

Reformation:¹ Wanting to Grow and Change



SABBATH—AUGUST 31

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 John 2:1–9; Philippians 2:12–14; Matthew 26:31–35; John 20:24–29; Luke 15:11–21; John 5:1–14.

MEMORY VERSE: “God continues to give us more grace.² That’s [that is] why Scripture [Bible] says, ‘God opposes those who are proud. But he gives grace to those who are not.’ So obey God. Stand up to the devil. He will run away from you” (James 4:6, 7, NIV).

BEFORE PENTECOST,³ THE DISCIPLES (FOLLOWERS OF JESUS) HAD DEEP SPIRITUAL NEEDS. They did not fully understand God’s plan. They failed to understand Jesus’ mission. But after the disciples were touched by God’s grace, Christ’s love broke their hearts. They experienced revival⁴ and reformation.

A revival is a reawakening of deeper spiritual longings (desires). The closer our hearts come to God through the Holy Spirit’s leading, the more we want to obey and serve Him. Revival does not mean that we have had no past experience with Jesus. Instead, it calls us to an experience that is deeper and richer. And reformation calls us to grow and change. It encourages us to improve our spiritual lives. It invites us to reexamine our lives according to Bible principles (important rules). It also lets the Holy Spirit help us to make any changes necessary so that we can better obey God’s will.

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

1. reformation—the ongoing process in which a person changes his or her lifestyle in order to follow God’s will after having accepted Christ as Savior.

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

3. Pentecost—the time when Jesus’ followers received the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Jesus rose from the dead and went back to heaven (Acts 2:1–4).

4. revival—renewed interest in God and the desire to improve one’s spiritual life.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 1**THE GRACE TO GROW
(Luke 9:51–56)**

The lives of the disciples showed continuing spiritual growth as they walked with Jesus. When Christ first called His disciples, their attitudes (thoughts and feelings) and actions certainly did not reflect (show) the beauty of His character (who God is).

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

James and John had some serious character (personal) weaknesses. They were not prepared to represent (show) Christ’s love to the world. They were not fit to preach a message of grace to others who had not changed their own lives.

But James and John wanted very much to show Jesus’ character more fully. They desired change and reformation in their own attitudes. Growth and change are part of our Christian experience, too.

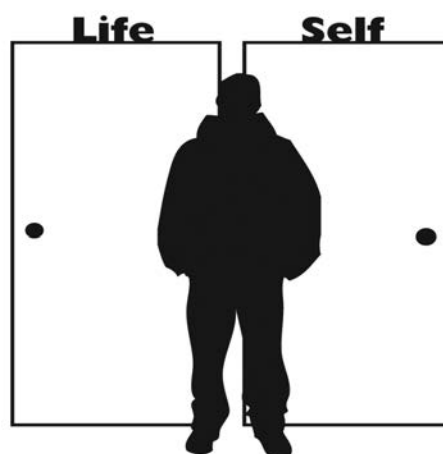
Read 1 John 2:1–9. What do these verses show about the great changes that came over John during the years after Jesus’ death? What do they teach us about what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

It is so easy to get discouraged over our own spiritual growth. This is true when we truly want to have revival and reformation in

our lives. Suppose you become discouraged, and you feel as if you are a spiritual failure and are going to be lost. Then what promises can you claim that will show you why you must never give up? And what promises can help you to have the assurance (promise) of salvation?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 2**THE POWER TO CHOOSE
(Philippians 2:12–14)**

Change comes when a Christian makes a choice. Reformation happens when we have chosen to accept the power of the Holy Spirit to help us surrender our will to God’s will. God will never force our will. He respects our freedom. His Spirit encourages us to do right. But we still have to choose to accept or not to accept the Holy Spirit’s leading.



God accepts our freedom of choice.

Read Philippians 2:12–14. How do these verses show that as we grow in grace, we need to cooperate

with God? What does Paul mean by “work out your own salvation” (verse 12, NKJV)? What does he mean by saying, “It is God who works in you” (verse 13, NKJV)?

As He works in us through His power, we are able to make the choices to live a life of grace and strength.

“Limited, sinful man is to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. But it is God who works in him to do of His own good pleasure. God will not work without the cooperation of man. Man must use his powers to the best of his ability. Man must put himself, as a willing student, in the school of Christ. And as he accepts His grace, the thoughts of Christ will help him make decisions to put aside every weight of sin. Then the heart may be filled with all the fullness of God and of His love.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals [Building Blocks] of Christian Education*, page 134.

Reformation takes place when we cooperate with God by choosing to surrender to Him anything that is sinful. Positive spiritual change will not come if we do not make those choices.

God will not take some selfish thoughts out of our minds. He will not secretly remove unhealthful habits or secret desires. He makes us aware of sin. He makes us realize what is right, but we must choose. Once we do, He gives us more power to make choices. But it is we ourselves who have to make those choices every day.

What does it mean to cooperate with God in the working out of our salvation? What does it not mean? When was the last time that you gave up a sin you wanted to hold on to?



God gives us power to put aside every weight of sin.

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 3

CONFIDENCE (FAITH) AND DOUBT (Matthew 26:31–35)

What was wrong with Peter’s attitude (feeling) before the Cross? Read Matthew 26:31–35.

Peter could not compete with Satan. He tried to face Satan’s temptations with his own strength. But filled with false pride, Peter had little idea of the trouble that was coming. Peter was in the courtyard of the high priest. And he was afraid of a servant girl’s questions. So Peter denied his Lord (Matthew 26:69–75). Jesus had warned Peter earlier, saying, “ ‘Simon, Simon! Satan has asked to sift you disciples like wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon.

I have prayed that your faith will not fail. When you have turned back, help your brothers to be strong' ” (Luke 22:31, 32, Nlrv). Jesus gives an interesting opinion of Peter's spiritual condition. Trusting in his own strength, Peter turned from his Lord. This is why Jesus used the words “when you have turned back [to Me].” Peter needed a spiritual awakening. He needed a change of attitude. He needed reformation.

Read John 20:24–29. What do these verses show about Thomas? What lessons can we learn from these verses for ourselves?

Both Peter and Thomas failed in their faith in much the same way. Peter put faith in what he could do; Thomas put faith in what he could see. They depended on their poor human judgment. But Pentecost made a difference. On that day, a changed Peter fearlessly preached. And three thousand believers were baptized (Acts 2:41). At the temple gate, Peter understood 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). And when the church leaders tried to silence his voice, Peter said, “ ‘There's [there is] nothing else we can do. We have to speak about the things we've [we have] seen and heard' ” (Acts 4:20, Nlrv). Peter's actions show that he was a changed man. Thomas was changed also. It is believed that Thomas sailed to India to preach the gospel. Not much more

is said about Thomas, but we can be sure that he became a new man after Pentecost, too.

Who are you more like, Peter or Thomas? What can you learn from their experiences so that you do not make the same mistakes?



Peter knew that the strength to heal the lame man came only from Jesus.

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 4

THE CONVICTION TO RETURN (Luke 15:11–21)

Read Luke 15:11–21. What certain attitudes and actions made the prodigal (wasteful) son decide to return home? What principles of revival and reformation do we discover in these verses?

Revival can be explained in different ways. But no matter how we explain it, one point ought not to be missed: *Revival means coming home*. It is one of the heart's hungers to know the Father's love in a deeper way.

Reformation is the choice to answer the Holy Spirit's leading for change and growth. It is the choice to give up whatever it is that blocks a closer relationship with God. The prodigal son needed to make his choice, too. He could not have both the pigpen and the Father's banquet table.

It is simple. The young man misses home too much to remain where he is. There is an aching in his heart to return home. It is this aching in our hearts that makes us want God to lead us to revival and reformation. It is our heart's cry for the warm love of the Father that encourages us to make necessary changes in our lives, too.

As the young man prepares to return home, he plans his apology in advance. He must have practiced it again and again. Read his speech in Luke 15:18, 19. Also read his father's response to his son's return and speech in verses 20–24. What does this response show about the father's attitude (feeling of love) toward his son and God's attitude toward us?

The father's son is far from his eyes. But the son is not far from the father's heart. The father's eyes watch across the country for his son each day. As the boy wanders around in the mud with the pigs, the father suffers more than his son. So, the greatest desire we can have when we make changes in our lives is the desire to no longer break the heart of the One

who loves us so much. Revival happens when God's love breaks our hearts. Reformation happens when we choose to accept a love that will not let us go. Each takes place when we make the difficult choices to give up bad attitudes (feelings), habits, and thoughts that separate us from Him.

How is the father's saying that " "my son was dead and is alive again" ' ' (NKJV) an example of true revival? What is it like to be dead and then alive again?



Revival means coming home.

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 5

THE FAITH TO ACT (John 5:1–14)

Jesus showed the Father's mercy and love through the miracles that He did. He healed people with palsied bodies.⁵ Jesus did so to show His even greater ability to heal palsied souls.⁶ He restored (made new) twisted

5. palsied bodies—people who have palsy (shaking) in their bodies.

6. palsied souls—believers who are not growing in Christ. In other words, they are spiritually "dead."

arms and legs so that He could show His greater desire to restore twisted hearts and minds. Jesus' miracles teach us something about how to make use of faith. They teach us valuable lessons about growth and change.

One of Jesus' most powerful examples of the power of faith is found in the miracle of the sufferer at the healing pool of Bethesda. The poor man lay by the pool for 38 years. He was hopeless. His life seemed doomed to 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). Is it not clear that anyone suffering for so long would want to be healed? What was Jesus' reason for healing the man? What was the man's answer? (John 5:7).

Jesus did not listen to the man's excuse. He did not try to argue. Jesus just said, “ ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’ ” (John 5:8, NKJV). The important question was, *Would this poor sick man believe the word of Christ and act upon it, no matter what he was experiencing?* As soon as the man decided to act upon the word of Christ, he was made well. Jesus' gift of healing was in His word. Christ's word carried with it the power of the Holy Spirit to do what Christ says.

“If you believe the promise, then believe that you are forgiven and cleansed. God gives the fact; then you are made well. In the same way, Christ gave the crippled man 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 well. Just say, ‘I believe it. This is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.’ ”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 51.

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

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 6

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Let no man give the idea that man has little or nothing to do in the great work of having victory in one's life. This is because God does nothing for man without his cooperation. No one should 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 worker together with God. Without the Holy Spirit's work upon the human heart, at every step we shall fall. Man's efforts [work] alone are worth nothing. But cooperation with Christ means a victory. . . . Never forget that there is little or nothing to do on the part of man. But if man learns to cooperate with God, he may be successful in having victory in

his life.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 381.

“All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we accept, He will join with our thoughts and aims. So train your hearts and minds to obey His will. Then, by obeying Him we shall be doing His will. Then the will, when made holy, will find its highest joy in doing Christ’s service. When we know God as it is our honor to know Him, we will spend the rest of our lives always obeying God. The more we appreciate the character of Christ through staying close to God, the more that sin will become hateful to us.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 668.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ As Christians, we grow as we claim God’s promises by faith. We

always believe that He will do just what He says. And what are the promises made to us? (Read 1 John 1:7–9; Philippians 4:13; James 1:5–8; Romans 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?

❷ Think more deeply about the idea of working out your own salvation with “fear and trembling.” In class, talk about what that means. What should we fear? What should cause us to tremble?

❸ When was the last time you made a promise to God but failed to keep it just as Peter did? What did you learn from that mistake? What principles can we find in the Bible that will help us to have the victories that Christ promises us?