

Reformation: The Willingness to Grow *and* Change



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 John 2:1–9, Phil. 2:12–14, Matt. 26:31–35, John 20:24–29, Luke 15:11–21, John 5:1–14.*

Memory Text: “He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (*James 4:6, 7, NKJV*).

Before Pentecost, the disciples had significant spiritual needs. Their understanding of God’s plan was clouded. They failed to comprehend Jesus’ mission. After they were touched by divine grace, Christ’s love broke their hearts. They experienced revival and reformation.

A revival is simply a reawakening of deeper spiritual longings. It is an intensifying of our spiritual desires as our hearts are drawn closer to God through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Revival does not imply that we have had no previous experience with Jesus; rather, it calls us to an experience that is deeper and richer. Reformation calls us to grow and change. It appeals to us to move beyond the status quo, spiritually. It invites us to reexamine our lives in the light of biblical values and to allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to make any changes necessary in order to live in obedience to God’s will.

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

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 7.*

The Grace to Grow

The lives of the disciples showed constant spiritual growth as they walked with Jesus. When Christ first called His disciples, their attitudes and actions certainly did not reflect the loveliness of His character.

Read Luke 9:51–56 and Matthew 20:20–28. How do these passages reveal James' and John's thinking?

James and John had some serious character flaws. They were not prepared to represent Christ's love to the world. They were not qualified to proclaim a message of grace to others who had not changed their own lives.

In spite of their serious defects of character, James and John longed to reveal Jesus' character more fully. They longed for transformation and reformation in their own attitudes. Growth and change are part of our Christian experience.

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

It's so easy to get discouraged over our own spiritual growth, especially as we truly want to have revival and reformation in our lives. When discouraged, when feeling as if you are a spiritual failure and that you are going to be lost, what promises can you claim that will show you why you must never give up, and why, despite your faults, you can have assurance of salvation?

The Power to Choose

Change comes at the point of choice. Reformation occurs as we choose to yield to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and surrender our wills to God's will. God will never force or manipulate our wills. He respects our freedom. His Spirit impresses our minds, convicts our hearts, and prompts us to do right, but the choice to respond to the Holy Spirit's appeals is, always and only, our own.

Read **Philippians 2:12–14.** How does this passage show the necessity of cooperating with God in our growth in grace? What does Paul mean by “work out your own salvation”? What does he mean by “it is God who works in you”?

It is not possible for us to work out what God has not already worked in. As He works in us through His supernatural power, we are able to make the choices to “work out” through our lives the grace and strength that He has worked into our lives.

“As finite, sinful man works out his own salvation with fear and trembling, it is God who works in him, to will and to do of His own good pleasure. But God will not work without the co-operation of man. He must exercise his powers to the very utmost; he must place himself as an apt, willing student in the school of Christ; and as he accepts the grace that is freely offered to him, the presence of Christ in the thought and in the heart will give him decision of purpose to lay aside every weight of sin, that the heart may be filled with all the fullness of God, and of his love.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 134.

Reformation occurs as we cooperate with God by choosing to surrender to Him anything that the Holy Spirit points out as not being in harmony with His will. Unless we make those choices (sometimes very painful ones too), then positive, spiritual change will not occur.

God will not rip some selfish thought out of our minds. He will not mysteriously snatch away unhealthy habits or secret indulgences. He convicts us of sin. He convinces us of right, but we must choose. Once we do, He empowers our choices, but it is we ourselves who have to daily, even moment by moment, make those choices.

What does it mean to cooperate with God in the working out of our salvation? What doesn't it mean? When was the last time that you felt deeply convicted over something and, through God's grace, overcame, no matter how difficult the struggle?

Confidence and Doubt

What was wrong with Peter's attitude before the Cross? *Matt. 26:31–35.*

Peter was no match for the wiles of the evil one. He attempted to face Satan's temptations in His own strength. Filled with a sense of self-inflated confidence, he had little idea of the crisis that was coming. Alone in Pilate's courtyard and trembling at the sound of a servant girl's questioning, Peter denied His Lord (*Matt. 26:69–75*). Jesus had warned Peter earlier, " 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren' " (*Luke 22:31, 32, NKJV*). Jesus' statement provides a fascinating analysis of Peter's spiritual condition. Trusting in his own strength, Peter drifted from his Lord. This is why Jesus used the expression, "when you have returned to me." Peter needed a spiritual awakening. He needed a change of attitude. He needed reformation.

Read *John 20:24–29*. What does this passage reveal about Thomas? What lessons can we take from this for ourselves?

Both Peter and Thomas had one striking feature in common. They approached faith from a very human perspective. Peter placed confidence in what he could do; Thomas, in what he could see. They depended on their faulty human judgment. But Pentecost made a difference. A transformed Peter fearlessly preached, and three thousand were baptized on Pentecost (*Acts 2:41*). Peter realized 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*). When the authorities attempted to silence his voice, Peter proclaimed, " 'For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' " (*Acts 4:20, NKJV*). Peter was a changed man. Thomas was changed also. It is believed that he sailed to India to preach the gospel. Though not much more is said about him, we can be sure that he had become a new man after Pentecost, as well.

Who are you more like in temperament, Peter or Thomas? What can you learn from their experiences so that you don't make similar mistakes?

The Conviction to Return

Read Luke 15:11–21. What specific attitudes and actions led the prodigal to decide to return home? What principles of revival and reformation do we discover in this passage?

Revival can be defined in different ways. However it may be defined, one factor ought not be missed: revival is coming home. It is a heart hunger to know the Father's love in a deeper way. Reformation is the choice to respond to the Holy Spirit's leading for change and growth. It is the choice to give up whatever stands in the way of this closer relationship with God. The prodigal could not have both the pigpen and the Father's banquet table.

Simply put, the young man missed home too much to remain where he was. There was an aching in his heart to return. It is this heartache for the presence of God that leads us to long for revival and reformation. It is this heart cry for the warm embrace of the Father that motivates us to make necessary changes in our lives too.

As the young man prepared to return home, he planned his apology in advance. He must have rehearsed it again and again. Read his speech in Luke 15:18, 19 and his father's interruption in verses 20–24. What does this interruption reveal about the father's attitude toward his son and God's attitude toward us?

Although his son was far from the father's eyes, he was not far from his heart. The father's eyes searched the horizon for his son each day. The greatest motivation to make changes in our lives is the desire to no longer break the heart of the One who loves us so much. When the boy was wallowing around in the mud with the pigs, the father suffered more than his son. Revival occurs when God's love breaks our hearts. Reformation occurs when we choose to respond to a love that will not let us go. It takes place when we make the difficult choices to give up those attitudes, habits, thoughts, and feelings that separate us from Him.

How is the statement “ ‘ “my son was dead and is alive again” ’ ” an insightful definition of true revival? What is it like to be dead and then alive again?

The Faith to Act

Jesus revealed the Father's compassion and love through the miracles that He performed. He healed palsied bodies in order to reveal an even greater ability to heal palsied souls. He restored twisted arms and legs in order to demonstrate His greater desire to restore twisted hearts and minds. Jesus' miracles teach us something about how to exercise faith. They teach us valuable lessons about growth and change.

One of Jesus' most powerful illustrations of the power of faith is found in the miracle of the sufferer at the pool of Bethesda. The poor man lay by the pool for thirty-eight years. He was hopeless. His life seemed doomed to wretchedness, poverty, and 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*). Isn't it rather obvious that anyone suffering for so long would want to be healed? What was Jesus' motive here? What was the man's response? *John 5:7*.

Jesus did not listen to the man's excuse. He did not counter the excuse with an argument. He simply said, “Rise, take up your bed and walk” (*John 5:8, NKJV*). The essential question was, Would this poor sick man believe the word of Christ and act upon it in spite of what he was experiencing? As soon as the man resolved to act upon the word of Christ, He was made whole. Jesus' gift of healing was in His word. Christ's word carried with it the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish that which Christ declares.

“If you believe the promise,—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed,—God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic 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 whole, but say, ‘I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.’”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 51.

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

Further Study: “Let no man present the idea that man has little or nothing to do in the great work of overcoming; for God does nothing for man without his cooperation. Neither 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 laborer together with God. Unless the Holy Spirit works upon the human heart, at every step we shall stumble and fall. Man’s efforts alone are nothing but worthlessness; but cooperation with Christ means a victory. . . . Never leave the impression on the mind that there is little or nothing to do on the part of man; but rather teach man to cooperate with God, that he may be successful in overcoming.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 381.

“All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Growth comes in the Christian life as we claim God’s promises by faith, believing that He will do just what He says. What are the promises made to us here? *1 John 1:7–9, Phil. 4:13, James 1:5–8, Rom. 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?
- ② Dwell more on this idea of working out your own salvation with “fear and trembling.” In class, talk about what that means, especially in terms of salvation by faith alone. What should we fear; what should cause us to tremble?
- ③ When was the last time, like Peter, that you made a promise to God that you, however sincere at the time you made it, utterly failed to follow through on it? What did you learn from that mistake? What principles can we find in the Bible that will enable us to have the victories that we are promised?

Samba Jean's Dilemma

Samba Jean loved going into the forest near his mountain home in central Madagascar to collect herbs for his magic. Although his family calls themselves Christians, his father sees no problem mixing Christian beliefs with witchcraft. He uses sticks and bones to determine who has cursed someone, and he uses magic and traditional herbs to break curses, bring good luck, and heal his clients.

When Samba Jean was 14, a friend invited him to attend evangelistic meetings. Samba Jean listened intently as the preacher read from God's Word. He heard things that were so different from what his father and his priest had taught him. *Who is right?* he wondered. As he learned more, he became convinced that the Seventh-day Adventist pastor who read from the Bible was teaching the truth. He realized that his father's powers were from the devil.

Samba Jean spent many restless nights trying to decide what he must do with the new truths he was discovering. *What will the devil do to me if I refuse to help my father?* he wondered.

Samba Jean's father tried to force the boy to take part in his witchcraft ceremonies, but Samba Jean refused. The boy wanted to commit his life completely to God in order to be free of the devil's power. But his parents insisted that he attend their church.

Samba Jean asked the pastor to baptize him but allow him to continue attending his parents' church to keep the peace. But the pastor explained that baptism means giving up all other religions and accepting only God's truth.

As Samba Jean continued attending Bible studies, he realized that he must leave his family's faith and join the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When he told his parents, his father refused to speak to him. Other family members called him a traitor.

Samba Jean took his stand for God and is trying to share his faith with his family. But his father insists that his witchcraft has all the power he needs. To keep the Sabbath holy, Samba Jean stays at the church all day on Sabbath so he won't be told to work. He tells those who visit his father that he no longer believes in witchcraft, that God is more powerful than his father's witchcraft. Some of his father's clients are studying the Bible with him now.

"I pray that soon my parents will give up their false beliefs and surrender to God," Samba Jean says.

Our mission offerings help us to reach people such as Samba Jean around the world. Thank you for giving so that others can meet the Savior.

SAMBA JEAN lives in the hills near Antananarivo, Madagascar.