

# Prayer: The Heartbeat of Revival




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Prayer and Revival in Acts

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

What was the secret?

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

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

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

## Jesus' Prayer Life

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

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

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

*John 17:20–24* \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 22:31, 32* \_\_\_\_\_

*Matt. 26:36–44* \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

## Praying Together

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Our Freedom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Effective Prayer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Luke 9:28; Matthew 18:19, 20*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** (1) Recognize the utter impossibility of developing an intimate experience with Jesus without prayer, and realize the enormous privilege of knowing Him deeply through prayer. (2) Reveal the intimate link between prayer and revival.

**Feel:** Experience a deep need to spend regular time with Jesus in prayer.

**Do:** Grasp the privilege of prayer and set aside specific times daily to get to know Jesus better through prayer.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Spiritual Vitality**

**A** Why is prayer such an integral aspect of spiritual revival?

**B** Why is it so important to recognize that without prayer our spiritual lives are empty, spiritually barren, and weak? Why are we powerless to face Satan's temptations in our own strength?

**II. Feel: Spiritual Satisfaction**

**A** How do you feel when you have just finished a time of deep, meaningful spiritual communion with God? How do you feel when you start your day without such communion?

**B** What is it about spending time alone with God that is so meaningful in your life? Why is this fellowship with God important to you?

**III. Do: Spiritual Discipline**

**A** Prayer requires a certain spiritual discipline. Determine to set aside a specific time to pray each day. How can this be a blessing to you?

**B** Often it is a blessing to pray with a close friend. In what ways have you been blessed by taking part in a prayer group of church members or close friends? If you are not part of such a group, why not start your own or consider joining one?

**C** If you have a prayer list, consider the specific things for which you are praying. What are the benefits of praying for these things in a systematic way?

► **Summary:** Through prayer, we understand God's heart more, know His will more fully, and experience His presence more powerfully.



## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Acts 4:31*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The disciples faced overwhelming challenges in their attempts to reach their generation for Christ. The Roman Empire was bathed in Greek philosophy, dominated by military might, obsessed with pleasure seeking, and consumed with political intrigue. Hardened hearts and callous minds were almost impossible to penetrate with the gospel. The disciples recognized this reality and opened their lives to the power of the Holy Spirit. What seemed impossible became possible through the divine power of God. The experience of the disciples speaks to us of the almighty power of God to use His praying people in order to reach twenty-first-century society, as well.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson focuses on prayer. We will study the prayer life of Jesus and the disciples, as well as the value of united prayer. Additionally, we will look at the role of prayer in the great controversy between good and evil. Throughout the Bible, prayer is at the heart of the Christian life. Prayer is also at the heart of each revival mentioned in Scripture. Without prayer, revival will not come. Jesus’ example in prayer, as well as the disciples’ emphasis on prayer, provides a model for the church today.

**Opening Discussion:** Jesus regularly found quiet places for prayer and communion with His Father. It is difficult to be quiet in today’s media-saturated culture. Even in societies where media does not dominate, often it is difficult to find time alone among the thronging masses. What are the places you have discovered where you may be alone with God? Be practical.

Ask your class to list at least ten places where they have found their “Gethsemane” or “wilderness” to spend time alone with God.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- 1 What can we learn from Jesus’ prayer life that applies to our own prayer experience?
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- 2 Why are we too busy to pray? What is it that makes prayer such a low priority in our lives at times?
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## ► STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Jesus often invited His disciples to join Him in prayer. Following His example, the disciples prayed together throughout the book of Acts. There is unusual strength that comes from praying together. By asking this penetrating question, Ellen G. White underlines the importance of united prayer: “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 for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 21. Small groups of praying people are at the heart of the church’s growth, spirituality, and revival.

## Bible Commentary

### I. When We Kneel to Pray (*Review Matthew 18:19, 20 with your class.*)

Jesus urges His disciples to pray together in union with their hearts in one accord. He admonishes, “ ‘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’ ” (*Matt. 18:19, 20, NKJV*). The original Greek word for “agreement” used here means “in complete accord.” It also may be used to refer to an orchestral piece that has no discordant notes. It is perfect harmony with varied voices blended together in a symphony of song. United prayer with hearts in one accord is a chorus of praise in Christ’s ears and a testimony to the power of the gospel. It is a joyful melody bringing gladness to His heart. Here one member’s shortsightedness is aided by another’s strong faith, one’s weakness is helped by another’s strength, one’s straightforwardness is balanced by another’s meekness, and one’s frailty by another’s might. United in prayer, members share common joys and sorrows, strengths and weaknesses, joys and heartaches. In our passage, Christ promises two specific things for those who are united in prayer with their common praise and petitions.

1. When we approach Him in united prayer, with hearts desiring only His glory, He will answer. When we come jointly in prayer, seeking His will, longing to know Him better, asking for the outpouring of His Spirit on our lives and the lives of those special ones for whom we are praying, He will respond powerfully. Miracles will be wrought beyond our comprehension. God especially honors the petitions of “‘two or three . . . gathered together in [His] name.’”

2. When we approach Him in prayer with united hearts in His name, He is “‘there’” in our midst. The expression “in My name” could also be translated as “into My name.” It implies that the prayers offered are not only offered by those united with one another but by those who are united with Christ. These praying believers are seeking more of His love, yearning for His presence, and desiring His glory. Christ’s praying disciples have the joy of knowing that His real presence is with them. The ancient rabbis had a saying that something special occurred if two of them sat together at a common table, discussing the law of God. They believed that the same Shekinah glory, which manifests itself between the golden cherubim over the ark of the covenant and represents the presence of God, rested over the table in the room where they discussed the law and filled it with the glory of God. Although there is a real temple or sanctuary in heaven where God’s glory is manifest, in a real sense we are the temple of God, fashioned to manifest His glory to the world (*1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20*). When we pray with unified hearts, Christ’s presence is apparent among us, and His glory is revealed.

**Consider This:** When we kneel to pray with others, Christ promises to be in our midst. We are not praying to Someone who is so far distant that to imagine His closeness is almost impossible. Through His Holy Spirit, Christ is, in reality, in our midst. Why is it that sometimes He seems so far away? What can we do to experience His presence more fully in prayer?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Lead your class in a practical discussion of how to be more effective in united prayer. Make a list of the benefits of praying together in unity. What pitfalls might there be in united prayer? What are some of the things that may rob the blessings of prayer groups?

**HINT:** These can include talking too much rather than praying, long drawn-out prayers, negative prayers, one person dominating the prayer session, et cetera. What guidelines can the class develop for united prayer sessions?

**Thought/Application Questions:**

❶ What can we do to make united prayer an integral part of our spiritual lives?

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❷ What can our church do to initiate a greater emphasis on united prayer?

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❸ How might our local Sabbath School class place greater priority on united prayer?

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► **STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Personal prayer and corporate or group prayer are powerful spiritual weapons as we face the enemy. They open our hearts to the rich blessings of God. God respects our freedom of choice. Although He graciously works in our lives, even before we approach Him in prayer, it is in prayer that we give our all-powerful Creator, our loving Redeemer, and our Coming King—Jesus Christ—permission to use us in order to glorify His name in any way He desires. Prayer is our acknowledgment that we are completely dependent upon Him and that knowing Him is the top priority of our lives.

**Activity 1:** This week, just as you have designated time for your meals or work assignments, set aside a specific uninterrupted time to pray. Find a place where you can be alone with God, and share your thoughts aloud with Him.

**Activity 2:** This week ask God to help you find one or two others with whom you can pray. Invite them to join you in united prayer.

Next week we will spend a little time in our Sabbath School class sharing our prayer experiences that happened during the week.