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Editor

featured articles

The Tyranny of the Weaker Brother
Loren Siebold
One of the great Pauline principles of Christian discipleship is that we are free in Christ Jesus—freed from sin by His grace, freed from legalistic bondage, and freed to reflect the model and teachings of Jesus. While Paul vigorously defends this freedom (Gal. 5:1), twice he adds a qualification: sometimes we must voluntarily restrict our freedom for the sake of others who are weaker in faith than we are (1 Cor. 8–10; Rom. 14).

The preacher’s problem

February 13, 2013
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editor's blog
A biblical view of resolutions
As we stand at the start of a new year, many of us think about the things we resolve to accomplish. I suspect a clear majority of individuals violate their resolutions within the first few weeks...

Imprisoned in Togo
Two of our colleagues in ministry have been imprisoned in Togo since March, 2012.
Charles Wesley Knight
Every Christian preacher and leader ministers in the context of a problem. Paul, the New Testament apostle, could confound the scholars on Mars’ Hill; but he had a problem. His powerful proclamations are impressive, but he still had a problem. We only hear Paul speak of his problem once, as if the problem was not of great importance. This single mention of his problem is much like our practice today of minimizing our struggles. Too many preachers are out of touch with the reality of their own problems because they specialize in helping other people with their problems...

Salvation, hermeneutics, and culture
Lael Caesar
Culture is everything, everywhere, all the time. It is “the world of human meaning, the sum total of a people’s works . . . their vision of what it is to be fully human.”1 Biblical hermeneutics (interpretation) and human culture are often intertwined and almost inseparable competitors. ...

just for you...
Experiencing God Through Prayer and Praise! (handouts)
Compiled by Jerry and Janet Page

just for you...

Biblical Spirituality: Rediscovering Our Biblical Roots or Embracing the East?
Mark Finley
In my view there are ten basic elements that both seekers and Christians want from a sermon. Here is the countdown...

Should we observe the Levitical festivals?

news updates
Monteiro’s ongoing nightmare
Already one year and nothing has happened. I have been thinking about Pastor Antonio Monteiro every day since I met him in the Civil Prison of Lomé, Togo.

Theology of Ordination Committee ends first session
Members of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) ended their first session – held January 15-17 at a meeting site near the church’s world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States – on an optimistic note.
Jacques Doukhan
Arguments in support of and against the observance of the feasts have been debated in church circles recently, including Adventist churches. Therefore, this issue must be addressed.

Ten things listeners want in a sermon

Robert R. Hostetler
In my view there are ten basic elements that both seekers and Christians want from a sermon. Here is the countdown...

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The Tyranny of the Weaker Brother

One of the great Pauline principles of Christian discipleship is that we are free in Christ Jesus—freed from sin by His grace, freed from legalistic bondage, and freed to reflect the model and teachings of Jesus. While Paul vigorously defends this freedom (Gal. 5:1), twice he adds a qualification: sometimes we must voluntarily restrict our freedom for the sake of others who are weaker in faith than we are (1 Cor. 8–10; Rom. 14).

The implications of these passages have a far-reaching effect on ministry. I do not know a pastor who has not been stymied in his or her attempts to make necessary changes in a church program, much less blaze a creative path, because “someone would be offended.” Sermons, relationships, plans, all fall prey to the sometimes tender, often angry, sensibilities of the “weaker brother.”

The result can be the church’s adjusting its activities to the capacity of its most dysfunctional member. I am acquainted with a church where a single man angrily objects to having church fellowship meals for reasons neither sound nor biblical. For 20 years, the congregation has not had a meal together in their church building. One man’s irrational opinion has dictated the activities of everyone.

The Greek word skandalon refers to an object that causes someone to trip and lose one's footing something you might stumble over. Metaphorically (the only way this word is used in the New Testament) the verbal form is rendered “stumble,” “fall,” or (transitively) “offend.”

Some offenses, says Jesus, you must never cause. “ ‘If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea’ ” (Matt. 18:6).*

For other offenses, though, He makes no apology. When some followers were offended by the seemingly bizarre notion of eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:53–61), He did not say, “Oh, well, then forget it; it’s not that important,” but let them leave (v. 66) rather than retract or even (in this setting) clarify the teaching.

Paul, too, is intolerant of those offended by Christ. He recognizes that the Crucifixion was a skandalon to the Jews (1 Cor. 1:23), but it will not stop him from preaching it. He reserves the most brutal insult in all his letters for circumcision proponents by charging them with being offended by the Cross (Gal. 5:11, 12).
Like Jesus, Paul also uses the word to describe a situation in which one should avoid offending a vulnerable person. “Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall [skandalizei] into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall [skandalis]” (1 Cor. 8:13). “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall” (Rom. 14:21).

These teachings may appear, at first glance, to be similar to Jesus’ blanket condemnation of offending “little ones,” suggesting we are always to give in to weaker believers. But just because a need has risen to admonish strong church members to be sensitive to new believers does not mean Paul wants a church controlled by weak Christians. If Paul had meant we should let the church grind to a halt at every objection, he would have been contradicting his own pastoral practice: a lifetime of pushing back against objections theological, cultural, and practical.

As a Jew, Paul has never been part of the empire’s dominant religious culture. Now, as a Christian Jew charged with the important task of grafting on the non-Jewish branch (Rom. 11:17), he tries to see through the eyes of Gentiles and realizes that the idols he knows objectively to be nothing at all may, in fact, be a subjective problem to his Gentile converts. A quick reading through 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 gives one the sense that he is thinking it through as he writes, and, given the transition the church is going through, that is understandable.

In ancient cities, places of worship and merchants surrounded the town square. Idols were on display. A butcher, grocer, or restaurateur might offer a prayer to his gods and dedicate all of his stock to them, perhaps hoping to improve his sales.

Except for Jews and Christians, most ancient peoples were polytheists. The transition from multiple regional or ethnic gods to a single universal One could be difficult. Like Hinduism today, ancient paganism was not so much a conviction or conversion but a culture: the gods were the spiritual background to everyday life. The person Paul describes has just come into Christianity. He is still surrounded by temples and idols, and he realizes the indefinable, almost subconscious hold paganism has on him, and feels it necessary to make a defined separation.

This is the one of whom Paul writes, “For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?” (1 Cor. 8:10). If the conscience is the seat of a productive guilt, as we define the word today, then a weak conscience means that this person has not yet developed a strong moral compass. He is easily influenced. His moral muscle gives out, and
he may collapse back into old habits.

Weak may also shade in meaning toward “tender,” suggesting a person’s moral sense is overcompensating. This is hinted at in Romans 14, where Paul speaks of the person who really need not be so zealous about food and celebration days but whose qualms can be accommodated during his faith maturation.

Either way, there are some things we know about this weaker brother.

First, this problem is personal. Paul implies that the weaker brother does not yet see this clearly: it is neither the teachings of the church nor the actions of other Christians, but his conscience that threatens to trip him up. “But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean” (Rom. 14:14; emphasis added). What is at stake is his faith, not the faith.

Second, if others in the church oblige him, it is not because he is right, but because he is weak. What threatens him spiritually is not necessarily real: “An idol is nothing at all in the world,” says Paul (1 Cor. 8:4). It follows that the weak brother is not one who, ignoring the convictions of other Bible students in the church community, is allowed to impose his scruples on everyone. There are ecclesiastical processes for rethinking doctrine or establishing orthodoxy, but just demanding that everyone comply with one’s convictions is not one of them.

Third, the weaker one is expected to become stronger. Paul encourages growth in faith (2 Thess. 1:3) and knowledge (Col. 1:10) toward a Christian maturity (Eph. 4:15). When an infant is learning to walk, you clear a path so his little feet will not stumble, and hold out your hands to catch him should he fall. You would not, for the rest of her life, clear every path and hold out your hands for her to walk into. You want him to learn to climb stairs, to hike over rough ground, to play games without tripping over his or someone else's feet.

So this isn’t a blank check for church manipulation. The one who stomps his foot and threatens conflict unless people see things his way is not a “weaker brother.” He has a spiritual problem, but it is not the one Paul addresses here.

Disputable matters

Again, where a teaching is central to the Christian witness, neither Jesus nor Paul gave ground. So if believers are to accommodate the weak or conflicted person, it is only in matters that do not adversely affect the work of God or believers’ salvation.
Paul’s use of the phrase disputable matters in Romans 14:1 shows his recognition that, in the church, some elements of faith and practice will always be under discussion. We will never eliminate all differing points of view, and one person’s conviction does not necessarily dictate a corporate one.

Many of us struggle with this, for our convictions tell us there is no matter of belief or behavior that should not be definitively pronounced upon; after all, I have studied and clearly decided it. Yet part of spiritual maturation is realizing that not only is not every matter that comes up for discussion in the church of salvific importance, but some simply cannot be and do not need to be agreed upon. Paul acknowledges as much when he writes that for now, “we know in part” (1 Cor. 13:9). Disputable matters should not prevent the church from moving forward, whether or not they are agreed upon by all.

Paul’s sensitivity to this may spring from his experience in Pharisaic Judaism, where community harmony depended upon agreement in thousands of specific behaviors. His postconversion position against legalism appears to play a part in the Jewish issues (celebration days, food, relationship to idolatry) that he weighs in Romans 14. While Paul appears to reject the basis of these (e.g., “I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself,” v. 14), he still insists the church need not let such questions discourage new believers.

That will not necessarily end church conflict, for argumentative believers are adept at shifting the argument to whether the issue under discussion is disputable or indisputable. Undoubtedly, many things that churches argue about float between those poles. But to Paul, the poles are pretty clear. Differences having to do with ritual, ceremony, and food are clearly on one end. The primacy of Christ, His teachings, and power, are at the other. In his letters, Paul addresses dozens of problems, but he identifies a single unifying belief: the Lordship of Christ and living that relationship.

Please note, then, these two requirements. The weaker brother must be weak in faith, not simply opinionated or dictatorial. And we will not accommodate his weak conscience in anything that hobbles the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**The weakest link**

Paul does not hesitate to demand mature behavior of those he expects to be mature. With weak Christians he is nurturing, though he may not agree that their scruples are God’s. But when Peter ministers in Galatia, Paul expects him to uphold Christian freedom, going so far as to “oppose him to his face” (Gal. 2:11) for refusing to eat with the Gentile Christians in
the presence of other Jewish Christians.

But what of the one who remains, willfully or unwittingly, weak?

Each Christmas I struggle with strings of Christmas lights that will not light up. Out of 100 bulbs, 99 are just fine. Only one is defective and, because of that one, none of the rest work.

If this were the model of Paul’s ecclesiology, and this happens occasionally in congregations, we probably would not have a Christian church today. Paul never taught that the church should be controlled by its weakest link—exactly the opposite. The church is a temple built of interlocking components, rising up for God’s glory (Eph. 2:21, 22). The church is a body of individual parts, some important and others minor (1 Cor. 12:12–30), but capable of completing tasks even when some parts do not contribute.

This is a vigorously parallel and organic ecclesiology. The weaker one, surrounded and supported by the strong, upholds the structure and moves it forward, preferably with him; but if not, then in spite of him. One weak mortar joint will not topple the temple, for there is redundancy built in. One cut finger does not put the whole body abed.

And, Paul tactfully adds, should some parts be “unpresentable” (1 Cor. 12:23), they are kept hidden out of modesty. Might he be thinking of those weak but troublesome church members who cause problems when they are allowed too much exposure?

The weak legalist

The “weaker brother” passages must be nuanced carefully if we are not to contradict the larger Pauline ecclesiology. Our English word offend adds to the confusion, for one can be offended out of petulance, fear, obstinacy, or ignorance—qualities that skandalon’s usage proves are not valid excuses. Paul urges accommodation of the weak only in a certain situation: when someone is pushed unnecessarily beyond the stage of growth he has achieved, and then only in matters where all that is at stake is a small self-abridgment of one’s own freedom until the weaker ones can mature.

To Paul, the stricter, more legalistic Christian is the weaker one. Of course, the weaker one will not necessarily recognize himself as such. He may equate strictness with strength. To the legalist, God’s grace in Christ does not seem enough: God enjoins of him an artificial and forced compliance to an ever-lengthening list. This becomes most evident when he demands everyone conform to his convictions, for then we see he is not just wrestling with his own conscience, but is trying to legislate a zone of control that would stabilize him in
his own spiritual unsteadiness. Because that strategy rarely works, we see the weakest assurance of salvation and the greatest brokenness among the most legalistic of our members.

Some of our struggle with this in conservative churches results from our own confusion about strictness and legalism. When someone becomes incensed because of what is served at potluck or the musical instruments used in worship, do we (perhaps subconsciously) see him as having strong self-control and a willingness to go to ground for principle? In these situations we may lose sight of Christian freedom and find ourselves mucking about in what is disputable and of minor importance, and so prolong the adolescence of the weaker believer.

Churches are as often destroyed by a too-ready capitulation to the least-mature, weakest-conscience members as by errant doctrine, for churches consumed in offense taking implode in stressful relationships. Furthermore, the most abstemious Christian is not necessarily a strong, productive Christian. Giving too much attention to the weaker brother defines faith by what is not done rather than (as Jesus illustrates in Matt. 25:34–36) the good, just, and mercifulness that is. It’s hard to see how Paul, who never tolerated a Judaizer’s religion, would have intended that we should simply yield to those weaker brothers or sisters who demand their way rather than encouraging them to mature in their relationship with Christ.

* All Scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are from the NIV.
The preacher’s problem

Written by Charles Wesley Knight

Editor’s note: This article is an adaptation of a sermon preached at the Pastoral Evangelistic and Leadership Conference, Oakwood University, Huntsville, Alabama, United States, December 6, 2011.

Every Christian preacher and leader ministers in the context of a problem. Paul, the New Testament apostle, could confound the scholars on Mars’ Hill; but he had a problem. His powerful proclamations are impressive, but he still had a problem. We only hear Paul speak of his problem once, as if the problem was not of great importance. This single mention of his problem is much like our practice today of minimizing our struggles. Too many preachers are out of touch with the reality of their own problems because they specialize in helping other people with their problems.

Paul’s problem seems to be revealed in 2 Corinthians 12:7 where he describes “a thorn . . . in the flesh” that was given to him.¹ This is a problem for Paul because it is painful. This “thorn” was thought to be of a physical nature and caused the preacher great discomfort and pain. How does one preach and lead in the midst of pain?

All preachers lead with a type of pain. And sometimes, the temptation is to attribute the source of pain to the people we lead. Some pastors believe if they get a new parish or move to a new ministry location that the pain will dissipate. But this kind of pain cannot be circumvented by relocation because it is in the flesh, it’s personal. Paul also describes it as persistent. He is recorded asking God three times to remove the pain. God does not grant his wish. How does a preacher, who prays successfully for so many other people, deal with the fact that his personal pain persists even though he has requested a reprieve?

The challenge of his pain is that it is chronic. All of us can get by a season of pain or discomfort, but Paul’s pain was one that lingered. To make matters worse, his pain was also permitted by the same God who called him to preach the gospel. If we are honest, the greatest pain is sometimes brought on—not because of what happens to us—but by who allows it. Paul was busy advancing the kingdom of God, so perhaps one of the fringe benefits of his work should be safety from such pain. However, he is left to tell people about a God who permits his personal pain. Paul’s problem is painful, personal, persistent, and permitted. And yet, he must preach.
The problem is not the problem

We may first be led to believe that the pain of Paul’s thorn was the problem, but that was not it. We all would rather not have pain and, if possible, would eradicate the pains we experience as preachers. But Paul’s pain was not his real problem, and neither are the pains we experience. In fact, Paul’s pain was the antidote for the real problem. The potential problem every preacher faces is the success of his or her ministry. In many cases, the devil is not our greatest nemesis. Paradoxically, our greatest danger can come from being used mightily by God. This danger could be the feeling that comes from delivering a stirring message, the euphoria of being asked to serve as the keynote at a stellar event, or accepting the election to a high-ranking administrative office. The real problem Paul faced, and every preacher faces, is pride. Every minister that stands in front of a congregation or constituency on a regular basis must wrestle with the problem of becoming too conceited due to the surpassing greatness of the message.

I must admit that this has been my problem as a preacher, for I have had the opportunity, in my short tenure as an ordained minister, to preach internationally. There have been times when Divinity has flashed through my pitiful manuscript and set the place ablaze with conviction and celebration. I have often witnessed the miracle of scores of penitent people coming to the front of the church in response to what the Holy Spirit said through me. I am quite cognizant that all the praise belongs to God. I agree that it was the result of His Spirit speaking to the hearts and minds of people. However, in many of those moments of homiletical glory, I have often been tempted to steal or at least share the glory with God. I have been tempted to believe that the power flowing through me originated from me.

This internal nemesis is often present with me in the pulpit. There are times when an invisible wrestling match breaks out in the pulpit as my pride wrestles with God’s desire to speak plainly to His people. I can sense when God is telling me to deviate from my studied and rehearsed notes, but I struggle to obey because I want to finish my carefully crafted phrases. There are even times when I sense God telling me to end a sermon early, but I argue with Him that I still have a few more sagacious gems to share. So sadly, I must admit, sometimes my selfish will wins. I have a thorn and I suspect all preachers do.

The preacher’s ego is a fragile thing, easily fed by the opportunities we intend for ministry. The nature of public proclamation of the gospel is that it places the messenger in a precarious situation. The reality is that although all the praise belongs to the God who gave you the message, the people cannot see or touch God. The people can, however, see and touch the preacher. They attempt to respond to a spiritual and divinely inspired message while they show appreciation to a flawed and frail human messenger. This presents a
seductive temptation of narcissism for the preacher. “Christian leaders often use those they
lead to enhance their own image and improve the way they feel about themselves.” The
truth? Many preachers suffer from emotional and psychological wounds that color the way
we view and practice ministry.

Unfortunately, due to the superhuman expectations we either place on ourselves or accept
from our parishioners, we neglect to be healed in these deep and dark places. So we begin
to heal our broken and fragile self-esteem by “medicating with ministry.” This practice of
ministry medication allows us to preach and lead with the intention of glorifying Christ
while, in reality, we are feeding our pride and self-esteem in a subconscious effort to deal
with our own emotional and psychological issues.

Comparing and competing

The practice of comparison and competition is also used in ministry to feed our pride. We
have created a corporate business mind-set as it relates to the measure of our ministerial
success. We use baptism numbers as our bottom line. Church edifices are seen as
expanding the church’s portfolio. Attendance becomes the weekly statistical measurement
we use to determine progress. We use these metrics to compare with other “competing”
churches.

These measurement tools are inadequate and incongruent with biblical principles. While all
of us would naturally desire our churches to grow in number and stewardship, these are not
the only measurements God uses. In fact, Paul gives us a rundown of his ministerial résumé
in 2 Corinthians 11:23–30, and it does not read as a usual curriculum vitae would read
today. Paul asks, “Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a
madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and
often near death” (v. 23). Paul defines his ministry not by how many he has won for Christ.
He defines his service to Christ by how many challenges and hardships he has suffered
because of his faithfulness to the call. Paul goes on to list them for us; he was beaten with
39 lashes on five different occasions, beaten three times with rods, stoned, shipwrecked,
under constant danger on the sea, in the city, and among his own people. He describes
sleepless nights, and days filled with hunger. He concludes his somber list of experiences
by declaring, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (v. 30). Paul
measures his ministerial success by his scars, while we often measure ourselves by our
stars.

Modern-day experiences seem in direct opposition to the experience of Paul and many
other New Testament preachers. In the first century, you had not really preached until some-
one tried to kill you. Popularity and acceptance of the message was not the focus, unlike our present-day celebrity context. The definition of success in ministry must not be performance, attendance, size, or even finances. It must be faithfulness to the assignment He has given us. To this end, God permits the painful thorns. To paraphrase and adapt an old Negro spiritual: I've got a thorn, you've got a thorn, all God's preachers got a thorn.

Paul describes the thorn as “a messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7). This raises the question, Who is responsible for the thorn? It seems as if Paul pins the blame on Satan for using this thorn to torment him. However, Paul says the thorn is necessary to keep him humble. Is the thorn the agent of Satan or of God? Either God or Satan can use the thorns in our lives. There are painful realities in the lives of all preachers that Satan tries to use to discourage and silence us. The thorn represents something in your life that causes you some great anxiety or pain and may be the feeling of inadequacy. The evil one uses the thorn to convince you that you will never be good enough. He uses the thorn to tell you that you are inadequate and ineffective. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, the word we translate as “harass” is kolaphiz. This word communicates the picture of being punched in the face with a closed fist. These discouraging blows can become persistent and overwhelming in the mind of the preacher. They can cause you to approach the pulpit or the board meeting with the internal bleeding of doubt. The persistent thought and doubts can make a preacher feel that he or she is unable to accomplish the tasks of ministry. And the truth is that Satan is partly correct. We are inadequate and ineffective to accomplish the true goal of ministry. The Bible points out the futility of preaching and calls it “foolishness” since flawed human agents promulgate it (1 Cor. 1:18). We will never be good enough or worthy of the calling that lives on in our lives. This is true. However, this is only a half-truth like so many of Satan’s messages to humanity.

Why does God permit such thorns?

God permits this thorn in our flesh to show us our weakness and frailty. What Satan meant to discourage us has the potential of humbling us. Humility is the true position of power. When one experiences humility, the barriers of ego and human agenda are moved out of the way, which makes way for God to be revealed. Greatness is always accomplished by people who are not seeking personal glory. This is why Jesus often talked about and modeled humility. Jesus understood that pride was the origin of sin in heaven and the only cure for it was humility. Jesus permits the thorn in order to place Paul, and every preacher, in the position of real spiritual power. Charles Spurgeon was known as one of the greatest preachers of his generation; but his thorn was a painful ailment that also kept him quite depressed. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the most influential men of his century, and yet
he was constantly misunderstood by his own race and hated by many Americans. The thorn seems to be the trademark of every preacher who seeks to transform the world through the Word. All God’s preachers have thorns.

The resolute faith of Paul, after pleading for the thorn’s removal, may be due to his understanding of the use of the word thorn in classical Greek. The word skolops, translated as “thorn,” is only used once in the entire Bible. However, this word, used in classical Greek, means a stake used to keep a tent driven into the ground. The fact that Paul was a tent maker was no coincidence. Paul uses this word to show us a picture of the thorn’s purpose in his ministry. The thorn acts as a stake to keep the preacher grounded and in place. Paul knew that without the stake the tent could possibly be blown away by howling winds and terrible tempests. The thorns in our ministries act like stakes to keep us in place so that we are not blown away by the unexpected pain of ministry. God knows, if it were not for my thorn, I would have allowed the demands of ministry to ruin my marriage. If it were not for the thorn,

I would have left the ministry over bitterness and unfair treatment. But the thorn keeps me in place. The thorn will not let me leave. It will not let me be silent. The thorn drives me into the ground of fervent prayer. The thorn reminds me that I am nothing but dust. The thorn demands that I be still and know that He is God (Ps. 46:10). The miracle of the thorn is that what I asked God to remove was the very thing He uses to save my ministry.

In the end, there are these two realities that save every preacher’s ministry from destruction: thorns and grace. The thorn humbles us; grace encourages us. The answer to our ministerial pride is the thorn represented by our painful life situations and inadequacies. God assured Paul that what he needed most was not removal but refocus. The focus now shifts from the preacher’s pain to God’s purpose. Pastoral weakness has the potential to reveal divine strength. The truth is that preachers do not have to be superhuman. We do not have to be OK all the time. We, too, can hurt, cry, and struggle. Our thorns reveal His grace. So then there is an inherent call to all preachers to embrace their “thorny” ministry. Paul says, “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). Our strength comes not from hiding our insecurities, disappointments, and pains but from confessing them. Our churches, constituents, and communities need to understand that we preach and lead with human “thorns.”

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is an act of public confession. He knew that you never conquer what you do not confess. Paul’s example for every preacher is to live in the authenticity of your weakness. Confess the pride that seeks to derail your preaching. Embrace the fact that your ministry is only about revealing God’s glory. Remember that
faithfulness is the measure of ministerial success. Put the façade aside and be the inadequate conduit of His grace. Preach, minister, and lead with your thorn. When you do so in humility and with the grace of God, the preacher’s problem becomes the preacher’s power.

1 All scriptures used in this article, unless otherwise stated, are from the English Standard Version of the Bible.

2 Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima Sr., Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1997), 99.
Salvation, Hermeneutics, and Culture

Written by Lael Caesar

Culture is everything, everywhere, all the time. It is “the world of human meaning, the sum total of a people’s works . . . their vision of what it is to be fully human.” Biblical hermeneutics (interpretation) and human culture are often intertwined and almost inseparable competitors. Despite the transcendent authority of faith, we read and live the Bible within human and social contexts. However, it is reasonable and necessary that we have a proper understanding of the culture–hermeneutics nexus so that the interaction of the two does not undermine the authority of the Word, but rather yields adequate salvific outcomes, with the end result that a valid interpretation of God’s Word is accessed and effectively transmitted across cultures.

Illustrating the issue

The issue demands serious attention, as illustrated by a look at global Seventh-day Adventism. In 209 countries across the world, nearly 19 million Seventh-day Adventists and visitors attend church Sabbath mornings. As a general rule, the church’s scripturally founded fundamental beliefs dictate Adventist belief, lifestyle, and worship. But because culture is “the world of human meaning,” faith in Scripture’s transcendence, in Guyana for example, is itself only part of a Guyanese overall social milieu. Australian interpretation is hard pressed to prescribe for Zimbabwean Adventist dress or music. And how can criteria from New Delhi best define the greetings or architecture typical of New Guinea’s Adventism? Whose theorizing determines orthodoxy among the baptized members worldwide?

These questions, stated in three words, actually ask, Whose biblical hermeneutics? As Huston Smith states, the world comes to us, and we go to it—with inbuilt sensors, concepts, beliefs, and desires that filter its incoming signals in ways that differ in every species, social class, and individual. Set over against Adventism’s global character is the truth acknowledged by C. Ellis Nelson that the individual congregation is “the primary society of Christians.” “Individuals sharing a common outlook or behavioral style increasingly cluster around those institutions . . . of which they approve.” The local congregation, rather than dictation from some global headquarters, most accurately reflects the theology, perceptions, conscience, and cultural identity of most of the millions numbered in the
church’s global reckoning. Perhaps reverently worshiping “conservatives” may be geographically close to, yet practically widely separated from “progressives” or “liberals” in another congregation fifteen miles away. Today, neither racial nor ethnic nor chronological homogeneity guarantees any similarity between congregations within the same city or village.

But human differences and variations of perception and behavior do not mean that the gospel is either inaccessible or incomprehensible. Human objectivity, more so than biblical intelligibility, remains perpetually open to question. As Smith states, “our concepts, beliefs, and desires affect worldviews.” This simply means that, as humans, we permit ideas we already hold, prejudices not always so labeled, to determine our attitudes to new ideas. Our reality “is mediated by . . . a meaning we give it in the context of our culture or our historical period, interpreted from our own particular horizon and in our own particular thought forms.” Hence reliable data transfer from mind to mind, school to school, or culture to culture, must be acknowledged as a real challenge. Nevertheless, despite the multitude of interpretive roadblocks set up along the hermeneutical road, comprehension and its attendant behavior may yet be possible between radically disagreeing parties.

Osborne’s challenge

Grant R. Osborne has thrown a hermeneutical challenge to the theology faculty of the University of Marburg. Osborne acknowledges that many of them will approach his writing from quite different presuppositional perspectives than his own, but insists:

The question is not whether they will agree but whether they can understand my arguments. I will not be around to clarify my points, so certainly this written communication lacks the dynamic of oral speech. Moreover, those readers without the necessary philosophical background will definitely struggle with the concepts herein.

However, does this mean that no amount of clarification can impart the meaning that I seek to communicate in these paragraphs? I think not.

Osborne’s Marburg colleagues do not share his faith in the Bible’s historicity. They all know this. They disagree because one side does not believe the other has correctly stated the facts, or properly interpreted the data. Sometimes disagreement occurs because of misunderstanding. But even those misunderstandings are grounded in a sense that things
have not been put the way they should. Most amazing then, in all this, is the divine success in communicating to earthlings the gospel of grace. For no two human societies, whether separated by epoch, science, age, or faith, can ever be as far apart as the distance between heaven and fallen humanity. And yet the Bible testifies that God has succeeded in revealing the truth about Himself to us in a way that saves us from ourselves to Himself.

Bible stories of human beings who successfully grasp and practice divine truth testify to this most dramatic of all transcultural communications. We shall review two of them from the life of Abraham, the father of all who believe (Rom. 4:11), and note some of their implications for our topic.

**Story 1: Abraham answers the call**

The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, “LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.” Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living (Acts 7:2–4).

Interestingly enough, Terah, not Abraham, heads up the caravan that set out from Ur (Gen. 11:31).

Terah’s move to Haran in the north seems quite compatible with Joshua’s statement that he served other gods (Josh. 24:2). The cities of Ur and Haran shared the same deity, the moon god, Sin. As head of the family, Terah may have opted for Haran’s superior economic prospects—fertile pastureland, wheat and barley farming unaffected by gulf salt water, and the chance to provide services for caravaneers traveling between Mesopotamia and the Levant or the Hittite territory. Abraham stays with his father, not journeying to Canaan until after his death (Gen. 12:5).

**Analyzing story 1**

This story identifies at least five different groups of individuals. Two of them exhibit the radical alteration from their contemporary cultural norms to Abraham’s divinely instituted ways of behavior. Abraham’s relatives remaining in Ur when he moves constitute the first group (vv. 1, 2). Then there are those relatives left in Haran when he leaves that city.
Jacob returns to them to find a wife among his mother’s relatives in the house of Nahor, Abraham’s brother (28:4; 29:1–6). Then there are people Abraham meets in Haran, who join him whether as household slaves or otherwise (v. 5). A fourth group does not join Abraham’s household when he leaves Haran. The fifth group is, of course, the primary one: Abraham and his companions who leave Ur together and continue all the way, via Haran, to the land of Canaan.

The groups’ varied behaviors again help us focus on two questions Osborne raises about understanding. Osborne wonders (1) if it is possible for readers to know what a written document means; and (2) if it is important to know what the document means. Barring total mindlessness, the varied responses show how dissimilar people’s mental and practical responses to revelation can be. Many contradictory behaviors follow Bible study. But acceptance of the difference between divinely revealed truth and human nature means openness to the miraculous as we seek ways of sharing the gospel with humanity.

The Bible speaks with unequivocal consistency about people. Its binary thinking dismays those who would integrate hell and heaven into coherent oneness: “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). “The carnal mind,” the natural human being, “is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7, KJV). The Bible also denounces hermeneutical mischief, reversing bitter and sweet, darkness and light, evil and good, making each latter its former (Isa. 5:20). This constitutes no mere disagreement over how to put things on which all are agreed. It is disagreement over what is truth. Whatever our reasoning, ignoring real contrast or seeking to circumvent it confuses the purpose of God’s biblical self-revelation. That revelation is designed to expose the chasm between God’s purity and our shame, His goodness and our corruption, His gift of everlasting life and our works of death. “Jesus” means Savior from sin (Matt. 1:21), not harmonizer of sin and righteousness.

**Story 2: Abraham’s covenant with God**

A second story from Abraham’s life involves his longing for an heir. In keeping with his times, the childless Abraham recommends to God his servant Eliezer, born in his house (Gen. 15:2, 3). Continuing the family’s name and wealth were imperatives in his day, accomplished, if necessary, through adoption. The adoption guaranteed an heir and the parents’ long-term care to the day of their burial.

God is not persuaded. He redirects Abraham’s thoughts and reeducates his thinking on the principle of faith. Abraham catches on, and God reckons his faith in Him “as righteousness”
(v. 6). Later (vv. 7–21), God complements and expands the teaching, once again, within the context of the interaction between familiar local culture and the phenomenological exception of divine revelation. The account features God as suzerain, engaged in a treaty-making action with His vassal people in the person of Abraham. In the ritual that normally established the treaty, animals were slaughtered, cut in pieces, and the portions arranged in two rows with an aisle between. Parties to the treaty or covenant passed down the aisle between the rows “while taking an oath invoking similar dismemberment on each other should they not keep their part of the covenant.”\(^\text{13}\) But in Genesis 15, God, rather than Abraham, passes, alone, between the pieces, turning on its head the cultural expectation. God’s pledge of dismemberment at the covenant’s violation confirms the promise of Calvary where He pays for our treachery, that He might bring us to Himself.

Learning from our stories: Seven principles

We have said that the Bible’s salvation message (1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:15) is about a divine culture, alien to earth. Its truths reach us because God’s communication is comprehensible and alters our previous beliefs and behaviors. I now propose seven principles, drawn from our two stories that may greatly assist in spreading heaven’s culture to other humans, much as God Himself shared it long ago with Abraham. A consistent message of these stories that we have reviewed is that God’s intervention into the existing culture makes the place of His coming the locus of a new, otherworldly culture. Here are the seven principles that we may apply to the culture–hermeneutics nexus:

1. **Otherness.** God is not the same as Abraham. He is different, unmistakably and even disconcertingly so, whether to Abraham or anyone else of his culture. And God’s messengers to all human cultures, fallen as humans are, must be other: “A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION” (1 Pet. 2:9). Apology about this otherness embarrasses God, our Commissioner.

2. **Mutuality.** When God as missionary approaches Abraham, He engages Abraham, acknowledging his intelligence (Gen. 12:1). God assumes a certain compatibility with His subject. His otherness is not necessarily alienating, though some may seize upon it as a reason for rejection. God works to eliminate any aspect of His otherness peripheral to His essence. So must we. Nothing dispensable must persist if this will prove inimical to missionary purpose. So the Word becomes flesh and lives in a tent among us (John 1:14). God’s representatives will not work from perspectives of superiority. They will acknowledge native people’s intelligence and operate on the basis of mutuality.

3. **Authority.** But setting aside the dispensables that inhibit mission does not mean that
God is Abraham's equal. His missionary enterprise requires authority: misery loves company. The coming of the missionary God must not lack authority or He has but come to accompany Abraham in his misery. God as missionary brings things unfamiliar, things that Abraham needs, and which, from God, he may draw full supply. God calls on Abraham to change, to leave the familiar and ease into the unknown (Gen. 12:1).

4. Respect. Respect, like the principle of mutuality, must be shared by both parties. God respects Abraham who returns the compliment; He does not force him. He offers the new, the promise, and the choice. Abraham’s action involves a choice to change, to be different from his father Terah, the idol worshiper (Josh. 24:2). But Abraham displays much respect for his father even in this choice for change. Despite God’s call, he follows Terah to Haran, stays with him there, and only leaves after his death (Acts 7:2–4). God speaks of leading Abraham all this way (Josh. 24:2, 3). Missionally speaking, respect is a general value, shown to all, not just to some. God respects Abraham. Abraham respects God. He also respects his father who does not understand his God. Tarrying with one’s unconverted family need not signify lack of conversion or indisposition to follow truth. We may understand from the example of the Father of all who believes that some who do not step out may be showing respect.

5. Sincerity. Our fifth principle is sincerity, a challenge to the judgmental. For sincerity is neither proved by conformity nor disproved by nonconformity, but is where and why the Holy Spirit must be allowed to direct conscience and office. God does not dissemble in His speaking. Neither may the missionary who goes in His name. Be aware: God is who He is because of how He acts as surely as how He speaks. The missionary and God are both presented this way. Respect for the individuality of the other and for the Holy Spirit’s work on conscience allows us to accept the other’s sincerity. As Peter expressed to the lying Ananias in the case of violation of conscience, that is a matter between the human and God (Acts 5:4). Sometimes God exposes hypocrisy, determining for Himself, when He is obligated to do so.

6. Integrity. A sixth missional principle derived from the Abraham stories is integrity. The God who promised greatness to Abraham (12:2, 3) gives most eloquent voice to this word when Abraham sees Him pass between the chopped up pieces (Gen. 15:17). We see, in His countercultural action, that there is no reserve about His commitment. Integrity is wholeness. God is wholly committed. He counted the cost before earth’s foundations were laid, before the first angel was formed. His representatives must count the cost. Or prepare for tragedy by going half committed, by easily dismissing changed mind or broken promise, by winning with bribery when earnestness cannot persuade. We prepare for personal and institutional tragedy, since who we are discloses to observers who is our Commissioner.
7. Trust. A seventh principle on salvation, hermeneutics, and culture, is trust. Trust may be defined as the willingness to believe rather than the sincere suspicion of all belief. Skepticism will not be manipulated. Trust may be abused, but trust lets us grow. God’s trust has been much abused by the cynical, but His love still gives to those who ask, and He will not turn away from those who wish to borrow (Matt. 5:42). If we are too afraid to trust, we will be too stunted to grow. All the rewards of His promises depend on trust that works by obedience. If we will not trust enough to surrender to His will and power, then He cannot act on our behalf. Trust counts as evidence of the things not seen. Without trust, it is impossible to please Him. Without trust, none of our exegetical genius matters. Whether we agree or disagree, understand or misunderstand, comprehendingly and comprehensively proclaim, or mutter and follow tangents, we are nowhere without trust. Nothing in God’s coming to us or our going for Him will work if we are skeptical.

If our hermeneutical excursions and cultural interventions demonstrate commitment to these seven principles, men and women will hear our expositions and see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

Notes:


2 Ibid.


6 Smith, 205.


8 “Presuppositions” refers to the mental framework within which we individually interpret our data. What we see, hear, feel, etc., how we access, and how we cognitively process what we think we have accessed is informed and controlled by our presuppositions. For more on presuppositions, see Lael Caesar, “Examining Validity: The Bible As Text of History,” in


10 All Scripture passages are from the New American Standard Bible, except as otherwise stated.

11 Osborne, 401.


13 Ibid., 103.
"Experiencing God Through Prayer & Praise!"

Compiled by Jerry and Janet Page
# Table of Contents

1. Statements On Prayer & Empowered Ministries .............................................. 3
2. Praising God .................................................................................................... 5
3. Praise God In All Circumstances! ................................................................. 8
4. The Character of Christ ............................................................................. 11
5. Guidelines For Persons Desiring Anointing ............................................. 16
6. Encouraging Promises and Quotes On Healing ....................................... 18
7. To Know Him ........................................................................................... 19
8. Principles Of Intercessory Prayer ............................................................... 20
9. The Power Of Praying Together ................................................................. 24
10. Prayer Group Ideas .................................................................................. 26
11. Partnering In Prayer ............................................................................... 28
12. How To Pray With Your Spouse ............................................................... 30
13. Powerful Promises For Parents ................................................................. 34
14. A.C.T.S. Prayer Format ........................................................................... 35
15. Yesterday’s Prayer Journal ...................................................................... 36
16. The Sanctuary Prayer Model ..................................................................... 37
17. The Lord’s Prayer Model .......................................................................... 38
18. Encountering God In Prayer – A Model For Prayer ............................... 39
19. How To Get Started Prayerwalking .......................................................... 40
20. Themes For Prayerwalking ....................................................................... 41
21. Lord, Give Us .......................................................................................... 42
22. What To Pray For Non-Christians ............................................................. 43
23. “That We May Be One” .......................................................................... 45
24. Modern Peter ........................................................................................... 49
25. Bibliography On Prayer ............................................................................ 52
26. Resources For A Prayer Ministry .............................................................. 52
27. God’s Word Is Life & Power ...................................................................... 53
28. Hearing God’s Voice ............................................................................... 58

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STATEMENTS ON PRAYER
AND EMPOWERED MINISTRIES

Inspired writings and experience make it clear that two principles must be applied for all our ministries to be most fully used and empowered by the Holy Spirit: 1) Much personal and united prayer; 2) Much lay member involvement.

1. “What the Lord did for His people in that time (early church), it is just as essential, and more so, that He do for His people today. All that the apostles did, every church member today is to do.”* And we are to work with as much more fervor, to be accompanied by the Holy Spirit in as much greater measure, as the increase of wickedness demands a more decided call to repentance.” 7T p. 33

2. “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work” . . . Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessings. A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer.”* 1SM p. 121

3. “At the sound of fervent prayer, Satan’s whole host trembles.” 1T p. 346

4. “It is part of God’s plan to grant us in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow if we did not thus ask.” GC p. 525

5. “It is the order of God that those who bear responsibilities should often meet together to counsel with one another and pray earnestly for that wisdom which He alone can impart.” Unitedly make known your troubles to God. Talk less: much precious time is lost in talk that brings no light. Let brethren unite in fasting and prayer* for the wisdom that God has promised to supply liberally.” 1T p. 624

6. “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” Matthew 18:19, 20 “Ask of Me, and I will answer your requests.”* The promise is made on condition that the united prayers of the church 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 of God and for one another. —Letter 32, 1903, p. 5 (To Brother and Sister Farnsworth, January 28, 1903.) White Estate Washington D.C. October 22,1979 (9MR 303.3) —MR No. 748 The Power of United Prayer.

7. “The greatest victories gained for the cause of God are not the result of labored argument, ample facilities, wide influence, or abundance of means;* they are gained in the audience chamber with God,* when with earnest, agonizing faith men lay hold upon the mighty arm of power.” GW p. 259

8. The word of the living God is not merely written, but spoken. The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe would we search its precepts! The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One. 6T p. 393

9. “An intensity, such as never before was seen, is taking possession of the world. In amusement, in moneymaking, in the contest for power, in the very struggle for existence, there is a terrible force that engrosses body and mind and soul. In the midst of this maddening rush, God is speaking. He bids us come apart and commune with Him. ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’”* Psalm 46:10
“Many, even in their seasons of devotion, fail of receiving the blessing of real communion with God. They are in too great haste. With hurried steps they press through the circle of Christ’s loving presence, pausing perhaps a moment within the sacred precincts, but not waiting for counsel. They have no time to remain with the divine Teacher. With their burdens they return to their work.*

“These workers can never attain the highest success until they learn the secret of strength. They must give themselves time to think, to pray, to wait upon God for a renewal of physical, mental, and spiritual power. They need the uplifting influence of His Spirit. Receiving this, they will be quickened by fresh life. The wearied frame and tired brain will be refreshed; the burdened heart will be lightened.

“No pause for a moment in His presence, but personal contact with Christ, to sit down in companionship with Him—this is our need.”** Education p. 260-261

10. “Parents have a great and responsible work to do, and they may well inquire: ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ But God has promised to give wisdom to those that ask in faith, and He will do just as He said He would. *He is pleased with the faith that takes Him at His Word.*”

“The mother of Augustine prayed for her son’s conversion. She saw no evidence that the Spirit of God was impressing his heart, but she was not discouraged. She laid her finger upon the texts, presenting before God His own words, and pleaded as only a mother can. Her deep humiliation, her earnest importunities, her unwavering faith, prevailed and the Lord gave her the desires of her heart. Today He is just as ready to listen to the petitions of His people. His hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; and if Christian parents seek Him earnestly, *He will fill their mouths with arguments and for His name’s sake will work mightily in their behalf in the conversion of their children.*”* 5T p. 322-323

11. "When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence, *it is Satan’s constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ.*

The pleasures of the world; life’s cares, perplexities, and sorrow; the faults of others; or your own faults and imperfections—any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses and thus by separating them from Christ, he hopes to gain the victory. We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. *Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him!*”* SC p. 71-72

12. "The greatest help that can be given our people is to teach them to work for God, and to depend on Him, not on the ministers.” 7T p. 19

13. "There is no influence in our land more powerful to poison the imagination, to destroy religious impressions, and to blunt the relish for the tranquil pleasures and sober realities of life, than theatrical amusements. The love of these scenes increases with every indulgence as the desire for intoxicating drink strengthens with its use. The only safe course is to shun the theater and every other questionable amusement.” 4T p. 653

14. "The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort. Those who achieve the greatest results are those who rely most implicitly upon the almighty arm. The man who commanded, ‘Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the Valley of Ajalon,’ is the man who for hours lay prostrate upon the earth in prayer in the camp at Gilgal. The men of prayer are the men of power.” PP p. 509

*Note: All bolding, italicizing, and underlining in this document are supplied by the compiler.

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PRAISING GOD

1. Gratitude and praise should be cultivated – 1 Chron. 16:8-36

“When the ten lepers were healed, only one returned to find Jesus and give Him glory. Let us not be like the unthinking nine, whose hearts were untouched by the mercy of God” (5T 315). “Let us educate our hearts and lips to speak the praise of God for His matchless love” (MH 253).

NOTE: Ellen White suggested to publishing house employees that “as often as once a week a praise meeting should be held” (4T 461). At camp meetings a simple service of thanksgiving should be held daily (6T 62).

2. The power of praise – 2 Chron. 20-30

“Begin to educate your tongues to praise Him and train your hearts to make melody to God; and when the evil one begins to settle his gloom about you, sing praise to God. When things go crossways at your homes, strike up a song about the matchless charms of the Son of God, and I tell you, when you touch this strain, Satan will leave you” (RH 8/5/1900).

“Unbelievers are often converted as they listen to pure words of praise and gratitude to God” (MYP 424). “No more effective means (telling about and praising God for blessings received) can be employed for winning souls to Christ” (COL 300).

“Let there be singing in the home, of songs that are sweet and pure, and there will be fewer words of censure, and more of cheerfulness and hope and joy. Let there be singing in the school, and the pupils will be drawn closer to God, to their teachers, and to one another” (ED 168).

3. Some of the benefits of praise – Prov. 17:27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase of joy (MH 253)</th>
<th>Far more power in prayer (5T 317)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More bestowed to praise God (5T 317)</td>
<td>Greater realization of God’s love (5T 317)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banishment of discouragement (MH 254)</td>
<td>Health of body and soul promoted (MH 251)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steady increase of courage, hope, and faith (PK202)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: “No tongue can express, no finite mind can conceive, the blessing that results from appreciating the goodness and love of God: (MH 253).

4. A few of the many things to praise God for – Lam. 3:22, 23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Gift of God’s son (SD 243)</th>
<th>Temporal Blessings and comforts (CG 148)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God’s goodness and mercies (4T 461)</td>
<td>The matchless charms of Christ (2T 593)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fresh blessings of each new day (MH 253)</td>
<td>The bread we eat the cross of Calvary stamped on every loaf (DA 660)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s peace in our hearts (MH 253)</td>
<td>Being kept through the night (MH 253)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The protection given by angels (6T 63)</td>
<td>God’s acceptance of the humble (FE 370)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The water we drink water purchased by Christ’s blood (MH 660)</td>
<td>The second coming of Jesus (Ev 218)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOTE: “The thought that Christ died to obtain for us the gift of everlasting life, is enough to call forth from our hearts the most sincere and fervent gratitude, and from our lips the most enthusiastic praise” (SD 238). “The greatness of this gift was to furnish men with a theme of thanksgiving and praise that would last through time and eternity” (SD 243).

Memorize stanzas 1, 3, and 6 of “When Morning Gilds the Skies...” (Church Hymnal #43).

Develop a plan for “educating” your heart and lips to praise God. See Daniel 6:10.

“Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!” (Ps. 150:6)

“Here are my directions: pray much for others; plead for God’s mercy upon them; give thanks for all He is going to do for them.” (1 Tim. 2:1, LB).

“Let us praise God for an opportunity to live for the glory of His name. Let the fresh blessings of each new day awaken praise in our hearts for these tokens of His loving care. When you open your eyes in the morning, thank God that He has kept you through the night. Thank Him for His peace in your heart. Morning, noon, and night, let gratitude as a sweet perfume ascend to heaven” (MH 253).

“No tongue can express, no finite mind can conceive, the blessing that results from appreciating the goodness and love of God...Then let us educate our hearts and lips to speak the praise of God for His matchless love” (MH 253).

**BENEFITS WHICH RESULT FROM PRAISING GOD**

1. **Praise increases faith, hope, and courage.** “If more praising of God were engaged in now, hope and courage and faith would steadily increase” (PK 202).

2. **Praise increases our power in prayer.** “We do not pray any too much, but we are too sparing of giving thanks. If the loving kindness of God called forth more thanksgiving and praise, we would have far more power in prayer” (5T 317).

3. **Praise increases our love for God.** “If the loving kindness of God called forth more thanksgiving and praise, we...would abound more and more in the love of God” (5T 317).

4. **Praise increases our power in witnessing.** “Far more than we do, we need to speak of the precious chapters in our experience. After a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, our joy in the Lord and our efficiency in His service would be greatly increased by recounting His goodness and His wonderful works in behalf of His children... Such a testimony will have an influence upon others. No more effective means can be employed for winning souls to Christ” (COL 300).

5. **Praise results in greater blessings being bestowed.** “If the loving kindness of God called forth more thanksgiving and praise, we would...have more bestowed to praise Him for” (5T 317).
6. **Praise promotes health.** “Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul then does a spirit of gratitude and praise” (MH 251).

7. **Praise brings us nearer to heaven.** “The soul may ascend nearer heaven on the wings of praise. God is worshiped with song and music in the courts above, and as we express our gratitude, we are approximating to the worship of the heavenly hosts” (SC 104)
1. “The soul may ascend nearer Heaven on the wings of praise”–Steps to Christ, 104.

2. “In the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings.”–Ministry of Healing, 474.

3. “The way of the Lord’s helping we may not know; but this we do know: He will never fail those who put their trust in Him.”–Prophets and Kings, 576.

4. “Could Christians realize how many times the Lord has ordered their way that the purposes of the enemy concerning them might not be accomplished, they would not stumble along complainingly. Their faith would be stayed on God, and no trial would have power to move them.”–Prophets and Kings, 576.

5. “The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop. If He saw in us nothing whereby He might glorify His name, He would not spend time in refining us. He does not cast worthless stones into His furnace. It is valuable ore that He refines.”–Ministry of Healing, 471.

6. “All that has perplexed us in the providences of God will in the world to come be made plain. The things hard to be understood will then find explanation. The mysteries of grace will enfold before us. Where our finite minds discovered only confusion and broken promises, we shall see the most perfect and beautiful harmony. We shall know that infinite love ordered the experiences that seemed most trying.”–9 Testimonies, 286.

7. “Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme, will find perplexities vanish and a plain path before their feet.”–Ministry of Healing, 481.

8. “To all who are reaching out to feel the guiding hand of God, the moment of greatest discouragement is the time when divine help is nearest. They will look back with thankfulness upon the darkest part of their way. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the Godly.” 2 Peter 2:9. From every temptation and every trial He will bring them forth with firmer faith and a richer experience.–Desire of Ages, 528.

9. The Father’s presence encircled Christ, and nothing befell Him but that which infinite love permitted for the blessing of the world. Here was His source of comfort, and it is for us. He who is imbued with the Spirit of Christ abides in Christ. Whatever comes to him comes from the Savior, who surrounds him with His presence. Nothing can touch him except by the Lord’s permission. All our sufferings and sorrows, all our temptations and trials, all our sadness and griefs, all our persecutions, privations, in short, all things work together for our good. All experiences and circumstances are God’s workmen whereby good is brought to us.”–Ministry of Healing, 488-489.
10. "Moses had a deep sense of the personal presence of God....The presence of God was sufficient to carry him through the most trying situations in which a man could be placed. Moses did not merely think of God; he saw Him. God was the constant vision before him; he never lost sight of His face. He saw Jesus as his Savior, and he believed that the Savior's merits would be imputed to him. This faith was to Moses no guesswork; it was a reality. This is the kind of faith we need, faith that will endure the test. Oh, how often we yield to temptation because we do not keep our eye upon Jesus! Our faith is not continuous because, through self-indulgence, we sin, and then we cannot endure “as seeing Him who is invisible.”

My brother, make Christ your daily, hourly companion, and you will not complain that you have no faith. Contemplate Christ. View His character. Talk of Him. The less you exalt self, the more you will see in Jesus to exalt. God has a work for you to do, keep the Lord ever before you.” –Testimonies vol. 5,651-653.

11. “Begin to educate your tongues to praise Him and train your hearts to make melody to God; and when the evil one begins to settle his gloom about you, sing praise to God. When things go crossways at your homes, strike up a song about the matchless charms of the Son of God, and I tell you, when you touch this strain, Satan will leave you.” RH8/5/1900

12. “Unbelievers are often converted as they listen to pure words of praise and gratitude to God” (MYP 424). “No more effective means (telling about and praising God for blessings received) can be employed for winning souls to Christ.” (COL 300).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOR FORGIVENESS</th>
<th>FOR EVERYDAY LIFE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 John 1:9</td>
<td>Phil. 4:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If we confess our sins, He will forgive us, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.</td>
<td>Matt. 6:33</td>
</tr>
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<td>Matt. 11:28-30</td>
<td>2 Cor. 9:6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Come to Christ with your burdens.</td>
<td>1 Cor. 10:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John 6:37</td>
<td>2 Cor. 12:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whoever comes to Christ will not be cast out.</td>
<td>Rom. 8:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Tim. 1:15</td>
<td>Jude 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ came to save sinners.</td>
<td>Isa. 1:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 19:10</td>
<td>Phil. 4:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ came to seek and to save the lost.</td>
<td>Isa. 38:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rom. 8:1</td>
<td>Isa. 26:3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No condemnation to those in Christ.</td>
<td>Isa. 44:22</td>
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<td>Isa. 1:18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your sins can be made as white as snow.</td>
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<td>Isa. 38:17</td>
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<td>He casts our sins behind His back.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isa. 44:22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT
- Luke 11:13
  We will be given the Holy Spirit if we ask.
- John 14:26
  The Holy Spirit teaches us and brings things to our remembrance.
- John 16:8
  He convicts of sin.
- John 15:26
  He testifies of Christ
- John 16:7
  He comes as the Counselor.
- Eph. 3:16
  He strengthens you.
- Rom. 8:26
  Helps in our weakness.

FOR CHRISTLIKENESS
- 2 Cor. 5:17
  If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
- Ezek. 36:26,27
  God promises to give you a new heart.
- 2 Cor. 6:16
  God will dwell in you.
- Eph. 3:16,17
  Through the Holy Spirit Christ will dwell in your heart.
- 2 Peter 1:4
  Through Christ’s promises you can become a partaker of the divine nature.
- 2 Cor. 10:4,5
  Every thought can be made captive to Christ.
- 2 Cor. 3:18
  Be beholding the Lord we are changed into His likeness.
- Phil. 1:6
  God will complete the work He began in you.

FOR WISDOM AND STRENGTH
- James 1:5,6
  Wisdom will be given if you ask in faith.
- Prov. 3:5,6
  Rely on God for guidance.
- Ps. 32:8
  God will teach you the way to go.
- Ex. 33:14
  God’s presence will go with you and give you rest.
- Isa. 58:11
  He will guide you continually.
- Phil. 4:13
  I can do all things in Christ.
- Jer. 1:7
  He will give you words to speak.
- Prov. 14:26
  In the fear of the Lord you can have strong confidence.
- Isa. 41:10
  God will strengthen, God will help, God will uphold.
- Isa. 41:13
  The Lord your God will hold your right hand.
- Heb. 4:15, 16
  Come with confidence to the throne of grace.
- James 4:7
  Resist the devil, and he will flee.
- James 5:14, 15
  The prayer of faith will save the sick.
- James 5:16-18
  Prayer has great power.
- 1 Peter 5:7
  Cast all your anxieties on Him.
- 1 John 5:14,15
  You can know He hears when you ask.

FOR OTHERS
- Ezek. 11:19,20
  God promises to give others a new heart that they may keep His laws.
- 1 John 5:16
  God promises to give spiritual life to those for whom you pray.
- John 12:32
  Christ uplifted on the cross draws people to Him.
- Acts 5:31
  Repentance is a gift.
- John 16:8
  The Holy Spirit convicts of sin.
- Heb. 4:12
  God’s word reaches the heart.
- Jer. 32:40, 41
  “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.”
- Jer. 33:3
  If we call, God will answer with great things.
- Isa. 49:24,25
  God promises to deliver those who are captives of Satan.

ALL-INCLUSIVE
- Ps. 34:10
  If you seek the Lord, you will not lack any good thing.
- Ps. 37:3-5
  Delight in the Lord, and He will give the desires of your heart. Commit your way to Him, and He will act.
- Ps. 84:11
  God will withhold no good thing from you if you walk uprightly.
- Eph. 3:20
  He is able to do far more than we ask.
- Luke 1:37
  With God nothing is impossible.
- Mark 11:24
  Believe, and you will receive.
- Rom. 8:28
  In everything God works for good.
- John 16:24
  Ask and receive so that your joy may be full.
- John 15:7
  If you abide in Christ, you can ask whatever you will and it shall be done.
- John 15:16
  Anything you ask in Christ’s name the Father will give to you.
- Luke 11:9
  Ask and you will be given.
- Matt. 28:20
  I am with you always.

PLUS: “All God’s biddings are enabling!” He never asks us to do anything without giving us the power to do it. Therefore, every command in the Bible is also a promise!
THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

NOTE: This transcript is taken from E. G. White’s THE DESIRE OF AGES. The page references have been placed alongside each statement.

HIS COMPASSION

At all times and in all places he manifested a loving interest in men, and shed about Him the light of a cheerful piety. 86

He worked to relieve every case of suffering that He saw. 87

He spoke a word of sympathy here and a word there, as He saw men weary, yet compelled to hear heavy burdens. 90

The life of Christ was marked with respect and love for His mother. 90

The healing power of love went out from Him to the sick and distressed. 92

He manifested an interest in men’s secular affairs. 151

He spoke with solemn dignity, and both look and tone expressed such earnest love, that sinners were not offended as they realized their humiliating position. 173

His tender compassion fell with a touch of healing upon weary and troubled hearts. 254

His character expressed love in look and tone, and a sweet sympathetic spirit. 254

When He saw men refuse the message of peace, His heart was pierced to the very depths. 255

His heart, that loved and pitied, was a heart of unchanging tenderness. 319

His heart overflowed with love for the whole human race, but He never became indulgent about sin. 356

He who taught the people the way to secure peace and happiness was just as thoughtful of their temporal necessities as of their spiritual needs. 356

His love was not circumscribed to race or nation. 402

He sought not to condemn, but to save. He spoke words of comfort and hope. 462

He was a lover of children. His gentle and kindly manner won their love and confidence. 511
His tender, pitying heart was ever awakened to sympathy by suffering.

His enemies read in His calm, solemn face love, benevolence and quiet dignity.

During every hour of His life upon the earth, the love of God was flowing from Him in irrepressible streams.

His every feature expressed gentleness, and resignation and the tenderest pity for His cruel foes.

**HIS UNSELFISHNESS**

In principle firm as a rock, His life revealed the grace of unselfish courtesy.

From His earliest years He was possessed of one purpose; He lived to bless others.

He Labored earnestly for humanity

He did not contend for His rights.

He was always sacrificing Himself for the good of others.

He was so emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself.

He was so fully surrendered to the will of God that the Father alone appeared in His life.

He did not manifest selfish sorrow.

His whole life was a life of unselfish service.

He did not think of Himself. His care for others was uppermost in His mind.

**HIS TACTFULNESS**

Jesus carried into His labor cheerfulness and tact.

He reached the hearts of the people by going among them as one who desired their good.

His strong personal sympathy helped to win hearts.

He did not meet argument with argument.

He had tact to meet the prejudiced minds.

He made truth beautiful by presenting it in the most direct and simple way.

In all His contacts with rude and violent men, He did not use one unkind or discourteous expression.
When He reproved, His words were spoken with the utmost gentleness. 535

It was not His purpose to humiliate His opponents. 594

**HIS HUMILITY AND MEEKNESS**

He shunned display. 74

He did not strive for worldly greatness, and in even the lowest position He was content. 88

He did not contend for His rights. 89

He weeded all vanity from life. 91

He took no measures to bring Himself into notice. 137

His manners were gentle and unassuming. 138

In that life there was no noisy disputation, no ostentatious worship, no act to gain applause. 261

He was never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment. 330

He remained true to the humble lot He had accepted. 571

His every feature expressed gentleness and resignation and the tenderest pity for his cruel foes. 735

**HIS PATIENCE AND COURAGE**

We never manifested an impatient word or look. 88

In His work He was willing and uncomplaining. 89

He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently. 89

He never became discouraged. 89

He was still of good courage when amid the greatest opposition and most cruel treatment. 330

He was not impatient even though interrupted and robbed of rest. 364

He spoke no words of retaliation. 619

His heart was patient and gentle, and would not be provoked. 700

**HIS PURITY**

Neither gain nor pleasure, applause nor censure, could induce Him to consent to a wrong act. 72
He was wise to discern evil, and strong to resist it.

He hated but one thing in the world, and that was sin.

He could not witness a wrong act without pain, which it was impossible to disguise.

His presence brought a purer atmosphere into the home, and His life was a leaven working amid the elements of society.

He was the embodiment of purity.

He dwelt among men as an example of spotless integrity.

His language was pure, refined, and clear as a running stream.

He was surrounded with an atmosphere of peace, even amid the turbulence of angry enemies.

In the heart of Christ, where reigned perfect harmony with God, there was perfect peace.

His life was a rebuke to men’s sins.

**HIS DIGNITY AND MANLINESS**

In principle He was firm as a rock.

He possessed a dignity and individuality wholly distinct from earthly pride and assumption.

He spoke with solemn dignity.

He never purchased peace by compromise.

His enemies read in His calm, solemn face, love, benevolence, and dignity.

Even under disgraceful treatment, He bore Himself with firmness and dignity.

**HIS DILIGENCE AND INDUSTRIOUSNESS**

In His industrious life there were no idle moments to invite temptation.

He was perfect as a workman, as He was in character.

He labored earnestly for humanity.

A wise purpose underlay every act of Christ’s life on earth.

His life was crowded with labor and responsibility.

**HIS MINISTRY**

He would not enter into controversy, yet His example was as constant lesson.
He passed by no human being as worthless, but sought to apply the saving remedy to every soul.

To the discouraged, sick, tempted, and fallen, Jesus would speak words of tenderest pity, words that were needed and could be understood.

He would not betray secrets that were poured into His sympathizing ear.

He saw in every soul one to whom must be given the call to His kingdom.

He did not sermonize as men do today.

As people heard His words they were warmed and comforted. He spoke of God not as an avenging judge, but as a tender Father.

He had nothing to do with subjects of dissension among the Jews. It was His work to present the truth.

He taught the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority.

He was earnest rather than vehement.

He loved to gather the people about Him under the blue heavens, on some grassy hillside, or on the beach beside the lake.

He rested by faith in His father’s care.

His life was crowded with labor and responsibility; yet how often He was found in prayer.

He taught men not to place themselves needlessly in antagonism to establish order.

He was not presumptuous, nor would He rush into danger or hasten a crisis.

It was not His purpose to humiliate His opponents.

“Christ is sitting for His portrait in every disciple.” D.A. 827.

“He is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.” C.O.L. 69.
GUIDELINES FOR PERSONS DESIRING ANOINTING

“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.” James 5:13-14

WHAT IS ANOINTING?
Anointing is a biblical rite established in the Old Testament and carried on into the New Testament. Priests and Kings in the Old Testament were anointed with oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit coming upon them to lead God’s people. Jesus enlarged the rite of anointing by inviting believers to engage in this when sick.

WHEN IS ANOINTING APPROPRIATE?
Contrary to what some people believe, anointing is not a last rite. The Bible invites us to pray with anointing whenever there is a need, not only on one’s deathbed.

WHO CAN BE ANOINTED?
Any believer in Christ who has a need for healing and a desire to be prayed for and anointed.

WHY DOES THE PASTOR OR ELDER ANOINT WITH OLIVE OIL?
Oil represents the Holy Spirit. Olive oil was used for anointing in Bible times.

WHAT CAN I BE ANOINTED FOR?
Any sickness including physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, and social, as well as uncontrollable or addictive behaviors. People have been anointed for depression, bad habits, mental problems, handicaps, anything they feel Satan is bothering them with as well as physical illness.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR ANOINTING?
Psalm 66:18 says, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” All known sin must be confessed. God cannot bless you in your sins. “If any who are seeking health have been guilty of evil speaking, if they have sowed discord in the home, the neighborhood, or the church, and have stirred up alienation and dissension, if by any wrong practice they have led others into sin, these things should be confessed before God and before those who have been offended. . . When wrongs have been righted, we may present the needs of the sick to the Lord in calm faith, as His Spirit may indicate.” The Ministry of Healing, p. 229
If you feel like you cannot gain victory over a sin problem, this can be made a subject of prayer in the anointing service. Put your trust in the Lord and His grace. Jesus is able to heal every need. Besides searching your life for sins and confessing them, you may study and read the following:

James 5:13-16    Psalms 107:17-20
Psalms 66:18    Psalms 41:10
Jeremiah 30:17  Jeremiah 17:14
Isaiah 61:1-3   Psalms 103

Also, you may wish to read the chapter “Prayer for the Sick” in The Ministry of Healing.

WILL I HAVE TO DISCLOSE WHY I’M BEING ANOINTED?
You do not have to mention specifically why you wish to be anointed. But those praying for you will need to know your need in a general way so they know how to pray for you.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE SERVICE?
You will have opportunity to share your reason for requesting the anointing with a small group of people conducting the anointing. These people will kneel in a circle around you praying and claiming specific promises of healing for you. You may request special friends to accompany you and pray for you as well. One person will close the prayer time by praying and touching your forehead with oil. Sometimes the group chooses to quietly sing a song after the anointing is finished.

HOW CAN I KNOW IF I WILL BE HEALED?
You can trust God to bring you healing, even if it is not in the way you want or expect. (Remember healing is not only physical but can come with forgiveness, peace of mind, emotional well-being, etc.) Realize God sometimes chooses to heal in stages. Some have lost their pain. Others have found relief through doctors and surgeries. Know that on every occasion of anointing, blessings can be received. Trust God will heal you as He sees fit—even if you must wait until eternity. You can claim James 5:15, “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well (whole)”.
Prepared by Peggy Casebier

References:  God’s Word
The Ministry of Healing
“Anointing: the lost rite” Ministry Magazine (Sept. ‘89)
ENCOURAGING PROMISES AND QUOTES ON HEALING

“I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me.” Psalms 120:1

“Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.” Psalms 103:3

“Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.” Isaiah 65:24

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.” Isaiah 40:29

“. . . He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” Isaiah 61:1-3

“Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.” Jeremiah 17:14

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Mark 11:24

“For the pardon of sin, for the Holy spirit, for a Christ-like temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work for any gift He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received.” Education, p. 258

“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.” James 5:14-15
TO KNOW HIM

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. John 17:3

By God’s grace I want to set a faith objective (not a promise to be guilty over!).

1. ___________________________ Seeking to know Jesus better each day.
   (Amount of time)

2. ___________________________ To ask God to help me find someone or a small group to pray with regularly.

Please keep this commitment in your Bible as a prayer request reminder.
PRINCIPLES OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER

I. **WHY SHOULD WE INTERCEDE?**

If God is infinitely loving, all knowing, and all powerful, why do I need to be involved in intercessory prayer? Since He is already involved in everyone's life for their good, isn't He already doing all that needs to be done? While we may never understand all the issues involved, the following principles about God's call for us to intercede do seem clear:

A. **Intercession is our Lord's plan and command for us.**

   a. Jesus teaches the disciples to intercede in the Lord's prayer. Luke 11:1-4
   b. He stresses the importance of persistent intercession in the parable of the persistent friend. Luke 11:5-8
   c. He promises it will be effective: "And I say unto you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened unto you. For everyone who asks receive, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." Luke 11:9-10
   d. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will be given "to those who ask Him!" Luke 11:11-13

2. Jesus Himself interceded much.
   a. He was often found in prayer - Mark 1:35, Luke 11:1
   b. He interceded much for his followers - John 17

3. The prophets also confirm it is God's plan.
   a. Paul - "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men...For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." I Timothy 2:1-3
   b. James - "...You do not have because you ask not." James 4:2
   c. Ellen White - "Ministering angels are waiting about the throne to instantly obey the mandate of Jesus Christ to answer every prayer offered in earnest living faith." 2SM p. 377
B. Intercession opens doors in the Great Controversy to release God's power. He has limited Himself in some ways to our prayers.

1. "It is part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow if we did not thus ask!" GC p. 525

2. "Satan cannot endure to have his powerful rival appealed to, for he fears and trembles before his strength and majesty. At the sound of fervent prayer, Satan's whole host trembles." 1T 346

3. "Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the merit of Christ will in the end prove to have been efficient for good." DA p. 362

C. Intercessory prayer changes me in positive ways. It intensifies my desire for the things prayed for and opens my mind to the prompting and communications of the Holy Spirit.

1. "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him." STC p. 93

D. Intercessory prayer works!!! - Taste and see!

1. "Now this is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." 1 John 5:14,15

E. Okay - The Lord has called us to intercede - But how??

II. HOW TO INTERCEDE - PRACTICAL METHODS FOR EFFECTIVE INTERCESSION.

A. Pray in faith, claiming the promises of God's word. The "ABC's of Prayer".

1. Claim His promises - "...by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." 2 Peter 1:4

2. Give thanks in advance of seeing the answer -
   a. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6,7

   b. "For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift that He has promised, we
may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received. We need to look for no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most.”

Education p. 258

c. "We do not pray any too much, but we are too sparing of giving thanks. If the loving-kindness of God called forth more thanksgiving and praise, we would have far more power in prayer. We would abound more and more in the love of God and have more bestowed to praise Him for. You who complain that God does not hear your prayers change your present order and mingle praise with your petitions. When you consider His goodness and mercies you will find that He will consider your wants." 5T 317

B. Unite with others in intercession for greater power.

1. "Again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." Matthew 18:19,20

2. Use short sentence prayers or "conversational prayer" when interceding in a group for better interest level and ministry to each other.

C. Be specific with requests and record the answers.

1. A prayer journal or prayer list helps memory and strengthens our faith as answers come. Write the requests down and record the answers as they come.

D. Be persistent and don’t give up!

1. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving." Col. 4:2

2. "Perseverance in prayer has been made a condition of receiving. We must pray always, if we would grow in faith and experience." SC p. 97

3. "Jacob prevailed because he was persevering and determined. His experience testifies to the power of importunate prayer. It is now we are to learn this lesson of prevailing prayer, of unyielding faith. The greatest victories to the church of Christ or to the individual Christian are not those that are gained by talent or education, by wealth or the favor of men. They are those victories that are gained in the audience chamber with God, when earnest, agonizing faith lays hold upon the mighty arm of power." Patriarchs and Prophets p. 203
E. The importance of heart searching, confession, and obedience.

“For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

1 John 3:20-23

F. The priority of personal time with God

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” John 15:7

G. Trust God - He always answers - but sometimes He says "No" or "Wait"

1. Definition of true faith - Daniel 3:17,18

2. If God really wanted to punish us, He’d answer all our prayers "yes".

3. “…When we do not receive the very things we ask for, at the time we ask, we are still to believe that the Lord hears, and that He will answer our prayers. We are so erring and short sighted that we sometimes ask for things that would not be a blessing to us, and our heavenly Father in love answers our prayers by giving us that which will be for our highest good - that which we ourselves would desire if with vision divinely enlightened we could see all things as they really are. When our prayers seem not to be answered, we are to cling to the promise, for the time of answering will surely come, and we shall receive the blessing we need most. ….God is too wise to err, and too good to withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly. Then do not fear to trust Him, even though you do not see the immediate answer to your prayers. Rely upon His sure promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Matthew 7:7, Steps to Christ p. 96
THE POWER OF PRAYING TOGETHER

Quotes from Ellen White’s Writings

1. “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” Matthew 18:19, 20 “Ask of Me, and I will answer your requests.”

The promise is made on condition that the united prayers of the church 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 of God and for one another.—Letter 32, 1903, p.5 (To Brother and Sister Farnsworth, January 28, 1903.) White Estate Washington D.C. October 22, 1979 (9MR 303.3) –MR No. 748 – The Power of United Prayer

2. The Lord has promised that where two or three are met together in His name, there will He be in the midst. Those who meet together for prayer will receive an unction from the Holy One. There is great need of secret prayer, but there is also need that several Christians meet together and unite with earnestness their petitions to God. –In Heavenly Places, page 91

3. It is in the order of God that those who bear responsibilities should often meet together to counsel with one another and to pray earnestly for that wisdom which He alone can impart. Unitedly make known your troubles to God. Talk less; much precious time is lost in talk that brings no light. Let brethren unite in fasting and prayer for the wisdom that God has promised to supply liberally. –Counsels on Diet and Foods, page 188.1

4. A chain of earnest, praying believers should encircle the world. Let all pray in humility. A few neighbors may meet together to pray for the Holy Spirit. Let those who cannot leave home, gather in their children, and unite in learning to pray together. They may claim the promise of the Savior: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:20 –Review and Herald, January 3, 1907

5. There is nothing more needed in the work than the practical results of communion with God. We should hold convocations for prayer, asking the Lord to open the way for the truth to enter the strongholds where Satan has set up his throne, and dispel the shadow he has cast athwart the pathway of those whom he is seeking to deceive and destroy. We have the assurance, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” James 5:16. –In Heavenly Places, page 93

6. Solicit prayer for the souls for whom you labor; present them before the church as subjects for their supplication. It will be just what the members of the church need, to have their minds called from their petty difficulties, to feel a great burden, a personal interest, for a soul that is ready to perish. Select another and still another soul, daily seeking guidance from God, laying every thing before Him in earnest prayer, and working in divine wisdom. As you do this, God will give you the Holy Spirit to convict and convert the soul. –Testimonies to the Church volume 6, pages 80-81
7. Why do not believers feel a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are out of Christ? Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another? –*Testimonies to the Church*, volume 7, page 21

8. We must be much in prayer if we would make progress in the divine life. When the message of truth was first proclaimed, how much we prayed. How often was the voice of intercession heard in the chamber, in the barn, in the orchard, or the grove? Frequently we spent hours in earnest prayer, two or three together claiming the promise; often the sound of weeping was heard and then the voice of thanksgiving and the song of praise. Now the day of God is nearer than when we first believed, and we should be more earnest, more zealous, and fervent than in those early days. Our perils are greater now than then. Souls are more hardened. We need now to be imbued with the Spirit of Christ, and we should not rest until we receive it. –*Testimonies to the Church*, volume 5, pages 161-162

9. Our Savior follows His lessons of instruction with a promise that if two or three should be united in asking any thing of God it should be given them. Christ here shows that there must be union with others, even in our desires for a given object. Great importance is attached to the united prayer, the union of purpose. God hears the prayers of individuals, but on this occasion Jesus was giving especial and important lessons that were to have a special bearing upon His newly organized church on the earth. There must be an agreement in the things which they desire and for which they pray. It was not merely the thoughts and exercises of one mind, liable to deception; but the petition was to be the earnest desire of several minds centered on the same point. –*Testimonies to the Church*, volume 3, page 429

10. I asked the angel why there was no more faith and power in Israel, “Ye let go of the arm of the Lord too soon. Press your petitions to the throne, and hold on by strong faith. –*Early Writings*, page 73

11. There are many who long to help others, but feel that they have no spiritual strength or light to impart. Let them present their petitions at the throne of grace. Plead for the Holy Spirit. God stands back of every promise He has made. With your Bible in your hands say, I have done as thou hast said. I present Thy promise, “Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. –*Christ Object Lessons*, page 147

12. He longs to have you reach after Him by faith. He longs to have you expect great things from Him. He longs to give you understanding in temporal as well as in spiritual matters. –*Christ Object Lessons*, page 146
PRAYER GROUP IDEAS

The following are some ideas that you might find helpful in making a small group prayer time meaningful and powerful:

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING. “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise; be thankful unto Him, and bless His name.” Psalm 100:4. “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms. O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker.” Psalm 96:2,6. It is powerful and a very special experience to begin prayer time with thanksgiving and praise. Also, mingle requests with praise and thanksgiving. The prayers in the Bible by men such as Daniel, Elijah, and others always began with praise, thanksgiving, or confessing who God is. “We do not pray any too much, but we are too sparing of giving thanks. If the loving-kindness of God called forth more thanksgiving and praise, we would have far more power in prayer. We would abound more and more in the love of God, and have more bestowed to praise Him for.” 5T, p. 317. I encourage you to read pages 315-317 of Volume 5 of Testimonies. It is so good!!

NO OBSTRUCTIONS. “Beloved, if our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” 1 John 3:21,22. What a difference it makes to spend the first few minutes of your prayer time clearing the path for God to hear your prayers as a group. Allow God to impress your minds with any sin you need to confess. Make this a silent time when each person does this individually. It would be helpful if you read the booklet "AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD IN PRAYER", by Juanita Kretschmar can be ordered by contacting: A Key Encounter, P.O. Box 177, Big Pine Key, FL 33043-0177; E-mail: PrayingKs@aol.com; Phone: 305-292-2070. On page 36 in this handout, or on page 18 in the booklet "A Key Encounter", you will find step-by-step directions for a leader to lead the group through a time of confession. This has been a powerful experience in my life, and I believe it can be in yours too!

TWO’S OR THREE’S. It is nice to have more people, but you only need two or three. “Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:19,20. “Our Savoir follows His lessons of instruction with a promise that if two or three should be united in asking anything of God, it should be given them. Christ here shows that there must be union with others, even in our desires for a given object. Great importance is attached to the united prayer, the union of purpose.” 3 T, p. 429.

ONCE A WEEK. Be sure and meet regularly. Meet once a week if possible. It is best to meet in person, but if this is impossible, pray together on the telephone.

SENTENCE PRAYERS. Instead of one person praying a long prayer and then the next person, have each person pray only two or three sentences at a time. It makes it much easier to listen to and you give the Holy Spirit time to impress each of you with what He wants you to pray. Also, someone may want to read a verse of scripture or start a song for the group to sing together during the prayer time. It is a beautiful experience! God loves for us to read His word back to Him in expressions of praise or promises. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Colossians 3:16. You’ll be amazed at how long a group can pray and enjoy it!
BIBLE PROMISES. Ask God to lead you to promises in His word that you can claim for the person or situation that is the subject of your prayer. We are told to put our finger on the promise and bring it before the Lord. Thanking Him in advance for the answer according to His will. “He is pleased with the faith that takes Him at His word. The mother of Augustine prayed for her son’s conversion. She saw no evidence that the Spirit of God was impressing his heart, but she was not discouraged. She laid her finger upon the texts, presenting before God His own words, and pleaded as only a mother can. Her deep humiliation, her earnest importunities, her unwavering faith, prevailed and the Lord gave her the desire of her heart. Today He is just as ready to listen to the petitions of His people. His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear.” 5 Testimonies 322, 323. Be sure and write down the promises He leads you to so you can remember to claim them in the future.

AGREE TOGETHER. When someone prays a request to God, be sure some others pray for that same request and agree together, it is powerful! Don’t think that because one person has prayed the request no one else needs to. “Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven.” Matthew 18:19. How encouraging it is to be lifted up in prayer.

HOLY SPIRIT. Be sure to ask the Holy Spirit to show you how or what you should pray for in a person’s life or in a particular situation. Claim Romans 8:26, “Likewise, the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

TAKING PRAYER REQUESTS Don’t ask for prayer requests from the group. Instead tell people to pray their request and encourage others to join in agreement and pray for those requests. Here’s why – time! Talking about the requests will take up most of your prayer group time. Satan is thrilled if he can keep us talking about the problem instead of praying about the problem. Group members will often begin counseling and suggesting solutions. The power is from God! The more we pray, the more His power is unleashed!

PRAYER REQUEST NOTEBOOK. Buy a stenographers note pad or use a spiral bound notebook. I would suggest drawing a line down the middle of the paper. Put the requests in the left column and the answers in the right. It is so exciting and faith building to look back and see how God has answered your prayers!

YOUR DAILY TIME. This is so important! What is life all about if we are not spending time daily at the feet of Jesus talking with Him and reading His word! If you will make knowing God a first priority in your life, it will open such a beautiful experience to you. “From the secret place of prayer came the power that shook the world in the Great Reformation. There, with holy calmness, the servants of the Lord set their feet upon the rock of His promises.” Great Controversy, p. 210.

“It is part of God’s plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow if we did not thus ask.” Great Controversy, p. 525
PARTNERING IN PRAYER

"AGAIN, I TELL YOU THAT IF TWO OF YOU ON EARTH AGREE ABOUT ANYTHING YOU ASK FOR, IT WILL BE DONE FOR YOU BY MY FATHER IN HEAVEN." MATTHEW 18:19

1. **Why Is Prayer Partnering So Important?**
   - God asks us to pray for each other. (Eph. 6:18)
   - Praying with others enriches your personal prayer life.
   - Prayer partnering fills people’s deep hunger to have others caring and praying for them.
   - Prayer partnering helps you appreciate the meaning of Christian community.
   - Prayer partnering assists you in being accountable to at least one other person.
   - Prayer partnering puts us on track with God.
   - Prayer partnering sets God’s power at work in your life and in the church.

2. **Guidelines For Prayer Partnering**
   - Decide how many times you will meet and how often.
   - Withhold judgment regarding anything said.
   - Resist the temptation to become a counselor your partner’s problems are not yours to solve.
   - Maintain confidentiality.
   - Try to spend most of your time together praying rather than talking about what to pray about.
   - Keep a record of answers.
   - Claim scripture promises as you pray.
   - Keep prayer times conversational; pray in short sentences or paragraphs.
   - View pauses or silence as a normal and positive ingredient of your times together.

3. **Work Through The Barriers Of Prayer Partnering**
   - **TIME** - We make time for what is important to us. Prayer is a paradox that both takes time and frees time.
   - **RISK** - Fear of being vulnerable or misunderstood. What may seem initially intimidating can be a benefit.
   - **PREVIOUS BAD EXPERIENCE** - One bad experience doesn’t have to lead to another. Try again with a new partner.
   - **FEELINGS** - (Inadequacy, Uncertainty, Doubt, etc.) For most people, these feelings are normal when attempting something new. Honestly acknowledge your feelings and pray about them.

4. **What Do Prayer Partners Pray About?**
   - "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Eph. 6:18
   - Praise & Thanksgiving
   - Family concerns (spouse, children, in-law issues)
   - Mutual friends
   - Work pressures
• Church matters
• Personal requests (temptation areas, new ministry opportunities, future dreams, etc.)
• Individual and corporate church revival
• Outpouring of the Holy Spirit
• Non-attending members
• Your community
• National Leaders
• Pastor & Church Leaders
• Prayer Partner Ministry
• Students, Teachers, & Schools

**Created by Peggy Casebier**
Couple prayer can add intimacy, both to your marriage and to your relationship with God. Here’s how to get started.

“If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask,” Christ promised in Matthew 18:19, “it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”

This promise, of course, is not limited to married couples, but who else has the capacity to agree so deeply? And who else needs such prayer so badly?

Couple prayer, as I call it, can be a powerful tool in deepening communication and commitment to each other. Here are some ideas to help you and your mate along the road to openness in prayer.

**Begin Gently**

Ann and David hadn’t always prayed together. They knew they should. They both wanted to, but Ann suffered from low self-esteem.

“I always felt David was more spiritual than I,” she explains. “I thought he wouldn’t think the things I prayed about were important. He’d criticize my prayer, maybe even diagram it in his head.” The time came, however, when David persuaded her to try. “This is something we must do. Our kids need it,” he insisted.

“We began with just a few sentences each,” Ann remembers. “David was very gentle with me, and gradually I began to feel more comfortable about praying with him. If we couldn’t have prayed through these last crises, I don’t know how we’d have made it.”

If your spouse is like Ann, here are some ways you can help:

1. Don’t push. If you’re eager to pray together, but your spouse is not, go easy. This sounds simple, but it’s very difficult, when you know how necessary and how powerful couple prayer is.

2. Be sensitive. Your spouse may want to pray with you but find it hard. It is harder for some people than it is for others. Often, as you become more open in other areas, however, you will become more open in prayer as well.

3. Let your spouse know you value his or her prayers. “I’d really appreciate it if you’d pray for me as you go through the day. I’m scared about...”

4. Mealtime prayers are an easy way to start. Hold hands around the table. You may be able to introduce a little more depth by suggesting, “Honey, when you pray at dinner, would you thank the Lord for helping Angie with her test.” Or, “Would you mind praying for the medical tests I’m having tomorrow.” Go easy, though. Remember, don’t push!

5. Pray with the children. Some spouses feel more free in praying aloud with the children than alone together. If your spouse does, be grateful for that, at least.
6. Share prayer requests and pray together silently before going to sleep. If the reluctant spouse doesn’t feel his prayer is being judged, he or she may be more willing. This was our first step back into praying together.

7. Pray together in times of crisis. “When there is a specific need,” one woman told me, “we pray better.” When you have children, that can be most of the time.

Make Time

In these days of two-career families and busy schedules, making time for couple prayer can be a formidable hurdle, but others have succeeded, and you can too. It’s really a matter of priorities. If prayer is important to both of you, you’ll make the time.

Pray about finding a suitable time. If possible, pray together about it. Then start experimenting. One of these options may work for you.

1. Set the alarm a few minutes earlier in the morning. Catherine Marshall and her husband, Len Seurd, would set their coffeepot timer each night. In the morning they woke to the aroma of fresh coffee perking. They’d pour a cup of coffee and sit propped up in bed as they prayed and studied the Scriptures together.

2. If you breakfast together, pray then. We do this, though it’s not our main prayer time. I feel good about the day when I’ve heard Pete pray for me and the children. He appreciates my prayers then too.

3. Pray before going to bed. It can be very comforting to share with God about both the day’s blessings and problems before going to sleep.

4. Pray on the telephone together at lunch or another convenient time during the day. You can also do this when one spouse is out of town—it’s a lovely way to keep in touch. Many businesses pay for calls home.

5. Take time for spontaneous prayers whenever a need arises. This may even be several times a day.

6. If you absolutely do not have a time when you can pray together on a daily basis, agree to set aside a time once a week when you can pray. Make it special. Share a scripture or two to set the tone.

7. List prayer requests and praises for each other, then pray separately, but at the same time if possible. You can be close in spirit, even when you are not together in body. If you are accustomed to praying together at 10:00 p.m., and one spouse is out of town, try to continue the practice. Just meet in spirit at God’s throne.

Experiment

Once you’ve incorporated couple prayer into your schedule, experiment with different prayer styles to find the one that fits your needs. When you find it, you may want to occasionally use a different method to add variety.
1. Conversational prayer. Begin with praise and thanksgiving. Continue to confession of specific sin, and end with requests. Let the conversation flow back and forth, with each partner praying spontaneously. Recognize God as a participant; accept short silences as times when He may be speaking.

2. Structured conversational prayer. As with conversational prayer, begin with praise, thanksgiving, and confession of sin. When you are ready to make requests, one spouse leads out with a concern. The other then continues that prayer from his or her own perspective. Suppose Johnnie is having trouble with mathematics at school, for example. The husband may pray for him to be able to concentrate and understand the concepts better. The wife continues by praying for patience on the part of the teacher or herself in working with him.

The wife then prays about a subject of concern to her. When she finishes, her husband continues that prayer, adding his own thoughts about it. He then introduces another prayer request. This method of prayer helps each partner concentrate on the prayer of the other, since he will continue the same subject.

3. Traditional prayer. In this style of prayer, one person prays about all of his/her concerns. Then, the other prays about all his concerns. If you have been brought up on this kind of prayer or like things very structured, you may feel more comfortable with this style. This type of prayer requires more concentration on the part of the agreeing (listening) spouse, however. So, avoid lengthy prayers, unless they are meaningful to both of you.

Ideally, prayer times should include praise, confession, requests, and listening to God’s voice. Practically, it’s more important that you pray than that you get all the parts incorporated properly. If there’s only time for a short sentence or two, God understands.

**Pray With-Not at-Your Spouse**

My husband Pete and I faced our own crisis over prayer in the first month of our marriage. Each evening we’d kneel by the sofa for our prayer time. I treasured those minutes as we poured out our hearts to God, telling Him our needs and desires.

Then one night before we prayed, Pete looked at me and said, “Sometimes I feel like you pray at me.” “What?” I asked. “I just tell the Lord the needs as I see them.”

“But, when you pray, ‘Lord, help us do this or that,’ I feel like you are really pointing out what you think I should be doing,” he insisted.

Deep inside, I knew he was right, but how could he criticize my prayers to God: How could I ever again be spontaneous in our prayers together?

Devastated, my emotions erupted in uncontrollable sobbing. Pete looked on helplessly. When there were no more tears, we discovered that our ability to be vulnerable in prayer together had disappeared. Many years passed before it was restored.

Here are some suggestions on how to keep your prayer time a positive experience:

1. Don’t scold or nag. Unless your spouse asks for prayer in an area where you think he or she needs improvement or help, it’s wise to keep quiet. Reserve those prayers for private time with the Lord. No one likes to be preached at—especially in prayer.
2. Find common ground. You don’t have to agree with your mate on everything about a situation in order to pray together over it. You may need to sort through the pieces, discuss, perhaps even vent your anger or get counseling in a crisis. But at prayer time, decide what the bottom line is.

3. Accept yourself and your mate. Some people, for instance, are naturally more reticent to pray with their spouse than are others. Perhaps they consider prayer a private thing, or maybe they are more regimented. These people are often matched with more open, spontaneous mates. Learn to appreciate these differences.

4. Focus on Jesus. One wife told me, “Sometimes I feel like we’re praying to each other, rather than to God.” To avoid that danger, take a little time to center your thoughts on Jesus. Sing a worship song, read a Psalm, have a short praise time together.

5. Persevere. Anything new feels difficult and awkward. Then too, I’m convinced that Satan will prevent any kind of prayer if he can—but how much more so couple prayer! Whatever you do, don’t get discouraged if you miss a day or two.

Again, don’t give up! Things that are worthwhile usually do take time. I pray that the day will come when you will say to your spouse, “I don’t know how I’d have gotten through this day (or week) without your prayers.”

Geneva Cobb Iijima writes from Oregon City, Oregon. Copyright 1990 by Geneva Cobb Iijima
“Parents have a great and responsible work to do, and they may well inquire: ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ But God has promised to give wisdom to those that ask in faith, and He will do just as He said He would. He is pleased with the faith that takes Him at His word.”

“The mother of Augustine prayed for her son’s conversion. She saw no evidence that the Spirit of God was impressing his heart, but she was not discouraged. She laid her finger upon the texts, presenting before God His own words, and pleaded as only a mother can. Her deep humiliation, her earnest importunities, her unwavering faith, prevailed and the Lord gave her the desire of her heart. Today He is just as ready to listen to the petitions of His people. His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; “and if Christian parents seek Him earnestly, He will fill their mouths with arguments and for His name’s sake will work mightily in their behalf in the conversion of their children.” 5 Testimonies 322, 323

**PROMISES TO CLAIM**

**ISAIAH 49:25** (NKJV)
- “…..For I will contend with him that contends with you, and I will save your children.”

**ISAIAH 44:3** (NKJV)
- “…..I will pour My spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring.”

**ISAIAH 54:13** (NKJV)
- “And all your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.”

**PSALMS 72:4** (NKJV)
- “…..He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor.”

**JEREMIAH 31:16,17** (NKJV)
- “Thus says the lord; refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears: for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord; and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in your future, says the Lord, that your children shall come back to their own border.”

**JEREMIAH 29:11,12** (NKJV)
- “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me, and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.”

**3 JOHN 4** (NKJV)
- “I have no greater joy than to hear that My children walk in truth.”
### A.C.T.S. Prayer Format

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THE SANCTUARY
A MODEL FOR PRAYER

KEY


2. Confession - 1 John 1:8-9; Romans 10:9; 2 Timothy 2:19.

3. Washing through the Word/Listen to God - Ephesians 5:25-26; John 17:17.


5. Strength for the day - John 6:32-33; Romans 13:12-14; Put on the whole armor of God - Ephesians 6:10-18 (see p. 28).

6. Intercession - Philippians 1:3-4; Romans 1:9-10.

7. Experience intimate communion - Psalm 16:8,11. Enter into the heavenly sanctuary with Christ. Hebrews 10:19, 20 (in the context of Mt. 27:51a, Hebrews 9:8-14, Hebrews 10:11-22)
THE LORD’S PRAYER
A MODEL FOR PRAYER

Focus upon God

a. Hallowed be Your Name
   (1) Praise God for His character
   (2) Praise God for His works

b. Your Kingdom Come (acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord)
   (1) In my own life
   (2) Intercede for others
      (a) Family
      (b) Friends
      (c) Church
      (d) Country/World

c. Your Will be Done
   (1) Lay out my plans before the Lord
   (2) Intercede for others

Present our needs

d. Give us this day our daily bread
   (1) Present specific physical needs before the Lord
   (2) Claim His promises to provide

e. Forgive us our debts
   (1) Confess specific personal sins and sins of family
   (2) Claim His promises of forgiveness, cleansing and healing

f. Deliver us from evil
   (1) Accept power from God through the anointing of the Holy Spirit
   (2) Put on the whole armor of God

Focus upon God

g. Conclude by giving praise and glory to God
h. Trust in His abiding presence
ENCOUNTERING GOD IN PRAYER
A MODEL FOR PRAYER
by Juanita Kretschmar

1. Ask the Father for the covering of the Holy Spirit bringing the presence of Jesus. Claim the blood of Jesus over all sin. Ask for angels to guard you, since He has promised. Ask Him to make sure that no other influences or thoughts will be allowed to disturb, that He will protect.

2. Worship the Creator, Redeemer, King, etc.

3. Invite Him to search your life for a revelation of hidden sin. Allow Him to take you back to childhood if necessary. Take time to be attentive and listen.

4. As conviction comes to your mind of thoughts, acts, cherished “rights” such as anger, rebellion and resentment, or experiences that in the presence of the cross are sin, be specific, call it sin, and ask for forgiveness. Accept forgiveness and thank Him aloud. (Your ears need to hear your own voice expressing confidence and praise.)

5. Ask for a deeper repentance. Since it is a gift, thank Him, whether you feel anything or not.

6. By your own free choice, tell your Heavenly Father you give Him permission to remove the sin and sense of guilt or condemnation that came with the sin. Let God know you are willing to allow Him to place the burden you have been carrying on the shoulders of His Son. Accept Jesus’ desire to release you from this guilt. Christ wants to do this for you. Be sure to express thanks aloud.

7. Ask God what He has for you in exchange. What characteristic of Jesus is He waiting to give you? What gift of guidance or insight is He making available? Take time to be attentive and listen.

8. Let God know you will accept that gift (whatever thought, word, or picture He brings to your mind). Be sure to thank Him aloud.

9. Repeat the process as desired. Enjoy His presence. Praise Him.

10. At the time you are accepting gifts from God, if He has just impressed you of specific instances of sin, you may want to ask what help He would have sent if you had turned to Him fully in that earlier moment of temptation. Or you may ask what Jesus would have done in your place. He may give you delightful insights.

11. You may want to ask Him at the final moments of this specific prayer if there is anything or anyone else He wants you to pray about or for, or if there is any particular instruction He wants to share with you, etc. Take time to be attentive and listen.

12. Be sure to praise Him aloud as you end the time of prayer. You’ll want to. He’s a wonderful God, and a marvelous, generous, loving Friend.
HOW TO GET STARTED PRAYERWALKING

• **Join with Other Believers.** Join your faith with others to help prayer flow in an engaging conversational style. Large groups sometimes fail to give everyone a chance to participate. Pairs and triplets work best. (For example, a group of 8 could naturally divide into pairs as they walk, but be in sight of each other or meet back together at a certain location.)

• **Set Aside Time.** Allowing one or two full hours gives prayerwalkers a good chance to manage preliminaries and follow-up discussions, although lots can be done in less time.

• **Choose an Area.** Ask God to guide you. It’s best by far to learn the joys of prayerwalking in unfamiliar neighborhoods; you’ll return quickly to your own neighborhood with fresh vision. Centers of commerce and religion are fascinating, but there’s nothing like touching families, schools, and churches in residential areas. Use elevated points to pray over a panorama. Linger at specific sites which seem to be key. When deciding where to go in a new community, you may choose to link up with a Christian ministering in that area so your prayers can be strategic to ministry plans that are being implemented.

• **Pray with Insight.** Pray for the people you see. As you do, you might find the Spirit of God recalibrating your heart with His own sensitivities. Enhance these responsive insights with research done beforehand. Use knowledge of past events and current trends to enrich intercession. Above all, pray Scripture. If you have no clear place to begin praying, select just about any of the Biblical prayers, and you will find that they almost pray themselves.

• **Focus on God.** Make God’s promises rather than Satan’s schemes the highlight of your prayer. Your discernment of evil powers may at times exceed God’s specific guidance to engage them in direct combat. Consider the simplicity of first making direct appeal to the throne of God before attempting to pick street fights with demonic powers. Seek a restraining order from heaven upon evil so that God’s empowered people may bring forth God’s intended blessings on the city.

• **Regather and Report.** Share what you have experienced and prayed. Expressing something of your insights and faith will encourage others – as well as yourself. Set plans for further prayerwalking.

• **Coordinate Efforts.** Enlist other praying people to join with friends to cover special areas. Give leadership by forming and mixing prayer bands. Seek to collect written notes recording which areas have been covered and what kinds of prayers have been prayed. Pool your insights to ascertain whether God is prompting a repeated focus on particular areas. Eventually aim to cover your entire town or city, unless God guides otherwise.
THEMES FOR PRAYERWALKING

Attempt to keep every prayer pertinent to the specific community you pass through. As you do, you will find prayers naturally progress to the nation and to the world.

Use a theme passage of Scripture. Unless God guides you to use another passage, try 1 Timothy 2:1-10. Many have it to be a useful launching point for prayerwalking. Verse 8 speaks of the important territorial dimension to prayer connected with God’s desire that all people be saved: “I want the men in every place to pray” (italics added).

Copy this and other passages in a format easy to read aloud several times during your walk. Each of the following prayer points emerges from this passage.

- **Concerning Christ:** Proclaim Him afresh to be the one Mediator and the ransom for all. Name Him Lord of the neighborhood and of the lives you see.
- **Concerning Leaders:** Pray for people responsible in any position of authority—for teachers, police, administrators, and parents.
- **Concerning Peace:** Cry out for the godliness and holiness of God’s people to increase into substantial peace. Pray for new churches to be established.
- **Concerning Truth:** Declare openly the bedrock reality that there is one God. Celebrate the faithful revelation of His truth to all peoples through ordinary people (1 Tim. 2:8). Pray that the eyes of minds would cease to be blinded by Satan so that they could come to a knowledge of the truth.
- **Concerning the Gospel:** Praise God for His heart’s desire that all people be saved. Ask that heaven would designate this year as a “proper time” for the testimony of Christ to be given afresh with simple power (1 Tim.2:6). Name specific people.
- **Concerning the Blessing of God:** Thanksgivings are to be made on behalf of all people. Give God the explicit thanks He deserves for the goodness He constantly bestows on the homes you pass by. Ask to see the city with His eyes, that you might sense what is good and pleasing in His sight as well as what things grieve Him deeply. Ask God to bring forth an enduring spiritual awakening.
- **Concerning the Church:** Ask for healing in relationships, that there be no wrath or dissension among God’s people. Ask that God would make His people, men and women alike, expressive in worship with the substance of radiant, relational holiness. Ask that our worship would be adorned with the confirming power of saints doing good in our communities.

*Taken from Prayerwalking by Steve Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick (Creation House)*
Lord, Give Us ________ for Your Kingdom!

(Name of City/Town/Area)

In preparation for Jesus’ soon coming, I will answer the call of Luke 10:2 by:

1. Praying intensely for the spiritual needs of:
   
   1. ____________________________
      
      Name
   
   2. ____________________________
      
      Name
   
   3. ____________________________
      
      Name

2. I will ask God to guide me as I seek to cultivate friendships and opportunities to love these people.

3. I will pray that they will surrender their lives to Christ and accept His will for their lives.

4. I will claim this Bible promise “...Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me....” 1 Chronicles 4:10. Also, 1 John 5:16 and Isaiah 42:7, 16.

Please keep this form in your Bible to remind you to pray for your three friends.

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Please keep this form in your Bible to remind you to pray for your three friends.
WHAT TO PRAY FOR NON-CHRISTIANS

1. That God draws them to Himself
   Jn. 6:44 “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him…”

2. That they seek to know God
   Acts 17:27 “God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.”
   Dt. 4:29 “But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find Him if you

3. That they believe the Scriptures
   1 Thess. 2:13 “And we also thank God continually because when you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God…”
   Rom. 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

4. That Satan is bound from blinding them to the Truth
   Mt. 13:19 “When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.”
   2 Cor. 4:4 “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

5. That the Holy Spirit works in them
   Jn. 16:8-13 “When (the Holy Spirit) comes, He will convict the world of guilt in

6. That they believe in Christ as Savior
   Jn. 1:12 “Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He
   Jn. 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; He has crossed over from death to life.”

7. That they turn from sin
   Acts 17:30, 31 “… (God) commands all people everywhere to repent.”
   Acts 3:19 “Repent, then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”
8. That God send someone to lead them to Christ

Matt. 9:37, 38 “Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”

9. That they confess Christ as Lord

Rom. 10:9, 10 “…if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

10. That they yield all to follow Christ

2 Cor. 5:15 “And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.”

Phil. 3:7, 8 “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ…”

11. That they take root and grow in Christ

Col. 2:6, 7 “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”
“THAT WE MAY BE ONE”  
Principles for Better Relationships

I. Our Lord’s will for us–that we be one so the world will believe in Him

A. Jesus prays for us; “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” John 17:21

B. Two Primary Reasons Jesus Came to Earth

1. To reconcile us to the Father by His perfect life and death. Romans 3; 2 Corinthians 5:7-21.

2. To reconcile us to each other in perfect agape love relationships (restores us to the image of God). John 17:21-23; Ephesians 2:13-18.

C. “It’s not the opposition of the world that most endangers the church of Christ. It is the evil cherished in the hearts of believers...on the other hand, the strongest witness that God has sent His Son into the world is the existence of harmony and union among men of varied dispositions who form His church.” Acts of the Apostles, p. 549.

II. Principles for Better Relationships

A. Intercede in prayer for people instead of trying to change them or trying to do the Holy Spirit’s work yourself.

1. Claim promises such as 1 John 5:16 and Isaiah 42:7, 16; Acts 26:18; Isaiah 65:1; Jeremiah 24:7; Jeremiah 3:22; Ezekiel 37:2,3.

2. As we spend time with the Lord He may show us we are part of the problem or set a mirror before us so we can see our need for change. Galatians 6:1-3; Luke 6:37, 38, 41, 42.

3. Live the fruit of the Spirit and “preach” at others less.

4. Take action only if the Holy Spirit leads us.

B. Respect diversity of temperaments and God’s created differences in people.

1. The Lord has created and gifted us differently so the Body of Christ will have all its complimentary parts. Ephesians 4:1-32.
2. Sacredly regard the feelings and respect the rights of those with whom God has placed us in relationship.

“Marked diversities of disposition and character frequently exist in the same family, for it is in the order of God that persons of varied temperament should associate together. When this is the case each member of the household should sacredly regard the feelings and respect the rights of the others. By this means, mutual consideration and forbearance will be cultivated, prejudices will be softened, and rough points of character smoothed harmony may be secured, and the blending of the varied temperaments may be a benefit to each!” Child Guidance p. 205.

C. Assume the best about other’s motives and actions.

1. Listen more—seek first to understand clearly and then to be understood. Don’t take things second hand from secondary sources.

2. “Christlike love places the most favorable construction on the motives and acts of others. It does not needlessly expose their faults; it does not listen eagerly to unfavorable reports, but seeks rather to bring to mind the good qualities of others.” Acts of the Apostles, p. 319.

D. Follow Christ’s specific instructions and do not talk to others about problems!

1. Only say those things which can be helpful for building others up according to their needs. Even if something is “true”, don’t talk to others if it can’t help or resolve the problem. Ephesians 4:29-32.

2. Follow the “gospel order” in all situations.

   a. Matthew 18:15-17 - When a brother in Christ sins against you:

      1. Go to the person “alone” first.
      2. If needed, take one or two others as witnesses.
      3. Lastly, if needed, take it to the church for discipline.

   b. Matthew 5:23,24 - If someone has “ought against you”, before you worship, go and seek to be reconciled

   c. Never talk to those who are not part of the situation or solution process.
E. Yield our “rights” and “expectations” to God.

1. Jesus did not go around defending His rights or getting angry when His expectations weren’t met. Many of our relationship problems are caused by our concern for our “rights”.

2. There is a time for “tough love”, but be sure it’s the Lord’s will, not self-centeredness.

F. Praise God for the source of irritations.

1. Make a list of the good things about the other person and praise God for those things.

2. Pray for the “problem person” to be blessed. Matthew 5:43, 44.

3. Praise drives evil angels away.

   ‘When things go crossways at your homes, strike up a song about the matchless charms of the Son of God, and I tell you, when you touch this strain, Satan will leave you.” Review and Herald 8/51900


G. Lay aside pride and selfishness.

1. Five minutes can solve most difficulties if self and pride are laid aside!

   “I saw that the remnant were not prepared for what is coming upon the earth. Stupidity, like lethargy, seemed to hang upon the minds of most of those who profess to believe that we are having the last message. My accompanying angel cried out with awful solemnity, “Get ready! Get ready! for the fierce anger of the Lord is soon to come. His wrath is to be poured out, unmixed with mercy, and ye are not ready. Rend the heart, and not the garment. A great work must be done for the remnant. Many of them are dwelling upon little trials.” Said the angel, “Legions of evil angels are around you, and are trying to press in their awful darkness, that ye may be ensnared and taken. Ye suffer your minds to be diverted too readily from the work of preparation and the all-important truths for these last days. And ye dwell upon little trials and go into minute particulars of little difficulties to explain them to the satisfaction of this one or that.” Conversation has been protracted for hours between the parties concerned, and not only has their time been wasted, but the servants of God are held to listen to them, when the
hearts of both parties are unsubdued by grace. If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties. Angels have been grieved and God displeased by the hours which have been spent in justifying self. I saw that God will not bow down and listen to long justifications, and He does not want His servants to do so, and thus precious time be wasted that should be spent in showing transgressors the error of their ways and pulling souls out of the fire.” Early Writings, p 119, 120.

H. Daily and moment by moment in-filling of the Lord Himself is the only way we can truly love others!!

1. We only love God to the extent we love the person we like the least. “In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brother…”

2. But we cannot love—no love in us—GOD IS LOVE!

3. ”The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.” Romans 5:5

4. ASK AND WE SHALL RECEIVE! CHRIST IN YOU –THE HOPE OF GLORY!
MODERN PETER

Lord, do you require more of men than what I am now doing? I'm busy in your work, yet I am not certain that it is what you have for me to do. Lord, what more can I do to serve you better?

Nothing, my child.

But, Lord, why do I feel discontented with my service for you? I'm giving of myself and my money unsparingly. I'm a church deaconess and a Sabbath School teacher. I give much of my time to witnessing for you. What more can I do for you?

Nothing, my child.

But, Lord, there still remains a vacancy inside, in spite of my private and public devotion to you. What more can I do?

Nothing. Listen, my child: Stop doing things for Me.

What? Now, Lord, let's be reasonable. You've blessed my work for you; you've exhorted me to labor in your vineyard. What do you mean? What if I do stop doing things for you?

Then I'll be able to do them through you.

Oh... I think I see. Of course, Lord. My work for you is in vain unless you do it through me. Make me a fit channel, Lord. Do humble me and may I be a worthy vessel for you to use. Now, what task do you want to do through me?

None, my child.

What? You said you'd work through me. What is your task for me?

My daughter, love me.

Now wait a minute, Lord. I've been a Christian for eleven years; what do you mean, "Love Me?" I do love you. Now, that is settled. What is the next step?

There is no other step, loved one; just love Me.

You know I love you, Lord-why, my whole life is taken up with service to you. What do you mean?

Your love for Me is revealed in your love to your fellow man.

Oh, I know that, Lord. I do love my fellow man!
Do you love your Biology Professor?

Well, I don't hate the guy; I just leave him alone and he leaves me alone.

Do you love your Biology Professor?

Now, look, we don't get along. Our personalities clash; one cannot solve that, so I avoid him.

I died for him--and live for him too.

I know, Lord? And I would like to see him saved but you understand that I just don't click with him.

Do you love your Biology Professor?

Oh, I respect him--and I think he respects me. I recognize that he is a fine fellow, and I'm sure he'd make a good Christian. But I guess I do think of him as being overconfident and conceited--even a bigot at times. You know his kind, Lord. Why all this about him, Lord? Look at all these other people I love. Why I could... Do you love your Biology Professor?

He's the one person, Lord, that I just can't stand. He's pretty hard to take, but I do love... I guess everyone else, and certainly, you know I love you.

You only love me to the extent that you love the person you like the least.

But... well, then, I really don't care about You then. But... I've been a Christian eleven years. I always thought I loved you. Now I see. Lord, thank you for revealing this to me. I will truly love you now.

You cannot, my child.

But you said "love Me" and when I said "OK" you... I don't understand.

How can you love Me?... There is no love in you... God is love.

Then I cannot love anyone?

You are only the channel through which I can love anyone.

Then: Love this world through me, Lord.
This world of broken men.
Thou didst love through death, Lord:
O, love through me again!

Yes, I will, my child.
I usually close by saying:

Isn't this too strong?

*We only love God to the extent that we love the person we like the least.*

But what did Jesus say?

"*In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brothers, ye have done it unto me?*"

Thank God He says:

"*The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.*"

_Romans 5:5_

Ask and ye shall receive!
BIBLIOGRAPHY ON PRAYER

Please pray for the Lord to guide you as to which books will be helpful to you.

1. Coon, Glenn  
   The ABC’s of Bible Prayer  
   R&H

2. Finley, Mark  
   Prayer Makes a Difference  
   Hart Research Center

3. Kretschmar, Juanita  
   An Encounter With God In Prayer  
   A Key Encounter

4. Kretschmar, Juanita  
   Power To Cope  
   A Key Encounter @ 305-292-2070

5. Morneau, Roger  
   Incredible Answers to Prayer  
   R&H

6. Morneau, Roger  
   More Incredible Answers to Prayer  
   R&H

7. Morneau, Roger  
   When You Need Incredible Answers to Prayer  
   R&H

8. Shewmake, Carroll Johnson  
   Practical Pointers to Personal Prayer  
   R&H

9. Venden, Morris  
   The Answer Is Prayer  
   PPPA

10. White, Ellen  
    Christ’s Object Lessons, “Asking To Give”, pp. 139-149  
    PPPA

11. White, Ellen  
    PPPA

12. White, Ellen  
    In Heavenly Places, March 1-31, pp. 67-97  
    PPPA

13. White, Ellen  
    Mount of Blessings, pp. 86-87  
    PPPA

14. White, Ellen  
    Prayer  
    PPPA

15. White, Ellen  
    Power of Prayer  
    Teach Services, Inc.

16. White, Ellen  
    Steps to Christ, “The Privilege of Prayer”, pp. 63-71  
    PPPA

Most resources available through your local Adventist Book Center (1-800-843-8585)

RESOURCES FOR A PRAYER MINISTRY

1. Graf, Jonathan & Hinkle, Lani  
   My House Shall Be a House of Prayer  
   A Pray! Magazine Book

2. Griend, Alvin J. Vander  
   The Praying Church Sourcebook  
   CRC Publication

3. Jacobsen, Ruthie  
   Establishing a Prayer Ministry  
   Advent Source

4. Kamstra, Douglas A.  
   The Praying Church Idea Book  
   CRC Publications

5. Maxwell, John  
   Partners In Prayer  
   Thomas Nelson Publisher

6. Maxwell, Randy  
   Bring Back the Glory  
   PPPA

7. Shewmake, Carroll Johnson  
   When We Pray For Others  
   R&H

8. Franklin, John  
   And the Place Was Shaken  
   Broadman & Holman Publishers

9. Sacks, Cheryl  
   The Prayer Saturated Church  
   Navpress Publishing Group
1. Every promise in the Word of God is for us. In your prayers, present the pledged word of Jehovah and by faith claim His promises. His word is the assurance that if you ask in faith, you will receive all spiritual blessings. Continue to ask, and you will receive exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think. Educate yourself to have unlimited confidence in God. Cast all your care upon Him. Wait patiently for Him, and He will bring it to pass.  
*In Heavenly Places, p. 71*

2. We are to come to God, not in a spirit of self-justification, but with humility, repenting of our sins. He is able to help us, willing to do for us more than we ask or think. He has the abundance of heaven wherewith to supply our necessities . . . God is holy, and we must pray, “lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.” *1 Timothy 2:8, In Heavenly Places, p. 71*

3. For any gift He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received. *Education, p. 258*

4. God stands back of every promise He has made. *Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 147*

5. Can you not trust in your heavenly Father? Can you not rest upon His gracious promise? Can we not have implicit trust, knowing that He is faithful who hath promised? I entreat you to let your trembling faith again grasp the promises of God. Bear your whole weight upon them with unwavering faith; for they will not, they cannot, fail. *Testimonies, Vol. 2, p. 497*

6. Let these blessed promises, set in the framework of faith, be placed in memory’s halls. Not one of them will fail. All that God hath spoken He will do. “He is faithful that promised.”  
*Testimonies, Vol. 5, p. 630*

7. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. *Romans 15:4*

8. We should now acquaint ourselves with God by proving His promises. Angels record every prayer that is earnest and sincere. We should rather dispense with selfish gratifications than neglect communion with God. *The Great Controversy, p. 622*

9. How I wish that we might all believe in the promises of God . . . We are not to look into our hearts for joyful emotion as an evidence of our acceptance with heaven, but we are to take God’s promises and say, “They are mine. The Lord is letting His Holy Spirit rest upon me. I am receiving the light; for the promise is, ‘Believe that ye receive the things ye ask for, and ye shall have them.’ By faith I reach within the veil and lay hold of Christ, my strength. I thank God that I have a Savior.” *Signs of the Times, March 25, 1889*

10. Think of Christ. Look to Him in faith; believing His promises. Keep your mind trustful. He will be your stay. Lean on Him, depend on Him . . . Put your trust in One whose arm will never fail . . . Looking to Jesus you will find encouragement. *Selected Messages, Book 2, p. 265*

11. For all the promises of God in him are yes, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.  
*2 Corinthians 1:20*
12. Instead of thinking of your discouragements, think of the power you can claim in Christ’s name . . . Let your thoughts be directed to the evidences of the great love of God for you. Faith can endure trial, resist temptation, and bear up under disappointment. Jesus lives as our advocate. All is ours that His mediation secures . . . All experiences and circumstances are God’s workmen whereby good is brought to us. *My Life Today*, p. 488,489 or (TBOGA p. 27)

13. The enemy never can take out of the hand of Christ the one who is simply trusting in His promises. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Ellen G. White Comments on Revelation 3:3; p. 959 or (TBOGA p. 11)*

14. The children of God may rejoice in all things and at all times. When troubles and difficulties come, believing in the wise providence of God, you may rejoice. You need not wait for a happy flight of feelings, but by faith you may lay hold of the promises and lift up a hymn of thanksgiving to God . . . *In Heavenly Places, p. 123*

15. There are many who, though striving to obey God’s commandments, have little peace or joy. This lack in their experience is the result of a failure to exercise faith. They walk, as it were, in a salt land, a parched wilderness. They claim little, when they might claim much; for there is no limit to the promises of God. Such ones do not correctly represent the sanctification that comes through obedience to the truth. The Lord would have all His sons and daughters happy, peaceful, and obedient. Through the exercise of faith the believer comes into possession of these blessings. Through faith, every deficiency of character may be supplied, every defilement cleansed, every fault corrected, every excellence developed. *In Heavenly Places, p. 200*

16. Jacob prevailed because he was persevering and determined. His experience testifies to the power of importunate prayer. It is now that we are to learn this lesson of prevailing prayer, of unyielding faith. The greatest victories to the church of Christ or to the individual Christian are not those that are gained by talent or education, by wealth or the favor of men. They are those victories that are gained in the audience chamber with God, when earnest, agonizing faith lays hold upon the mighty arm of power. *Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 203*

17. Those who are unwilling to forsake every sin and to seek earnestly for God’s blessing, will not obtain it. But all who will lay hold of God’s promises as did Jacob, and be as earnest and persevering as he was, will succeed as he succeeded. “Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.” *Luke 18:7-8, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 203*

18. It is in these promises that Christ communicates to us His grace and power. They are leaves from the tree which is “for the healing of the nations.” *Revelation 22:2* Received, assimilated, they are to be the strength of the character, the inspiration and sustenance of the life. Nothing else can have such healing power. Nothing besides can impart the courage and faith which give vital energy to the whole being. *Ministry of Healing, p. 122*

19. We should now acquaint ourselves with God by proving His promises. Angels record every prayer that is earnest and sincere. We should rather dispense with selfish gratifications than neglect communion with God. The deepest poverty, the greatest self-denial, with His approval, is better than riches, honors, ease, and friendship without it. *The Great Controversy, p. 622*
20. By what means did He overcome in the conflict with Satan? By the word of God. Only by the word could He resist temptation. “It is written,” He said. And unto us are given “exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” 2 Peter 1:4 Every promise in God’s word is ours. “By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,” are we to live. When assailed by temptation, look not to circumstances or to the weakness of self, but to the power of the word. All its strength is yours. “Thy word,” says the psalmist, “have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee. By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.” Psalms 119:11; 17:4, Desire of Ages, p. 123

21. Should you sit always in one position, without moving, your muscles would become strengthless and your limbs would lose the power of motion. The same is true in regard to your religious experience. You must have faith in the promises of God . . . Faith will perfect itself in exercise and activity. In Heavenly Places, p. 104

22. (Referring to faith as a grain of mustard seed.) If you have faith like this, you will lay hold upon God’s word, and upon all the helpful agencies He has appointed. Thus your faith will strengthen, and will bring to your aid the power of heaven. The obstacles that are piled by Satan across your path, though apparently as insurmountable as the eternal hills, shall disappear before the demand of faith. “Nothing shall be impossible unto you.” Desire of Ages, p. 431

23. The mother of Augustine prayed for her son’s conversion. She saw no evidence that the Spirit of God was impressing his heart, but she was not discouraged. She laid her finger upon the texts, presenting before God His own words, and pleaded as only a mother can. Her deep humiliation, her earnest importunities, her unwavering faith, prevailed and the Lord gave her the desire of her heart. Today He is just as ready to listen to the petitions of His people. “His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear;” and if Christian parents seek Him earnestly, He will fill their mouths with arguments and for His name’s sake will work mightily in their behalf in the conversion of their children. Testimonies, Vol. 5, p. 322, 323

24. Those who bring their petitions to God, claiming His promise while they do not comply with the conditions, insult Jehovah. Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 143

25. True faith lays hold of and claims the promised blessing before it is realized and felt. Early Writings, Prayer and Faith, p. 72

26. For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift that He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received. We need to look for no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most. Education, p. 258

27. We have too little faith: We limit the Holy One of Israel. We should be grateful that God condescends to use any of us as His instruments. For every earnest prayer put up in faith for
anything, answers will be returned. They may not come just as we have expected; but they will come, not perhaps as we have devised, but at the very time when we most need them. But, oh how sinful is our unbelief! “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it will be done unto you” Testimonies, Vol. 3, p. 209; Power of Prayer, p. 93

The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple. Psalm 119:130

I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life. Psalm 119:93

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1 NKJV

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:4 NKJV

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 NKJV

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are LIFE. John 6:63 NKJV

But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. John 4:14

… for You have magnified Your word above all Your name. Psalm 138:2 NKJV

He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Revelation 19:13, 16 NKJV

My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings, Proverbs 4:20

Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; Proverbs 4:21

For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Proverbs 4:22

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of Life. 1John 1:1 NKJV

And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. 1John 1:4 NKJV

And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness:” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of
Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.  
2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NKJV

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.  
John 15:5 NKJV

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.  
John 15:7 NKJV

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . Colossians 3:16

ASK – Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.  
Matthew 7:7

BELIEVE – Whatever things you ask when you pray believe that you receive them, and you will have them.  
Mark 11:24

CLAIM – Father I thank you that You have heard me.  
John 11:41

Suggested Reading:

Abiding in Christ, by Andrew Murray  
Christ’s Object Lessons, Asking to Give, pp. 139-149, by Ellen White  
Exalting His Word, by Shelley Quinn  
Early Writings, Prayer and Faith, pp. 72-73, by Ellen White  
Education, Faith and Prayer, pp. 253-261, by Ellen White  
Incredible Answers to Prayer, by Roger Morneau  
In Heavenly Places, by Ellen White  
Prayer, by Ellen White  
Steps to Christ, The Privilege of Prayer, pp. 93.104, by Ellen White  
The ABC’s of Bible Prayer, by Glenn Coon  
The Desire of Ages, by Ellen White  
Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings, The Lord’s Prayer, pp. 102-122, by Ellen White  
The Power of Prayer, by Teach Publishing
1. *Proverbs 3:32*
   For the perverse person is an abomination to the Lord, but His secret counsel is with the upright.

2. *Psalm 25:12 NASB*
   Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way He should choose.

3. *Psalm 25:14*
   The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.

4. *Amos 4:13 NASB*
   For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into darkness and treads on high places of the earth, the Lord God of hosts is His name.

5. *Daniel 2:22*
   He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.

6. *Amos 3:7*
   Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.

7. *John 15:15*
   No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

8. *Daniel 2:29*
   As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be.

9. *John 10:3*
   To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear His voice and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.

10. *John 10:4*
    . . . the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.

11. *John 10:16*
    And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.
12. Our life is to be bound up with the life of Christ; we are to draw constantly from Him, partaking of Him, the living Bread that came down from heaven, drawing from a fountain ever fresh, ever giving forth its abundant treasures. If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life. Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Often there will come to us a sweet joyful sense of the presence of Jesus. Often our hearts will burn within us as He draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch. When this is in truth the experience of the Christian, there is seen in his life a simplicity, a humility, meekness, and lowliness of heart, that show to all with whom he associates that he has been with Jesus and learned of Him. *Christ's Object Lessons* p. 129-130

13. All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature and with God. In them is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and they need to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, “Be still, and know that I am God.” ([Psalm 46:10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+46:10)) This is the effectual preparation for all labor for God. Amidst the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, he who is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. He will receive a new endowment of both physical and mental strength. His life will breathe out a fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men’s hearts. *Ministry of Healing* p. 58

14. We shall wait for His hand to lead us; we shall listen to His voice, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” [Isaiah 30:21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+30:21), *Mount of Blessing* p. 118

15. Impressions and feelings are no sure evidence that a person is led by the Lord. Satan will, if he is unsuspected, give feelings and impressions. These are not safe guides. All should thoroughly acquaint themselves with the evidences of our faith, and the great study should be how they can adorn their profession and bear fruit to the glory of God. *Testimonies Vol. 1*, p. 413

16. Impressions alone are not a safe guide to duty. The enemy often persuades men to believe that it is God who is guiding them, when in reality they are following only human impulse. But if we watch carefully, and take counsel with our brethren, we shall be given an understanding of the Lord’s will; for the promise is, “the meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way.” [Psalm 25:9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+25:9), *The Acts of the Apostles* p. 279

17. In the secret place of prayer, where no eye but God’s can see, no ear but His can hear, we may pour out our most hidden desires and longings to the Father in infinite pity, and in the hush and silence of the soul that voice which never fails to answer the cry of human need will speak to our hearts. *Mount of Blessing* p. 84
18. An intensity such as never before was seen is taking possession of the world. In amusement, in money-making, in the contest for power, in the very struggle for existence, there is a terrible force that engrosses body and mind and soul. In the midst of this maddening rush, God is speaking. He bids us come apart and commune with Him. *“Be still, and know that I am God.”* Psalm 46:10

Many, even in their seasons of devotion, fail of receiving the blessing of real communion with God. They are in too great haste. With hurried steps they press through the circle of Christ’s loving presence, pausing perhaps a moment within the sacred precincts, but not waiting for counsel. They have no time to remain with the divine Teacher. With their burdens they return to their work.

These workers can never attain the highest success until they learn the secret of strength. They must give themselves time to think, to pray, to wait upon God for a renewal of physical, mental, and spiritual power. They need the uplifting influence of His Spirit. Receiving this, they will be quickened by fresh life. The wearied frame and tired brain will be refreshed, the burdened heart will be lightened.

Not a pause for a moment in His presence, but personal contact with Christ, to sit down in companionship with Him – this is our need. Happy will it be for the children of our homes and the students of our schools when parents and teachers shall learn in their own lives the precious experience pictured in these words from the Song of Songs: “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.” Song of Solomon 2:3-4, Education p. 260-261

19. One sentence of scripture is of more value then ten thousand of man’s ideas or arguments. *Testimonies for the Church* Vol. 7, p. 71

20. Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the scriptures, will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore he invents every possible device to engross the mind. *The Great Controversy* p. 519

21. In the Bible we have the unerring counsel of God. Its teachings, practically carried out, will fit men for any position of duty. It is the voice of God speaking everyday to the soul. . . *Testimonies for the Church* Vol. 4, p. 441

22. Every chapter and every verse of the Bible is a communication from God to men. We should bind its precepts as signs upon our hands and as frontlets between our eyes. If studied and obeyed, it would lead God’s people, as the Israelites were led, by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 504
23. So with all the promises of God’s Word. In them He is speaking to us individually, speaking as directly as if we could listen to His voice. It is in these promises that Christ communicates to us His grace and power. They are leaves from that tree which is “for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:2) Received assimilated they are to be the strength of the character, the inspiration and sustenance of the life. Nothing else can have such healing power. Nothing besides can impart the courage and faith which give vital energy to the whole being. Ministry of Healing p. 122

24. His power, His very life, dwells in His Word. As you receive the word in faith, it will give you power to obey. Mount of Blessing p. 150

25. The Bible is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realize this, with what awe would we open God’s Word and with what earnestness would we search it’s precepts! The reading and contemplation of the scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One. Testimonies for the Church Vol. 6, p. 392-393

26. God’s holy, educating spirit is in His word. A light, a new and precious light shines forth from every page. Truth is there revealed and words and sentences are made bright and appropriate for the occasion, as the voice of God speaking to the soul. Christ's Object Lessons p. 132

27. We shall wait for His hand to lead us; we shall listen to His voice, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” Isaiah 30:21, Mount of Blessing p. 118

28. It is one thing to treat the Bible as a book of good moral instruction, to be heeded so far as is consistent with the spirit of the times and our position in the world; it is another thing to regard it as it really is – the word of the living God, the word that is our life, the word that is to mold our actions, our words, and our thoughts. “To hold God’s word as anything less than this is to reject it. And this rejection by those who profess to believe it, is foremost among the causes of skepticism and infidelity in the youth.” Education p. 260

29. When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence, it is Satan’s constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Savior and thus prevent the union and communication of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life’s cares and perplexities, and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections – to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ, he hopes to gain the victory. We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. “Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him!” Steps to Christ p. 71
Satan Called a World-Wide Meeting

Recently I came across a compelling article that I want to share with you in its short form.

Satan called a world-wide meeting. The huge crowd hushed as he stepped up to speak. “We can’t keep the Christians from going to church. We can’t keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth. We can’t keep them from conservative values, but we can do something else.” He paused. Everyone listened.

“We can keep them from forming an intimate, abiding experience in Christ. If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to church, let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time, so they can’t gain that experience in Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do. Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining a vital connection through their day!”

“How shall we do this?” shouted his angels.

“Simple. Keep them busy, busy, busy in the nonessentials of life and invent un-numbered schemes to occupy their minds,” he answered.

“Tempt them to spend and spend, then borrow and borrow.

“Keep them from their children.” Convince the wives to go to work and the husbands to work six and seven days a week, 10-12 hours a day, so they can afford their lifestyles. Tell them they are doing it FOR their children. Hah! That one works well. As their family fragments, soon their homes won’t offer an escape from the pressures of work.

“Over stimulate their minds so that they cannot hear ‘the still small voice.’ Entice them to play the radio or DVD player whenever they drive, to keep the TV, DVDs, MP3s, IPods, cell phones, text messages, and CDs going constantly in their homes. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ.

“Fill their homes with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, mail-order catalogues, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering, free products, services, and false hopes.

“Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted and unprepared for the coming week. Don’t let them go out in nature. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts and movies instead.

“When they meet for spiritual fellowship,” involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotion. Don’t let them encourage or uplift each other, keep those who are the gifted encouragers, especially busy and worn out.

“And above all when they get together keep them from praying for one another. Let them be involved in soul-winning. But crowd their lives with so many good causes they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family unity for the good of the cause.”

It was quite a convention in the end. And the evil angels went eagerly to their assignments trying to cause Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy, and rush here and there.

Author Unknown
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Biblical Spirituality: Rediscovering Our Biblical Roots or Embracing the East?

Written by Mark Finley

During a question and answer period at a spiritual convocation on the West Coast of the United States, a man stood up and asked, “What do you think of contemplative spirituality, spiritual formation, and meditation?” In some circles, these terms have become lightning rods; they engender heated discussions and sometimes more heat than light. There are those who believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has become cold, formal, legalistic, and spiritually lifeless; and its members desperately need to experience a fresh breath of spiritual newness. They are convinced that the way to reach postmoderns is through experience, not doctrine. To them, the answer lies in contemplative spirituality. For others, contemplative spirituality is no more than Eastern mysticism clothed in Christian terms—the devil’s deception. This group believes that contemplative spirituality leads unsuspecting church members into a counterfeit religious experience based on subjective feelings and emotions rather than scriptural truth.

This entire issue leads us to some vitally important questions. What is Christian meditation? How does the Bible define it and how does it differ from Eastern mysticism? What are contemplative and centering prayers? Are there dangers in these approaches to prayer? Is the concept of spiritual formation biblical? Where can we find answers for the Laodicean complacency, spiritual barrenness, and cold formality common in too many of our lives?

Christian meditation

Throughout Scripture, meditation stays always active, never passive, and always has an object. The goal of Christian meditation comprises filling the mind with the Word and works of God. Meditating upon His greatness and matchless love, we are changed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). In Christian meditation, we look out of ourselves to Him. Jesus is the object of our thoughts, the supreme focus of our attention (Isa. 45:22; Heb. 12:1, 2). We recognize that the heart is deceitful above all things, desperately wicked, and that in us there is no good thing (Jer. 17:9; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 7:18). Our hope is in Him. Our mind is fixed upon Him. Our attention is focused upon Him, and when meditating upon Him, we are transformed into His likeness (Col. 3:1, 2). The psalmist speaks of meditating on God’s
Word, His law, His testimonies, and His works (Ps. 119:97, 99, 104). He also meditates upon God’s precepts and contemplates His ways (Ps. 119:15). Christian meditation thus focuses our thoughts on the grandeur and greatness of God, lifting us from what is around us and within us to what is above us.

Ellen White uses the terms meditate and meditation 569 times. Speaking of Enoch, she declares, “The infinite, unfathomable love of God through Christ became the subject of his meditation day and night; and with all the fervor of his soul he sought to reveal that love to the people among whom he dwelt.”¹ Describing the importance of filling our minds with the Word of God in active meditation, she states, “We must be constantly meditating upon the word, eating it, digesting it, and by practice, assimilating it, so that it is taken into the life current.”² The significant factor in both the biblical and Ellen White’s counsel is that meditation is always rooted in God’s word, His works, and His ways, and anchored in His character, majesty, love, and power. Meditation’s goal is not to enter into the “silence of the soul” and somehow mystically “dwell in His presence,” but to actively engage the mind in focusing upon the matchless charms of His love and the amazing wonders of His grace.

In the high technological, frantic pace of our twenty-first century living, genuine Christian meditation may become a lost art. The prophet Isaiah reminds us, “For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength’ ” (Isa. 30:15).³ Thoughtfully opening God’s Word, reading a few verses, meditating upon His love, contemplating His character, and reflecting upon His greatness are life changing. The Holy Spirit speaks to us in these quiet moments. “When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Psalm 46:10. This is the effectual preparation for all labor for God. Amidst the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, he who is thus refreshed, will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. He will receive a new endowment of both physical and mental strength. His life will breathe out a fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men’s hearts.”⁴

**Contemplating Jesus**

The word contemplative simply means attentive, pensive, reflective, or thoughtful. A person who is contemplating is musing or pondering, reflecting or thinking. Ellen White uses the word contemplation 580 times. Her usage of the word is very similar to the way she uses the word meditation. She speaks of contemplating God’s Word, God’s works, and God’s providence. Here are just a few examples:
“The Bible is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe we would open God’s Word and with what earnestness we would search its precepts. The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One.”

“In the Bible a boundless field is opened for the imagination. The student will come from a contemplation of its grand themes, from association with its lofty imagery, more pure and elevated in thought and feeling than if he had spent the time reading any work of mere human origin, to say nothing of those of a trifling character.”

Probably the most well-known Ellen White statement on the value of genuine Christian contemplation is this: “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ.

We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.”

Contemplating the Cross draws us into an intimate relationship with Jesus, providing a solid foundation for our faith. Neither Ellen White nor the Bible writers speak of an aimless or mindless contemplation in which the mind resides in some sort of neutral trancelike state of oneness with God. In Scripture, the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible, speaks through the divinely inspired Word to transform our lives as we prayerfully meditate upon its passages. Jesus stated this plainly when He declared, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life’ ” (John 6:63, NKJV). The apostle Peter adds, “By which have been given to us exceeding great and precious promises that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). James declares, “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and the overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). Our characters are transformed as we actively meditate on God's Word. The Bible writers also describe the life-changing power of contemplating God's creative works (Pss.19:1–6; 32:6–12). The point of these divinely inspired writers is the same: Christian meditation does not seek to empty the mind but seeks to fill the mind. It does not seek oneness with a mystical god within, but seeks to understand more deeply the nature of God who created and redeemed us, and we then more fully reflect His character.
Understanding centering and contemplative prayer

In centering prayer, the individual chooses a common word and continually repeats it to center his or her thoughts. This exercise purportedly prepares the worshiper to enter a contemplative state in which all distractions cease. The goal involves a journey to the center of one’s being to enter into a state of oneness with the divine presence within. The Cloud of Unknowing, written by an anonymous fourteenth century author, includes practical principles of contemplative prayer. It instructs those interested in experiencing this form of prayer to “Take just a little word, of one syllable rather than of two. With this word strike down every kind of thought under the cloud of forgetting.”

Centering and contemplative prayer have been taught by Roman Catholic monks in monasteries for centuries. More recently Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, and Basil Pennington, as well as Quaker Richard Foster have advocated it and conducted retreats for thousands of people on contemplative spirituality. Their books have sold hundreds of thousands of copies. Most of the advocates of contemplative spirituality see real value in learning from the techniques of Eastern meditation. They often draw from the teaching and writings of medieval mystics, as well as Hindu and Buddhist spiritual teachers. Basil Pennington, one of the well-known proponents of the centering prayer technique, has delineated four guidelines for centering prayer.

1. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed, relax, and quiet yourself. Be in love and have faith in God.

2. Choose a sacred word that best supports your sincere intention to be in the Lord’s presence and open to His divine action within you (“Jesus,” “Lord,” “God,” “Savior,” “Abba,” “Divine,” “Shalom,” “Spirit,” “Love,” etc.).

3. Let that word be gently present as your symbol of your sincere intention to be in the Lord’s presence and open to His divine action within you.

4. Whenever you become aware of anything (thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, associations, etc.), simply return to your sacred word, your anchor.

Pennington’s guidelines for entering into centering prayer are deeply influenced by a group of monks called the Desert Fathers in the Middle Ages. These men lived a monastic lives of prayer and meditation in the deserts of the Middle East. The whole concept of looking to the Desert Fathers and the monastics for a deeper spirituality is seriously flawed. Jesus declared that His followers were to be in the world but not of the world (John 17:15). They were to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:13, 14). Paul affirms this
truth by declaring that followers of Christ should shine as “lights” in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). Jesus and the disciples lived their lives between the mountain and the multitude. They spent time with God but did not neglect spending time with people. Their lives were dedicated to devotion, but they were focused on service. True genuine spirituality involves both a relationship with God and loving service to God’s children and can never be truly lived by choosing to live a life of isolation. The One whom we serve “went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matt. 9:35). Daniel Goleman’s comments should give every Christian pause before entering into contemplative spirituality. “The meditation practices and rules for living of these earliest monks bear strong similarity to those of their Hindu and Buddhist renunciates in several kingdoms to the East.”

The concept of centering prayer raises serious questions for followers of Christ. The use of a sacred word to center one’s thoughts seems strangely similar to the mantras of the East. Is centering prayer Eastern mysticism in Christian garments? Jesus is very clear when He admonishes, “When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do” (Matt. 6:7). Does not the constant repetition of a “sacred word” violate Christ’s clear instruction? Why is there such a conspicuous absence of anything like centering prayer in the Bible? The Old Testament prophets, the New Testament believers, and Jesus never give even the slightest hint of continuously using a sacred word to center their thoughts in prayer. This should give us serious pause before we experiment with something that may open the door for satanic delusions. Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington state, “We should not hesitate to take the fruit of the age old wisdom of the East and ‘capture’ it for Christ. Indeed those of us who are in ministry should make the necessary effort to acquaint ourselves with as many of these Eastern techniques as possible.”

This counsel would sound very strange to Peter who proclaimed, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The New Testament believers did not “turn the world upside down” with a gospel that blended Eastern philosophy with Christian doctrine. Neither should we. The New Testament believers did not seek to get “in touch” with the divine presence within. They looked to their crucified, resurrected, and returning Lord, and their lives were transformed.

Thomas Merton describes the goal of centering prayer in these terms: “At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusions, a point of pure truth ... This little point ... is the pure glory of God in us. It is in everybody.”

Thomas Keating adds these thoughts, “Contemplative prayer is not so much the absence of
thoughts as detachment from them. It is the opening of mind and heart, body and emotions—our whole being to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond words, thoughts and emotions.”\(^{11}\) It is well to note these phrases in the above quotes, “point of nothingness,” “and the glory of God in us which is in everybody.” This sounds strangely like Buddhism. The idea of “the god within” comes directly from Eastern mysticism. Keating’s expression, “beyond words, thoughts and emotions” calls into question the nature of genuine spirituality. Can it be defined as a mystical experience or a relationship with God based on truth and fact that is life changing?

The biblical declaration that we are created in the image of God reinforces our ability to think and reason. Should we not be exceedingly cautious of any approach to spirituality that bypasses the mind and leads us to depend on a subjective, mystical experience as the measure of genuine spirituality? Mysticism is purely subjective. It does not rely upon biblical truth as the measure of spirituality but shifts the emphasis to our own experience. Yet, the Word of God has been given to us for the very purpose of establishing our faith. Jesus’ own words are too plain to be misunderstood; “‘Sanctify them by your truth, Your Word is truth’” (John 17:17). What we know about God is based on the truth of His Word. Trusting in experiential knowledge over the biblical record takes a person outside of the standard of all truth—the Bible. Encountering God in His Word leads us to a genuine Christian experience. When our subjective experiences, feelings, and emotions do not lead us to the Word, beware!

**Spiritual formation**

Another concept that has generated a great deal of discussion is spiritual formation. Words have meaning in the way they are defined and who defines them. Is the concept of spiritual formation biblical? If we define spiritual formation as being formed into the image of Christ as we meditate upon God’s Word, seek Him in prayer, and open our minds to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, certainly it is biblical. The apostle Paul admonishes believers at Rome “not [to] be conformed to this world but [to] be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

He urges the Philippians to “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). To the Colossians, he says, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above” (Col. 3:1, 2). Ellen White expresses the idea of our characters being formed in the image of Christ beautifully: “In Jesus is manifested the character of the Father, and the sight of him attracts. It softens and subdues, and ceases not to transform the character, until
Christ is formed within, the hope of glory. The human heart that has learned to behold the character of God may become, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, like a sacred harp, sending forth divine melody.”

When the term spiritual formation is used to describe contemplative spirituality, centering prayer, and a religious experience based on a mystical involvement, however sincere its proponents may be, it is certainly not biblical. If by spiritual formation we mean blending the meditative techniques of priests and monks or non-Christian religions with biblical ideas to achieve some sort of spiritual oneness with the so-called spark of divine within us, this is not biblical at all.

Adventism’s uniqueness

Adventism’s uniqueness lies in our understanding of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. In contrast to an ever-deepening knowledge of Christ through His Word and an ever-closer relationship with Him, Satan will offer a counterfeit spiritual experience. Seventh-day Adventists believe that in the final conflict over the law of God, His people, saved by His grace, and transformed by His love, will reveal His compassionate character before a waiting world and watching universe. God will have an end-time people who desire to be like the One they most admire, a people who long for something much deeper than a mystical experience based on subjective feelings, on the one hand, or cold, legalistic formalism based on an intellectual assent to doctrinal truth, on the other. The words of the apostle John will beat fervently in their hearts, “Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

References:


3 All Bible references are quoted from the New King James Version.


9 Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington, Finding Grace at the Gate (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Pub., 1978), 5, 6.


11 See Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group), 18–23.

12 White, “Christ Our Hope,” Signs of the Times, August 24, 1891.
Should we observe the Levitical festivals?: A Seventh–day Adventist perspective – Part 1

Written by Jacques B. Doukhan

What does the significance of feasts and festivals of the Old Testament hold for Christians today? How should Seventh–day Adventist theology, that recognizes the validity of the Seventh–day Sabbath, view the Levitical feasts?

Arguments in support of and against the observance of the feasts have been debated in church circles recently, including Adventist churches. Therefore, this issue must be addressed. This article proposes to take up this task in two parts. The first part will examine five arguments generally employed with respect to observing the feasts: (1) the pedagogical value of the typological interpretation of the feasts; (2) the usefulness of being reminded of the historical connection between Israel's feasts and Christian proclamation; (3) the relationship of the feasts to the Sabbath; (4) the relationship of the Feast of the New Moon to the Sabbath; and (5) the potential for better Jewish–Christian relations. In dealing with each issue, I propose to examine the problems raised by the Christian observance of the feasts and then discuss the negative arguments that oppose such practice. The second part of the article will suggest “a proper way,” further directions to take, along with some practical applications for the life of the church.

Jewish festivals as a teaching tool

The biblical festivals were intricately linked to the sacrificial system. Indeed, the sacrifices were not mere rituals or cultural expressions of piety; they were central to the very meaning of the festivals. The Feast of Passover, for example, did not just require the slaughter and eating of a lamb (Exod. 12:3–10); in fact, the lamb gave Passover its fundamental meaning and raison d'être. The Passover was specifically designed as a reminder of the sacrifice of the lamb offered in the Exodus event: God’s passing over the blood of the slaughtered animal, thereby granting redemption (Exod. 12:13). This connection is so strong that Passover is actually identified with the lamb itself. Pesah (Passover) is the lamb (2 Chron. 30:15).

Not only Passover, but also all the other festivals revolved around sacrifices in connection to
atonement. The biblical texts dealing with the feasts stipulate the sacrifice of a goat as a sin offering to make atonement for the people (Num. 28:15, 22, 30; 29:5, 11, 28). In the New Testament, the sacrifices point to the coming and function of Christ. Jesus is identified with the Passover lamb (John 1:36; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7), with the whole sacrificial system seen as the shadow of “things to come” (Heb. 10:1; cf. Col. 2:16, 17). The sacrifices convey a prophetic message concerning the process of salvation: God will come down and offer Himself as a sacrifice in order to atone for sin and redeem humanity.

The effect of Christ’s sacrifice is definitive and perpetual. In that sense, we have to understand the phrase ““statute forever throughout your generations”” (Lev. 23:14, NKJV). The phrase “statute forever” does not mean a perpetual stipulation; otherwise this would mean that we still have to do all the sacrifices. Indeed, the same phrase “statute forever” is also used for the sacrifices (Lev. 3:17) and all the other rituals associated with the tabernacle: the ablutions (Exod. 30:21), the priestly garments (Exod.28:43), the lamps (Exod. 27:20, 21), etc. In other words, the use of the expression “forever” does not mean a perpetual obligation but should be understood within the context of the temple—that is, as long as the temple was standing. Now that the sacrifices are no longer possible because of the absence of the temple, and because prophecy contained within the sacrifices has been fulfilled in Christ, it follows that sacrifices and related rituals, such as Levitical festivals, are no longer mandatory. The type has met the Antitype. To engage in festivals with the idea that they are compulsory for our own salvation makes the Antitype, the Messiah, altogether irrelevant.

Also noted, the same expression “forever” is used for the covenant of the circumcision (Gen.17:13). Does this mean that circumcision continues as still valid today? If that were the case, this would then contradict the recommendation of the apostles in Acts 15. All these observations help us understand why the expression “forever” with respect to feasts does not support an everlasting requirement.

That argument aside, it is precisely this typological/prophetic function of the feasts that inspires those who support the keeping of the feasts. They argue that the observance of the feasts will help Christians gain a better and richer understanding of the plan of salvation. The profound meaning of the feasts was already attested to in the New Testament; they not only commemorated past events of salvation, especially the going out of Egypt and the miracles of Exodus, they also pointed to the cosmic and eschatological salvation. It is indeed significant that Jesus died and was resurrected during the time of Passover, which He not only celebrated, commemorating the Exodus, but also invested with fresh meaning, applying it to Himself (Matt. 26:17–30). Also meaningful is the event of the gift of the Spirit, associated with the proclamation of the gospel to the nations, taking place during
Pentecost, the time of harvest. Basically, the spring festivals pointed to the first step of salvation: the first coming of Christ, His death, His resurrection, His enthronement at the right hand of the Father, and the universal broadening of the covenant through the global proclamation of the gospel. The fall festivals pointed to the second step of salvation: the judgment in heaven and the proclamation of the three angels’ messages on earth, preparing for the cosmic salvation and the second coming of Christ (Rev. 14:6–13). As Richard Davidson notes, “[T]he first and last feasts of Israel’s cultic calendar seem tied to the inauguration and consummation of Israel’s salvation history respectively.”¹ The progression of the feasts in the yearly calendar, following the progression of the historical plan of salvation, has then been used as an argument in favor of the adoption of these festivals as a part of our religious life. But the pedagogical function of the feasts does not imply that these feasts are divine laws to be perpetually observed.

The main problem remains, however, as to whether those feasts should be observed by Christians today.

The historical connection

One function of the feasts was its application to the historical life of Israel in Canaan. When the temple was destroyed and the Jews were exiled from the land, they were obliged to create and develop new traditions for the observance of the feasts adapted to the situation of the exile, that is, without the temple and the sacrifices.² Also, the fact that Jesus and His disciples observed the festivals and, later, early Christians (Jewish Christians) as well, even without sacrifices, suggests that it is not inconceivable for Christians to celebrate the festivals.

Yet, this example cannot be used as an argument to justify the Christian celebration of the feasts since Jesus and the early Christians kept not only the Jewish festivals but also other cultural and ceremonial practices, such as circumcision, the wearing of the tallith (prayer shawl), etc., practices that were not adopted by Gentile Christians on the basis of Acts 15. Furthermore, Christians, especially Seventh-day Adventists, do not have a historical festival tradition showing how to celebrate those festivals. How, then, will they celebrate the festivals? On what grounds will they justify one practice over another? Their claim to observe the festivals the biblical way stumbles on the fact that the biblical way requires the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Deut. 16:5). Without the support of a historical and cultural tradition, the keeping of the feasts is bound to generate tensions and dissensions in the church. Moreover, since no specific biblical law exists indicating how these laws should be observed outside of the temple, they will have to produce laws and traditions of
The Sabbath and the festivals

The practice of festivals may even affect our theology of the Sabbath. The Bible clearly explains the essential difference between the feasts and the Sabbath. Festivals are not like the weekly Sabbath. Unlike the festivals, the Sabbath, as a sign, reminds us of the creation of the universe and is therefore eternal in its relevance. God gave the Sabbath at the end of the Creation week when there was no sin on earth and hence no sacrifice and no feasts. The Sabbath, unlike the festivals, was a part of the Ten Commandments and given to all of humanity. In fact, its origin predates the gift of the Torah to Israel on Sinai (Exod. 16:23–28). Furthermore, Leviticus 23:3, 4, which lists the festivals along with the Sabbath, clearly suggests that an essential difference exists between the two categories of holy days. In Leviticus 23, the Sabbath is mentioned at the beginning of the list (v. 3). Then the other holy days are listed under the designation “'these are the feasts of the Lord’” (v. 4, NKJV), suggesting thereby that the Sabbath belongs to another category than the feasts. Although the Sabbath also implies sacrifices (Num. 28:9, 10), it is significant that the regular phrase “sin offering for atonement,” which always appears in relation to the festivals, is absent in reference to the Sabbath. This clear distinction suggests that the function of sacrifices in the context of the Sabbath is essentially different from their function in the context of the festivals. The Sabbath differs, not only from any other day of the week, but also from any feast day. It is noteworthy that this difference and even the superiority of the Sabbath over the festivals is systematically indicated in the liturgic reading of the Torah: we have more ‘ālyot (ascents to the platform to read the Torah) on the day of Sabbath (seven) than on any festival day. To equate the Sabbath with the festivals is fundamentally wrong and affects the true meaning of Sabbath, ultimately compromising its mandatory character.

Realizing that the Sabbath differs from the festivals, and is even more important than them, will help us understand the nature of the connection between the two holy appointments. The fact that Leviticus 23 brings them together while marking the difference between them suggests, indeed, that the Sabbath is the crown, the climax of all festivals.

Paradoxically, this special connection between the Sabbath and the Levitical festivals brings out, in fact, a lesson about the relative value of the festivals versus the absolute value of the Sabbath. Instead of leading to the promotion of the observance of festivals, the study of the
festivals should lead to a better understanding, appreciation, and experience of the Sabbath. For the Sabbath “is the foundation of all sacred time,” and thus contains and fulfills all the values and truths intimated by the festivals.

The Sabbath and the New Moon Festival

Within the festivals, the New Moon Festival occupies only a secondary place. Unlike other biblical holy days, the new moon never qualifies as a sacred day on which all labor is prohibited. During the period of the first temple, it was relegated to a “semi-festival” status, and its observance disappeared totally during the second temple period; thus, by the middle of the fourth century when the sages had established a permanent calendar, the proclamation of the new moon day was discontinued. Jewish tradition generally assigns a “minor” role to the New Moon Festival.

Therefore, it is surprising that the New Moon Festival has received renewed attention, especially among Messianic Jews and even some Adventists. One justification for such observance is Isaiah 66:23 (NKJV), “It shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,’ says the Lord.” This text is used to suggest that the New Moon Festival will be observed in heaven along with the Sabbath. But the text does not speak so much about the observance of those two days, per se; rather, it emphasizes the continuity of worship, a characteristic of the new earth. For that purpose, the biblical author refers to the two extremities of time: “from . . . to.” What this verse actually says is that the worship continues as an activity of eternity—“from New Moon to New Moon” and “from Sabbath to Sabbath”; as if to say, from month to month, from week to week.

A second reason offered for the observance of the new moon feast is that the moon determines the Sabbath day. On the basis of biblical texts, such as Genesis 1:14 and Psalm 104:19, it is argued that the weekly Sabbath was originally tied to the lunar cycle. Indeed, both texts relate the moon to the seasons (mo‘adim). Since Leviticus 23 includes the Sabbath in the category of (“seasons,” “convocations”; see v. 2), and since the moon rules the seasons (Gen. 1:14), some conclude that the moon also rules the Sabbath. This argument raises a number of problems, including the following:

1. The meaning of the Hebrew word mo‘adim. This word relates to the verb y’d with which it is also associated (Exod. 30:36; 2 Sam. 20:5). This verb means “to appoint” a time or a place (2 Sam. 20:5; Jer. 47:7). The word mo‘adim refers to “appointments,” “meetings,” or “convocations” in time or space. Now, not all the appointments (mo‘adim) are ruled by the
When Jeremiah 8:7 uses the word mo' adim to refer to the migration times of the stork and other migratory birds, it does not imply that the migrations of the stork are governed by the moon, since the stork returns to Palestine regularly every spring. The word mo' adim simply refers to a specific time or place appointed, either by humans (1 Sam. 20:35) or by God (Gen. 18:14), and could be weekly (1 Sam. 13:8), monthly, yearly (Gen. 17:21), or even prophetic (Dan. 12:7); and is not necessarily always dependent on the moon.

2. The idea that the Sabbath is dependent on the moon was in fact originally borrowed from the historical–critical presupposition of the Babylonian influence on the Bible. According to that view, the Sabbath was originally taken either from the Babylonian custom of the lunar days, evil/taboo days associated with lunar phases falling on days 7, 14, 19, 21, and 28 of the month, or from the monthly, full–moon day (shab/pattu). But this claim has no biblical support whatsoever and is no longer taken seriously by biblical scholars.8

3. The idea of the dependence of the Sabbath on the moon—placing the Sabbath on any day of the week, depending on the movements of the moon—goes against the testimony of history. First, it goes against the testimony of the Jews. Indeed, millions of Jews have kept the seventh–day Sabbath on Saturday for thousands of years, and this practice was never changed or lost by either the Julian or Gregorian calendar; the change only affected the number of the days and never the days of the week.9 The Jews still keep the same seventh–day Sabbath that was given at Creation, the same day that was commanded at Sinai and kept by Jesus and the apostles; that is, our Saturday. The claim that connects Sabbath to the moon and makes it fall on Tuesday, or any other moon–dependent day, is, indeed, a way of replacing the true Sabbath with another day, based on human speculation, just as human tradition replaced Sabbath with Sunday.

4. The argument that the day of the crucifixion of Jesus was Passover—that is, the 14th day from the new moon (Exod. 12:6; and, at the same time, the Sabbath day)—cannot be used to support the idea that the Sabbath depends on the moon. According to the testimony of the Gospels, Jesus was crucified on the preparation day (Friday) and not on Sabbath.

5. The fact that the function of the moon begins on the fourth day of Creation week (Gen. 1:14–19) makes it impossible to identify the Sabbath, coming three days later, as a moon day.

The Jewish–Christian relation

The Christian practice of the festivals may be counterproductive in regard to Jewish–
Christian relations. Christians who engage in those festivals, adopting traditions that belong to another culture, will appear artificial and fake. They will also be offensive to Jews who will perceive in this endeavor a usurping intention in the line of supercessionism, or a deceitful means to trap them into conversion. Christians, who imitate the Jews in the practice of the festivals, tend to do it in the context of a church liturgy, involving a whole community, as a public event. No need to say that this Christian adaptation of the Jewish custom totally misses the point and is shocking for the Jews, as traditionally those feasts were designed to be celebrated only at home, in the intimate circle of the family, and not in public. The Christian reproduction may, therefore, often become a caricature or a misrepresentation—at best, a pale imitation of the Jewish original. Instead of being a means of reaching out to the Jews, the Christian adaptations of the Jewish festivals may turn them away.

The marking of festivals may, on the other hand, draw Christians closer to the Jews, whom their tradition has taught them to despise. Indeed, anti-Semitism was the main motivation for the repudiation, not only of the Sabbath, but also of the feasts. It appears, then, that by marking the festivals, Christians could make a statement not only against the anti-Semitic voice of various groups but also, at the same time, produce a way of contextualization for reaching out to the Jews.

Yet, the situation is not this simple. As I have indicated earlier, the observance of festivals encounters serious theological, cultural, ethical, and practical problems that invite caution and serious reservations.

The second part of the article will suggest “a proper way,” further directions to take, along with some practical applications for the life of the church.

Watch for its release on our Facebook page or Twitter!

Notes:

1 Richard M. Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” in Symposium on Revelation–Book I, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 120.

2 See the Babylonian Talmud, Ber. 4:1, 7; 26b; 32b.

3 Ángel Rodríguez, Israelite Festivals and the Christian Church (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 9.

5 Ibid., 414.


10 On the meaning and dangers of supercessionism, the idea that the church has replaced, “superceded,” Israel, see ibid., 55–70; cf. id., The Mystery of Israel (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 11–47.
Ten things listeners want in a sermon

In a bold and controversial decision, Mel Gibson filmed The Passion of the Christ in Latin, the language of Pilate and the Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus, and in Aramaic, the language of Jesus and His disciples. He intended for the film to be shown without subtitles, thereby combining modern media (film) with languages almost no one speaks (or understands) anymore. By the time of the film's release, however, Gibson changed his mind, adding the subtitles.

That decision is oddly reflective of one of the dilemmas preachers face today. Often, churches tell the old, old story in languages (music, terminology, symbols, etc.) that only the initiated understand, leaving any newcomers or non-Christians in the dark. In contrast, “seeker–friendly” churches target a different crowd: People who are willing to hear the story but don’t necessarily speak the language of the traditional church. Some churches try to build a bridge between the two, providing subtitles, so to speak, to interpret what's going on for the uninitiated. Interestingly enough, the sermon itself can be that bridge because, in the end, both Christians and non-Christians seek basically the same things from the sermon.

What are those things? In my view there are ten basic elements that both seekers and Christians want from a sermon. Here is the countdown:

10. **Grab my attention as soon as you start speaking.** The great preachers of the past knew how to connect with an audience very quickly, but many modern preachers, even the good ones, tend to start with riveting phrases such as, “Turn in your Bibles to Obadiah.” Such tactics won’t do. You must grab your listener’s attention any way you can—with a dramatic statement, question, story, film clip, etc.—and give them no choice but to listen from there.

9. **Teach me something I didn’t already know.** Ask yourself, “If I were listening to this sermon, what part or points would I feel compelled to write down so I won’t forget it?” If the answer is “nothing,” start over. Every listener wants to discover new information, new insights, and new perspectives.

8. **Tell me what God says, not what you say.** Even seekers are far more interested in what God says on a subject than in what you say. Good sermons—whether targeted primarily to
seekers or Christians—rely heavily on the Bible as God’s Word and let it do the talking.

7. **Don’t try to make me feel foolish because I don’t know my Bible as well as you do.** Often seekers and long-time church members don’t use their Bibles in church. Many are embarrassed at their inability to find Haggai or Ruth in a few seconds. That’s why in my church, when it comes time to turn to the biblical text for the morning, we project on the screen the Bible table of contents with that book highlighted, and say something such as, “Ruth is the eighth book of the Bible, and it begins on page 184 in the Bibles we provide for your use.”

6. **Make me like you; help me get to know you a little bit.** Every speaker is encouraged to seize opportunities to give listeners an introduction and insight into their own life and personality. It’s so much better if what we reveal is a little vulnerable, self-effacing, and/or winsome.

5. **Make me smile.** Not everyone can tell a humorous story, but that is not the only way—and far from the best way—to inject humor into a sermon. Candid observations about our own follies are among the most effective ways to use humor.

4. **Show me that you understand what I’m going through.** One of the most crucial—and earliest—tasks of any preacher is to identify with listeners. In one message on “How to Survive Suffering,” I began my sermon with, “Sometimes a speaker bites off more than he can chew,” and went on to detail why I felt ill-qualified to speak in a room filled with people who had suffered far more than I had: a family losing their business, a couple in which each one was dealing with debilitating illnesses, a mother who’d lost her son, and so on. A sincere admission of our own struggles, or a brief acknowledgment of the real-life issues others are facing, is key to identifying with both seeker and Christian.

3. **Touch my emotions.** Seekers and Christians alike want to be inspired. They want their heartstrings to be plucked. And, while seekers in particular are alert to manipulation, they’re nonetheless longing for a preacher who will help them not only to think but also to feel. Any sermon that fails to engage both mind and heart is likely to disappoint.

2. **Meet a felt need.** The first question a writer or speaker must answer is, “So what?” If as a reader or listener I am not promised something that I want when you begin, I will quickly start thinking about the upcoming sport event, or where I should take the family after the service. Even worse, if I was promised something that you never delivered, I’ll be far less likely to return next week.

And, finally, the number one thing both seekers and Christ-followers want in a sermon:

1. **Tell me clearly how I can apply this to my life today, this week.** When I conclude a
message, I assume that all my listeners are interested in following through on what God has said to them. So in addition to giving them opportunity for private prayer and counsel, I try to suggest practical ways they can follow up on what they’ve learned. I’ve encouraged listeners to write their own mission statement, give away one possession in the coming week, or mail a postcard inviting someone to church the following week.

When it comes right down to it, it’s not so different preaching to seekers or to Christians. With Christians, of course, you can assume some knowledge and take some liberties. And with seekers, you might face fewer taboos. But both groups seek essentially the same things from a teacher of God’s Word—none of which are anything new but all of which we need to apply to every message we speak from now until Jesus returns.
A biblical view of resolutions

As we stand at the start of a new year, many of us think about the things we resolve to accomplish. I suspect a clear majority of individuals violate their resolutions within the first few weeks of the calendar year, or they abandon them altogether.

I wonder if a long-term view of start-of-year promises would serve us better – reducing stress and relieving mental pressure that comes as a result of “failure.” Would we experience victories – both now and down the road – if we approached our aims as goals to be measured throughout the year and at its conclusion rather than at the start of the year? In other words, how does God see us and how we accomplish the promises we make to ourselves?

I find the words of John instructive, although he doesn’t speak of resolutions per se. “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2, NKJV). Christ does not see me as I am; rather, He sees me as I shall be. I need to do the same; and so do you. So I set my goals, periodically ascertaining my progress. At the close of the year, I review those goals and see what I accomplished and where I fell short. Then by God’s grace I start over again the next year – knowing that God will give me His success as I continue to strive by His grace for victories.

Recent blog entries
Imprisoned in Togo

https://www.ministrymagazine.org/blog/imprisoned-in-togo

February 14, 2013

Editor's Blog

Posted on Dec 04, 2012 by Derek Morris

Two of our colleagues in ministry have been imprisoned in Togo since March, 2012. Lawyers and human rights activists have called for the release of Pastor Antonio dos Anjos Monteiro and church member Bruno Amah. A Togolese man implicated Monteiro and Amah as conspirators in an alleged blood trafficking network, but a police search did not produce any incriminating evidence. Since the time of their arrest and incarceration, local authorities have recognized both men's innocence, but will not release them from prison.

During a recent time of prayer, I was reminded of the words of Jesus in His great Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake" (Matt 5:11). Really? How would you feel if you were imprisoned for many months on false charges, separated from your family and friends? Blessed? What is Jesus trying to tell us? The answer is found in the verse that follows. "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:12).

When we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, we are in the company of great women and men of God who have suffered down through the ages. We never enjoy persecution, but we can rejoice when we suffer as followers of Jesus Christ. Why? Because we know God is at work in this broken world. He is accomplishing His purposes even in the midst of our suffering. He is working all things together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

How then should we pray for Pastor Antonio and Bruno in Togo? Should we pray for their release from prison? Absolutely. Christians prayed for the apostle Peter and an angel was commissioned to oversee his release (Acts 12:5–10). But don’t forget that the disciples also prayed for their imprisoned colleague John the Baptist, and he remained incarcerated until his death. Was he abandoned by God? Absolutely not. He was blessed and affirmed by God even in his prison cell.

Sometimes God has plans that we know nothing about. The faithful witness of John the
Baptist has encouraged persecuted followers of Jesus down through the ages. His witness was not in vain. Let’s pray for all who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake that they may know the joy that only God can give and that they may find rest for their souls. And let’s make the most of our liberty with thankful hearts.

Recent blog entries
Monteiro’s ongoing nightmare – Adventist News Network

Feb. 12, 2013 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

John Graz

Editor's note: This week's bulletin includes this ANN Commentary by Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Director John Graz giving an update on the situation of two Adventists in prison in Togo.

Already one year and nothing has happened. I have been thinking about Pastor Antonio Monteiro every day since I met him in the Civil Prison of Lomé, Togo.

We all have periodic nightmares, but they never last too long. In the case of Monteiro, his reality has become an ongoing nightmare.

Monteiro was invited to Togo by the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Sahel Union to help families as a missionary in Togo. In May 2011, rumors spread of about 20 young women disappearing and being killed by a network of human blood traffickers in the northern part of Lome.

As happens in similar cases, people accused the police and authorities of doing nothing to solve the case.

Police arrested Monteiro on March 15 of 2012. His office, church and home were raided under heavy media spotlight. No evidence was found. He spent 14 days detained at police headquarters.

This whole case is based on the accusation of one person. Monteiro's accuser was an ex–prisoner who said Monteiro was a leader of the blood trafficking group. Monteiro had previously helped the man while ministering to him. It is believed that the man was taken into custody where police forced him under duress to name people he knew and with whom he had some contacts. This man, with a documented history of mental instability, offered any names he could readily think of.

The events were devastating for Monteiro’s wife, children, colleagues and church members. The name of their husband, father and friend was on TV and on the front page of national newspapers.

After a few days, an investigation and a public confession of the accuser unfolded like a TV
drama. No evidence was found, and it became clear for many that Monteiro’s arrest was a mistake. Some also found it strange that a Seventh-day Adventist minister was suspected of using human blood for a religious ceremony.

The accusation against Monteiro lacked credibility. Most people thought that he would be released and the case dismissed.

But releasing him would have invited some questions: Who is responsible for such a big mistake? Who will speak to media saying: “Sorry, we messed up.” And the question of the people will be: “Who are the true criminals and why have they not been arrested?” It would be highly embarrassing for authorities to have to face these questions.

Monteiro is still in prison, along with Bruno Amah, a fellow Seventh-day Adventist also accused of the same crime. The facility is overcrowded where prisoners are trying to survive. Innocent people awaiting trial and criminals share the same space to sleep.

I remember when I saw Monteiro the first time. He wore a clean t-shirt, and I might have guessed he was a visitor. We prayed together. I explained the work that had already been done to grant his release, and it was our hope that he would be set free in a few days or weeks.

That was Saturday, September 8, 2012.

The men were in prison over Christmas. Some hoped that the authorities would have ended that tragedy. At this point it was a case of an arbitrary detention. He still had not had a trial. We contacted ambassadors, ministers and presidents. But nothing happened.

Our lawyers later received information that Monteiro would receive a trial on January 29 or 30 at the criminal court. It wasn’t great news, but at least Monteiro’s case would be heard and he would be able to defend himself with legal counsel.

But the trial was postponed. Nothing has happened, and they are still in prison.

We have sent letters to the president of Togo asking that justice be done.

New rumors are spreading about the imminent arrest of criminals. But until now Monteiro and Amah are still in prison. We will not give up. We want a fair trial, and we are certain it will prove their innocence.

On March 15, it will be one year since Monteiro and Amah were arrested. We expect that before this date they will be released. We are planning to launch a campaign to get
signatures and send letters from all around the world to the president of the United Nations Human Rights Committee and to the president of Togo.

Monteiro’s wife, his four children, and Amah’s family must know that we are doing everything we can to help. They are not alone. They are members of a great family of more than 30 million church members and their children.

We may feel powerless when innocent people are paying the price for free criminals. But we trust in God who will have the last word. His justice will prevail in the end.

—John Graz is director of the department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the Seventh-day Adventist world church. He is heading up the Monteiro Working Group, which is addressing the situation from the world church headquarters.
Theology of Ordination Committee ends first session – Adventist News Network

Jan. 18, 2013 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

Adventist Review staff

Members of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) ended their first session – held January 15–17 at a meeting site near the church’s world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States – on an optimistic note.

Prepared papers on various aspects of ordination were presented to the 106–member committee. [photos by Michael Porter]

“We have real hope that the church will be able to find a way to resolve the differences we have on the issue of ordination,” committee chair Artur Stele, director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute, reported to church leaders worldwide via a phone conference following the session. “We left the meeting feeling very optimistic and confident that God is leading us. We have many reasons to thank the Lord.”

The General Conference Administrative Committee organized the TOSC in October 2012 to study the concept of ordination from a biblical perspective and whether it is intended for only one gender. The study committee comprises 106 members, including theologians, laypersons, pastors, and Bible students from each of the church’s 13 world divisions. The General Conference appointed Stele as chair, Geoffrey Mbwana as vice chair, and Karen Porter as secretary. About 25 percent of the members are women.

Daily devotionals were presented by Kendra Haloviak–Valentine, La Sierra associate professor of religion; Mark Finley, special assistant to Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson; and Joel Musvosvi, newly appointed Solusi University president. Seasons of prayer invoking the Holy Spirit’s presence and guidance were then followed by the presentation of papers by individuals assigned to study various aspects of ordination. These papers included topics on how to deal with doctrinal issues in the church, the history of ordination, and hermeneutics.
After each presentation, time was given to discuss the material presented with the entire committee. On the second day smaller groups met for reflection and to develop suggestions and recommendations on the papers. Based on the suggestions and recommendations from the working groups, the presenters will refine their papers, and second drafts will be sent to the divisions’ Biblical Research Committees and to the TOSC members for input before the next meeting.

The committee members spent much time seeking God's presence and guidance throughout the three-day session.

Differences of opinion were animatedly expressed on the second afternoon of the session, one member said in an interview, “but then Pastor Stele stopped and said, ‘Let’s pray,’ and the whole atmosphere changed. There was a warm Christian spirit, and we felt free to openly share our views.”

A letter to the General Conference Executive Committee from the TOSC chair, vice chair, and secretary summing up the session read, in part: “Members of the committee could not help but express their gratitude to God for the sweet spirit that prevailed in these meetings. Please continue to pray for the Committee as it works under the leadership of the Holy Spirit in this study.”

The second of the four scheduled sessions will be held in July 2013 in Maryland.