

Prayer: The Heartbeat of Revival



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 1:4, 8, 14; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; Matt. 18:19, 20; 2 Cor. 10:3–5; Ps. 50:23.*

Memory Text: “‘If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!’ ” (*Matthew 7:11, NKJV*).

God moves powerfully as His people pray. Alfred Lord Tennyson was certainly correct when he said, “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.” The great revivals throughout Scripture were bathed in prayer. The Old Testament records the intercession of the patriarchs and prophets as they sought for revival. Moses, David, and Daniel petitioned the Almighty for power. The book of Acts reveals New Testament believers on their knees storming heaven, seeking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ prayer life reveals a constant dependence on His heavenly Father. The gospels give us glimpses of the source of His spiritual power. It was on His knees alone with the Father that the Savior received His greatest strength.

“A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121. During this week’s lesson, we will explore the role that prayer played in some of the great revivals in the Bible.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 13.*

Prayer and Revival in Acts

The believers in Acts were filled with power from on high. The Holy Spirit was poured out in a marked way. Hearts were touched, lives changed. The gospel penetrated the most difficult places, and thousands were converted. In Acts 2, three thousand were added to the church (*Acts 2:41*). Acts 4:4 records that the number of men alone who believed “was about five thousand.” Even many of the religious leaders, who opposed Jesus during His lifetime, became “obedient to the faith” (*Acts 6:7*). The story of this phenomenal growth continues in Acts 9, which said that churches throughout “all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria” were “multiplied” (*Acts 9:31, NKJV*). By Acts 10 to 12 the gospel spanned cultural and geographical boundaries. The Roman centurion and the treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia were baptized. Acts 1 says that about one hundred twenty believers met in the upper room (*Acts 1:13, 15*). The best estimates are that by the end of the first century there were at least one million Christians in the Roman Empire. This is remarkable growth by any standard.

What was the secret?

Look up the following texts. What was a major reason for the growth of the New Testament church? *Acts 1:4, 8, 14; 2:42; 4:31, 33; 6:3, 4.*

Pastor R. A. Torrey was a powerful revival preacher in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He conducted revival meetings in Great Britain from 1903–1905 and throughout North America in 1906 and 1907. Lamenting the busyness of Christians, he stated, “We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little; many services but few conversions, much machinery but few results.”

Are you too busy to pray? Who can’t relate to that? How can you slow down enough to take the time you need to pray? Think about all the excuses that you have to put it off, the reasons that you give to do other things. In the end, what is it that you are losing by not spending time in prayer?

Jesus' Prayer Life

Compare the following texts: Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, 9:18. What three specific things do these passages reveal about Jesus' prayer life?

“Christ was continually receiving from the Father, that he might communicate to us. ‘The word which ye hear,’ he said, ‘is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.’ ‘The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.’ Not for himself, but for others, he lived and thought and prayed. From hours spent with God he came forth morning by morning, to bring the light of heaven to men. Daily he received a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit. In the early hours of the new day the Lord awakened him from his slumbers, and his soul and his lips were anointed with grace, that he might impart to others.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, Aug. 11, 1910.

Examine the passages below. Identify each of the things for which Jesus prayed. How do Jesus' prayers reveal His most important concerns? What is the most distinctive component of each of Jesus' prayers?

John 17:20–24 _____

Luke 22:31, 32 _____

Matt. 26:36–44 _____

Prayer was a vital part of Jesus' life. It was His lifeline to the Father. Daily the Savior renewed His relationship with His Father through prayer. Jesus' prayer life gave Him the courage and strength to face the temptations of the enemy. He came from these prayer sessions with a deepened commitment to do the Father's will. They provided Him with a spiritual freshness and power. Describing one of Jesus' times of prayer, Luke adds, “As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening” (*Luke 9:29, NKJV*). Jesus experienced spiritual refreshing and a renewed experience with the Father each day through His prayer life.

Spend a few moments reflecting on some specific times that God powerfully answered your prayers. How can recalling and reflecting on these experiences deepen your prayer life today?

Praying Together

Although Jesus often spent time alone in prayer, there were multiple occasions when He encouraged His closest disciples to pray with Him. Peter, James, and John accompanied Jesus to the mount of transfiguration (*Matt. 17:1, 2*). He urged them to unite with Him in prayer in Gethsemane (*Luke 22:39–46*). There is unusual power in united prayer.

Carefully analyze Matthew 18:19, 20. Summarize Jesus’ statement regarding united prayer.

“The promise is made on condition that the united prayers of God’s people are offered, and in answer to these prayers there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love for God and for one another.”—Ellen G. White, *The Central Advance*, Feb. 25, 1903.

John Bunyan once commented, “You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.”

As we enter into earnest and heartfelt intercession, the Holy Spirit powerfully works in miraculous ways through our united prayers.

Read Acts 12:1–16. What was Peter’s situation? What was the attitude of the church? What does this passage tell us about the power of united prayer?

No question, in this case Peter had a miraculous deliverance. It was so intense that Peter wasn’t even sure it was real and that he wasn’t in a vision. Only afterward did he realize what had happened. It’s important to note that these texts stated twice that people were praying together. Considering the tough circumstances, it is no wonder. There is no question that we should do the same, especially when we face challenges as a community, such as they did there.

Our Freedom

Have you ever wondered why prayer is so vital? Why do we have to ask Him for the Holy Spirit? Isn't He willing to give the Holy Spirit to us?

The answer to these questions lies in understanding God's respect for our freedom of choice. He has created us with the ability to make moral choices. God is doing everything He can for us and through us before we pray, but He is limited by our choices (*Ps. 78:41, 42*).

In prayer we freely acknowledge our total dependency upon God and give Him the freedom to intervene in our lives. The more we pray, the more we acknowledge His all sufficiency. When we pray, His Holy Spirit prepares our hearts to receive more of Him. The more we pray, the more we allow the Holy Spirit to "crucify" our sinful desires. In the great controversy between good and evil, prayer enables God to work more powerfully in our lives.

Analyze 2 Corinthians 10:3–5. How would you define the expression "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God" (*NKJV*)? What are these weapons? What kind of warfare is Paul talking about here, and why would he use this kind of imagery? How are we to understand the battle in which we are engaged?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we understand the reality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. We know that it is real and that we all are involved in it. Left alone, we would be hopeless against Satan. Our only hope is our connection with Jesus, and central to that connection is our prayer life—a spiritual weapon for a spiritual battle, a weapon that none of us can do without. If Jesus needed to pray, how much more so do we?

"We, too, must have times set apart for meditation and prayer and for receiving spiritual refreshing. We do not value the power and efficacy of prayer as we should. Prayer and faith will do what no power on earth can accomplish."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 509.

In what ways have you experienced in your own life the harsh reality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan? How has prayer aided you in this struggle? Where would you be without it?

Effective Prayer

There are many effective ways to pray. Some people have found it helpful to kneel before God with their Bibles open. Then they read a few verses and commune with God about what they are reading.

The Psalms are particularly inspirational as subject matter for prayer. Try meditating upon a particular psalm during your prayer times. Take one verse at a time. Read it aloud, and then talk to God about what the text is saying to you.

Others have found that their most meaningful prayer times are alone with God in some quiet natural setting. Still others have blended singing and prayer.

What do we learn about effective prayer from the following verses?

Pss. 34:1, 50:23, 67:3, 71:6.

David's prayers were filled with adoration or praise. When we meditate upon God's goodness and matchless love, our hearts overflow with praise.

Read Daniel 9:8–13. What kind of prayer is this?

What feature does Paul add to an effective prayer life? *Eph. 5:20.*

What is the meaning of supplication in Ephesians 6:18 and Philippians 4:6, and why is this an important component of prayer?

Though we don't want to give a formula for prayer, a broad outline could be as follows: we start with praise and adoration, thanking God for His goodness to us. We then confess our faults and shortcomings, and then thank God for His forgiveness. We conclude with supplications, making our requests known to Him, all the while seeking an attitude of submission and trust in His divine power.

Has your prayer life not been what it should or could be? What do you need to do differently? Why not make a more concentrated effort to spend more time in prayer? It can change your life.

Further Study: “Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. ‘The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.’ James 5:11. His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them. Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. ‘He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.’ Psalm 147:3. The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watch care, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 100.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why do we need to pray if God knows everything? Though many answers can be given, perhaps the most important one is that we have been told, time and again in the Bible, to pray. Even if we don’t understand how it works, those who pray effectively know that it does work. You might take a medicine that helps to bring healing to your body, even though you don’t know how that medication works. It’s the same with prayer. What other reasons can you give for the importance of prayer, especially as we seek revival and reformation?
- 2 Read over prayerfully the Ellen G. White statement found in Friday’s Further Study. Look at all the encouragement that is found in there, especially in the last line that addresses the relationship between God and the praying supplicant. What can you do, what choices can you make, to enter into the kind of close communion with the Lord that is described here?
- 3 In class, talk about the reality of the great controversy and how it’s being manifested in your own church community. Talk about how praying together can help you all work through whatever challenges you are facing.

Show Me Your Church: Part 1

Roger's stomach tightened as he waited to see the director of his school. *I will stay true to God, no matter what this man decides.*

Roger was in his final year of secondary school. Soon he would take the national exams that would grant—or deny—him the right to pursue higher education. Roger had taken the exams before, but when one of the exams fell on Sabbath, he had chosen to honor God rather than take the exam. He had accepted the failing grade as a price he could pay for his faithfulness to God. He planned to try again the next year, but civil unrest in Central African Republic forced his family to flee to the Republic of the Congo. He now faced the same problem in a foreign country.

On the first day of classes in his new school, Roger had gone to the school's director to explain his religious beliefs and ask to be excused from school functions on Sabbath, a regular school day. The director had been polite, but his response was simply "We'll see how it goes." Roger could only hope—and pray—that the man would honor his request.

When Roger looked at his class schedule, he saw that nearly every exam was scheduled for a Sabbath. Roger asked the teachers to give him his exam on another day. Some did, but others refused.

"You are just one student among so many," the director told him. "I am a Christian too. Show me where God says that we must not work on Saturday."

Roger opened his Bible to Exodus 20 and began reading the Sabbath commandment.

"I didn't know that," the director said thoughtfully. "Why don't you worship your God in the morning, and come to school after lunch?" It seemed like such a reasonable request.

Patiently Roger explained the Sabbath, which began at sunset on Friday. He read Bible texts to support his explanation.



The director thought for a moment, and then said, "Show me your church."

Roger sat back. *How can I show him my church?* he thought. *In all of the Congo we have not one church.*

Before Roger could answer, the director made another request. "Can you bring me your church pastor?" Roger smiled. He could bring a pastor.

ROGER WAZOUA [left] is preparing to be a pastor in Africa.