that we get from God, and the other is the forgiveness that we give to others.

Forgiveness is helpful not only to those receiving it but also to those giving it. The feeling of grace⁴ and kindness helps bring those who give forgiveness closer to God. It also builds character.⁵

A study of people who were just divorced showed the difference between those willing to forgive and those not willing to forgive. Mark Rye of the University of Iowa researched 199 divorced people from community singles’ organizations and church-based divorce recovery groups. Researchers found that those who forgave their former spouses enjoyed higher levels of mental health. When compared with those who were not willing to forgive, forgiving people had higher levels of well-being and religious satisfaction and lower levels of anger and depression (deep sadness).

This is not unusual. Studies over the past ten years are clear. Forgiveness lowers depression and anxiety⁶ while increasing self-esteem and overall emotional well-being. Forgiveness is good for many things. But refusing to forgive others is dangerous for body and soul.

4. grace—God’s free gift of mercy.

5. character—the good qualities of a person that usually include moral or emotional strength, honesty, and fairness.

6. anxiety—fear or nervousness about what might happen.

Is this so unexpected? Who among us has not felt the healing and relief that come from forgiving those who have hurt us?



The experience of forgiveness is helpful in both ways—to those receiving it and to those giving it.

How can you practice Paul's advice: "Put up with each other. Forgive the things you are holding against one another. Forgive, just as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13, NIV)? What choices must you make in order to forgive those who have hurt you?

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 23

SERVICE (Matthew 25:34–46)

Throughout history, the Seventh-day Adventist outreach to the world has consisted of (been made up of) two basic branches of ministry (work done for God): (1) teaching/preaching and (2) healing/helping. They represent the two important parts of the ministry of Jesus (read Matthew 9:35 and Acts 10:38). For many people throughout the world, Seventh-day Adventists are

known for their work in the field of health and for helping people in need.

These two powerful branches of health work and helping people in need have become organized in many places. As a result, there are many ways for church members to take part in these ministries. For example, some may give financial support while others may go on mission trips or volunteer in other ways. Some, unfortunately, view them with an uncaring attitude (thought or feeling). In the end, many do not become directly involved in the work of going around doing good. So, they miss a great blessing.

There is a great personal blessing that comes from ministering to the needs of others. The simple practice of helping others will result in great blessings to the one who helps. There is something in us that makes us feel good while we serve others. And 6,000 years of sin have not removed this goodness.

What is Jesus saying to us in Matthew 25:34–46? What does this mean when compared⁷ with Ephesians 2:8, 9?

We cannot be saved by our works alone. If this were true, nobody would be saved. God's grace, shown by the sacrifice (death) of Jesus for us, is the only way we can be saved. At the same time, accepting the grace of God leads to good works. These works show that our walk with God is real. The good works we do should come from knowing that we already have salvation⁸

7. compared—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

8. salvation—God's plan to save us from our sins.

in Jesus. This is because He died on the cross for us. Our works show our natural response (answer) to God for saving us, but they are not the way we become saved. It is very important that we always remember this difference.

Meanwhile, there is a wonderful emotional and spiritual blessing for those who unselfishly give of themselves. This is because they want to thank God for saving them. Many people who are struggling with emotional problems would feel so much better if they did more to help others instead of thinking of themselves.

Are you unhappy or unsatisfied? Most likely, it is because you may be too self-centered. Get involved in helping others and see what happens.

THURSDAY—MARCH 24

HOPE AND TRUST IN GOD (Psalm 31:24)

“Be strong, all of you who put your hope in the Lord. Never give up” (Psalm 31:24, NIV). What reasons do we have for putting our hope in the Lord?

Studies show that hope has an important part in promoting health. Hope gives hostages⁹ a reason to live and to fight back. Hope is also a great contributor to mental and physical health. Many depression treatments work best for patients who believe that their mood can improve and that they can be helped. Depression and anxiety often

bother those who think negatively and feel hopeless. A hopeful attitude can make a big difference in how we look at life.

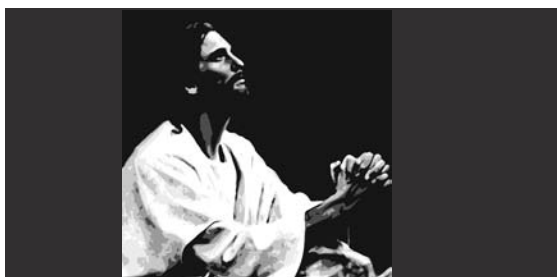
But there is a greater hope than the hope that your present problems will end well. Religious hope goes above what is on earth and focuses on the eternal. It helps us to understand that eternal truths are real and better than anything the world can ever offer. It is a hope found in the Creator God, who alone can give us what nothing else in the world can.

What can we learn about trusting in God, even in terrible times, from the example of Jesus in Matthew 26:36–44?

This passage tells us of the Savior’s discouraged condition. The words that describe the painful emotions of Jesus are chosen carefully: troubled, very sorrowful (deeply discouraged). Heartbroken and forgotten by His friends, Jesus fell on His face and asked His Father for help. When help did not come, He asked again. And again. Notice that every time Jesus made His prayer, He asked for God’s will (plan) to be done. In the end, Jesus put all His trust in the Father. No matter what happened, Jesus surrendered His will to His Father. That was His way. So, it must be ours, as well.

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

9. hostages—people who are held prisoner by other people.



In the end, Jesus put all His trust in the Father.

FRIDAY—MARCH 25

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Each one of us must hear God speaking to the heart. Every other voice is to be silenced. In quietness we wait before Him. The silence of the soul makes the voice of God more clearly heard. God asks us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Psalm 46:10. Here alone can true rest be found. And this is the best preparation for all who work for God. In the business of life’s many activities, the soul that is refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. The life will breathe out something sweet, and will show God’s power that will reach our hearts.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 363.

“Every ray of light given to others will be reflected [shown back] upon our own hearts. This includes every kind and sympathizing word spoken to the sorrowful, every act done to relieve the oppressed, and every gift given to help our fellow beings. All these actions, with an eye to God’s glory, will lead to blessings for the giver. Those who are working that way are obeying a law of heaven and will receive the approval of God. The

pleasure of doing good to others gives peace and light to the giver’s heart. This glow then flashes through the nerves, stirs up the circulation [movement] of the blood, and promotes mental and physical health.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*¹⁰ for the Church, volume 4, page 56.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What has prayer and Bible study done for you in your walk with the Lord? Where would you be spiritually if you stopped doing them? Write out a testimony explaining what these practices mean to you. Also, explain why they are so important in your walk with the Lord.
- ② What has your experience been 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 be comfortable coming, where all people could feel welcome, and where all people could learn about salvation? In what areas is your church strong, and in what areas must it improve?
- ③ What has your experience been with giving and getting forgiveness? What have you learned that could help those who need to learn how to forgive?
- ④ Suppose someone were to come to you and say, “Yes, I believe in God, in Jesus, in salvation. But I just do not know how to walk in faith. I just do not know how to trust God.” What good advice would you give?

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