

The Word: The Foundation of Revival



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 119:50, 74, 116; Heb. 4:12; 11:3; John 5:39; Heb. 4:1, 2; Acts 20:27–32.*

Memory Text: “Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word” (*Psalms 119:154, NKJV*).

Just as serious Bible study spawned past revival movements, we believe that it will happen again in the last days. The Holy Spirit will move upon a generation of committed Adventist Christians who have discovered His will in His Word and are passionate about proclaiming it to the world.

They will have found grace and strength and hope in His Word; they will have come face-to-face with the matchless charms of Christ in His Word. Thus, God will honor their commitment by pouring out His Holy Spirit in abundance, and the whole world will be lightened with the glory of the three angels' messages. The Holy Spirit will be poured out beyond measure, and the gospel will be carried to the ends of the earth, and Jesus Christ will return (*Matt. 24:14*).

In this week's lesson we will study the role of the Bible in revival and how God's Word can make a life-changing difference in us if we surrender ourselves in faith and obedience to its precepts and truths.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 20.*

Revived Through the Word

Look up each of the verses below. On the first line write the plea. On the second line write the circumstance that led David to make the plea.

Ps. 119:25 (Plea) _____

(Circumstance) _____

Ps. 119:107 (Plea) _____

(Circumstance) _____

Ps. 119:153, 154 (Plea) _____

(Circumstance) _____

In the Psalms, David talks about the blessings of the Word in his own spiritual life. Read the following verses from Psalm 119 and choose a word from each verse that best summarizes the blessings that the psalmist discovered in that Word. *Ps. 119:50, 74, 116, 130, 160, 169, 170.*

David found courage and strength in God’s Word. He discovered hope and divine guidance in God’s Word. The Word of God brought light to his darkened mind (*Ps. 119:130*). It nourished his famished heart and quenched his thirsty soul (*Ps. 119:81*). When Saul threatened to kill him, he clung to God’s promise of deliverance (*Ps. 34:4*). Plagued with guilt after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, he clung to God’s promise of forgiveness (*Ps. 32:1, 2*). Perplexed regarding the future, he clung to God’s promise of guidance (*Ps. 32:8*). David jubilantly exclaimed, “Your word has given me life” (*Ps. 119:50, NKJV*). The foundation of revival is all about finding new life in God’s Word.

How can you learn to draw hope, strength, assurance, and light from the Word of God? That is, how can you have a deeper experience with the Lord through coming to know Him as He is revealed in the Bible?

The Word’s Creative Power

Read Hebrews 4:12. The passage states that God’s Word is living, powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing our inmost being. How is God’s Word alive? What does that mean?

In what way is God’s Word different from the intelligent counsel of any other wise teacher, pastor, or counselor? What do the following texts say about the power of God’s Word? *Ps. 33:6, 9; Heb. 11:3; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.*

There is value in wise human counsel. We have all been helped by the advice of others. The problem is that human counsel does not carry with it the power to accomplish the kind of change that God’s Word can. God’s Word is a living, dynamic, powerful agent of change. The same power that was in God’s spoken word at Creation is in the Written Word of God. Accepting God’s commands and promises by faith, we receive the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish that which Christ commands.

“The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature, and re-creates the soul in the image of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 126.

A casual reading of God’s Word very seldom produces spiritual revival. Studying the Bible to prove one’s own position, or to convince someone else of his or her mistakes, does very little good for our own spiritual life. Change comes when we prayerfully read God’s Word, asking the Holy Spirit to give us the power to be more like Jesus. Real transformation takes place when we ask the God of creation to re-create us in His image. Change comes when Jesus’ teachings in Scripture become part of our lives, and we live “ ‘by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ ” (*Matt. 4:4, NKJV*).

**In what ways has the power of God’s Word changed your life?
In which areas do you need to see more of that change?**

Jesus and the Word

How are the functions of the Word of God and the Spirit of God similar? Read *John 5:39; 16:14, 15*.

The Word of God bears witness of Jesus. The Holy Spirit also bears witness of Jesus. The Spirit leads us to a deeper experience with Jesus through His Word. The purpose of the Holy Spirit in revival is not primarily to manifest Himself through supernatural signs and wonders but to exalt Jesus through His Word. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not about our power to accomplish great miracles. It is about God's power to transform our lives—and that's what revival and reformation are all about.

The Word of God provides the foundation or the basis for all genuine revival. Our experience flows out of an understanding of God's Word. Our praise and worship spring from minds saturated with the Word. A transformed life is the greatest testimony of true revival.

Positive feelings of praise may accompany revival, but they are never the basis for revival. Any so-called "revival" based solely on external feelings or experience is shallow at best, deceptive at worst. It is an illusion of spirituality, not genuine godliness. When revival is rooted in the Word of God, it is an experience that lasts and makes a difference in our lives and in the lives of the people around us.

The story of Jesus' appearance to the two disciples on the Emmaus road reveals the role that the Bible plays in initiating true revival. These followers of Christ were filled with confusion. Gradually, however, He "expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (*Luke 24:27, NKJV*). He repeated the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah. Jesus could have worked a miracle to prove His identity or shown the scars in His hands. He did not. Instead, He gave them a Bible study.

Notice their response as they reflected on what had happened that day: "They said to one another, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?' " (*Luke 24:32, NKJV*).

What an example of genuine revival!

Why can't we trust our feelings? How can our feelings deceive us? What role do feelings have in our walk with the Lord, and what role do they not have?

Revival, Faith, and the Word

Speaking of the time just before His return, Jesus said, “‘When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’” (*Luke 18:8, NKJV*). Evidently, faith will be in short supply in the last days.

How might we define biblical faith? Is faith believing that God will give us anything we want? Is faith centered in our desires? Is faith about asking God for what we want and believing we will receive it if we only believe hard enough?

We should know the answers to those rhetorical questions, shouldn't we?

Faith, true faith, is always focused on God's will, not on our wishes. It is trusting in God, believing in His promises, and acting on His Word. Our faith grows as we listen to God's Word and put it into practice (*Rom. 10:17; James 2:17, 18*). Opening our minds to the teachings of God's Word builds faith; and doing what God says—even if it is contrary to our personal desires—prepares us to receive the fullness of the Spirit's power.

Why do some people receive little benefit from reading the Bible?

Heb. 4:1, 2.

Our spiritual experience is revived when we accept and claim God's Word by faith. There is little benefit derived from hastily reading the Bible out of a sense of obligation or duty. We are changed as we internalize what we read, and allow the teachings of the Bible to mold our thoughts and our lives.

Compare the faith of the Roman centurion, the paralytic at Bethesda, and the disciples on the stormy Sea of Galilee (*Matt. 8:8–10, John 5:6–9, Matt. 14:29–33*). What can we learn from each account?

Faith does not grow merely by reading or listening to God's Word. It comes as we claim His promises as our own and when we believe that what He said applies to us personally. God has given each one of us a measure of faith. It is one of Heaven's gifts (*Rom. 12:3*). When we exercise the faith that He has already placed in our hearts, that faith cannot help but grow.

The Word: Revival's Guardian and Safeguard

The Holy Spirit mightily moved through the teaching and preaching of the apostle Paul as he established the Christian church in Ephesus. Ephesus was a city of approximately two hundred fifty thousand people. It was considered the marketplace of Asia. As ships brought their wares from throughout Asia, people flocked to Ephesus to buy fine silk, rare jewels, flavorful spices, hand-woven carpets, exquisite art objects, and exotic foods. It was also the center for the worship of the goddess Diana and the future home of the famed Celsus Library, with 12,000 volumes. The city had a magnificent amphitheater seating 15,000 people. It was used for massive concerts and theatrical productions. Sexual promiscuity was commonplace. If there ever was an unlikely place for Christianity to take root, grow, and flourish, it was Ephesus.

Read Acts 20:27–32. What was Paul's concern for the believers at Ephesus? What was his counsel to the church members in Ephesus? What role did he give to the Word of God?

Read 1 Peter 1:22, 23; James 1:21, 22; 1 John 2:14. Summarize the teachings of Peter, James, and John regarding the importance of the Bible in the life of each Christian. Especially notice the disciples' teaching regarding the impact of the Bible in our spiritual lives.

What similarities do you see in all of the above texts regarding the role of the Word of God? Why, then, must the Word of God be central to spiritual revival, both on a personal and on a corporate level?

Further Study: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isaiah 8:20. The people of God are directed to the Scriptures as their safeguard against the influence of false teachers and the delusive power of spirits of darkness. Satan employs every possible device to prevent men from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its plain utterances reveal his deceptions. At every revival of God’s work the prince of evil is aroused to more intense activity; he is now putting forth his utmost efforts for a final struggle against Christ and His followers. The last great delusion is soon to open before us. Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony every statement and every miracle must be tested.

“Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read carefully the Ellen G. White statements in Friday’s Further Study. What role does she give to the Word of God, especially in the context of the last days and the final deceptions? Dwell on the implications of this line: “So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures.” What does this tell us about how we need to be careful about judging truth based only on personal experience or on the way that we feel?
- 2 During the week we read James 1:22, where we are told to be “doers of the Word.” What does that mean, and why is that so essential for us if we are to have any kind of true spiritual revival in our lives? Why is reading about faith and teaching about faith and talking about faith so much easier than living it? Think through your week: how much of a “doer of the Word” were you?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Hebrews 4:12*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: (1) Understand more deeply the vital importance of knowing God through His Word. (2) Comprehend more fully the significance of the Word in both the nurturing of spiritual growth and the preserving of each believer from the deceptions of the evil one.

Feel: Foster the desire to study God’s Word with a receptive mind and a joyful heart.

Do: Commit to spending time with Jesus in His Word each day and seek to apply the biblical principles, studied in practical situations, to his or her daily life.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Life-Transforming Power of God’s Word

A Why is God’s Word dramatically different from other inspirational books? What sets it apart from all other literature?

B What role does the Bible play in revival, and why?

II. Feel: The Word’s Impact on One’s Life

A In order to appreciate God’s Word fully, what do we need to realize about our own need?

B How does the study, or lack of study, of God’s Word affect our relationships with God?

C Share a time when you felt personally close to God as you studied His Word. Think of a passage of Scripture that particularly moved you and share why.

III. Do: Receive God’s Richest Blessing From the Word

A What steps do we need to take in order to make Bible study more meaningful and spiritually productive?

B How can we make God’s Word the center of our lives as Jesus did?

C In what practical events/seminars/retreats can a local congregation participate in order to experience the revivifying, sanctifying power of the Word?

► **Summary:** When we spend time with God in His Word, we will know Him better, depend on Him more, and witness for Him more effectively.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Hebrews 4:12*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Word of God reveals the will of God. In His Word we are brought into contact with the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Word. As the Holy Spirit ministers to our hearts through the Word, we become more like Jesus.

Just for Teachers: This week's lesson should help the members of your class to recognize that God's Word is not merely a source of true doctrine, although it is certainly that. More than anything, it is a revelation of Jesus Christ (*John 5:39*). As the Holy Spirit impresses our minds with Jesus' love and power through the Word, our spiritual lives are revived (*2 Cor. 3:18*). Without a thoughtful study of God's Word, our spiritual lives will be barren. The fruit of genuine spirituality flourishes when our lives are rooted in God's Word. God's Word is the foundation of all true revival (*Ps. 119:25*). Without it, revival will either degenerate into emotional fanaticism, be vulnerable to doctrinal deceptions, or be stalled in the doldrums of complacency. The purpose of this week's lesson is not only to emphasize the importance of God's Word but also to stimulate a greater love for the study of God's Word.

Opening Discussion: In this week's lesson we will study the relationship between God's Word—the Bible—and spiritual revival. Throughout history, great revival movements have been birthed through the study of God's Word. Men and women of prayer, their minds saturated with the Word of God, have changed the world as the Holy Spirit changed them through the Word. One such earthshaker was Martin Luther. Luther, however, had difficulty believing that God actually loved him. His picture of God was one of a vindictive judge and a wrathful tyrant. One day while examining some books in the library at the University of Erfurt where he was a monk, Luther discovered a Latin Bible. This was the first time he had ever held a copy of the entire Bible in his hands. Ellen G. White describes his reaction this way: "With mingled awe and wonder he [Luther] turned the sacred pages; with quickened pulse and throbbing heart he read for himself the words of life, pausing now and then to exclaim: 'O that God would give me such a book for myself!' . . . Angels of heaven were by his side, and rays of light from the throne of God revealed the treasures of truth to his understanding."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 122. The revival in

Luther's heart that sparked the flames of the Reformation was ignited that day in the monastery library as he discovered the matchless charms of Christ's grace through His Word.

Question for Discussion:

Why does God's Word contain such life-changing, revival-generating power?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that revival is not rooted in our human emotions or feelings. It is not some warm fuzzy emotion that we experience in prayer, during a particularly moving sermon, or in a wave of ecstasy during a popular praise song. Revival is the renewal of God's grace in the soul as we fellowship with Him in prayer and through His Word. There is no substitute for the role of the Bible in revival.

Bible Commentary

I. The Living Word *(Review Hebrews 4:12 with your class.)*

Hebrews chapter 4 is packed with meaning, especially verse 12. Each phrase is significant. Each word is full of riches. Let's study it phrase by phrase, sensing its practical impact on our lives today. "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (NKJV). The Bible is the Written Word, and Jesus is the Living Word (*John 1:1, 14*). Jesus is the Word made flesh. If you want to see what the Word looks like lived out in human life, look at Jesus. His Word is living and imparts life. It is a creative Word (*Ps. 33:6, 9*). In the Word we meet the living Christ through His Spirit, and He transforms our lives. His Word is powerful. The Greek word for "powerful" is *energes*, from which we get the English word *energy*. As Ellen G. White so aptly states, "The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and re-creates the soul in the image of God."—*Education*, p. 126. Re-creation requires the power of creation, and that power is found in God's Word.

The image of a "sharp sword," or of a "two-edged sword," is a com-

mon expression for God’s Word (*see Eph. 6:17, Rev. 1:16, 19:13–15*). This expression is followed in Hebrews 4:12 by three pairings—soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and thoughts and intents. A careful study of these pairings reveals the depth of their meaning. The soul and spirit represent *our spiritual faculties*, the joints and marrow represent *our physical abilities*, and the thoughts and intents represent *our mental capacities*. The point of our text is that the Word of God has the creative ability to transform our entire nature. It governs every aspect of human life and behavior.

Consider This: The Bible is different from all other literature. Other books may be inspiring, but the Bible is inspired. It is God’s message to our hearts. It speaks to us personally. Its message is both universal and eternal. Of the many evidences of the Bible’s inspiration, which one impresses you the most?

II. Hearing the Word (*Review Romans 10:17 with your class.*)

Genuine, authentic, spiritually renewing faith comes through hearing the Word of God. In the New Testament, the word for “hearing,” *akoe*, implies not only hearing with your ears but hearing with your heart. Have you ever talked with someone who heard what you said but was really not listening and had little comprehension of what you meant? In this passage, Paul urges us to listen to God’s Word, truly hear what is being said, and let it change our lives.

Consider This: When the Bible becomes the “word of God” speaking to us just as though we could hear Him speaking with His own voice, our lives will never be the same again. Share a time that you have felt the deep conviction of the Holy Spirit as you read God’s Word or a time when you sensed His presence as you meditated on a passage of Scripture.

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Thought Questions:

❶ What are some of the obstacles to revival in my own life?

❷ Is the busyness of my life sapping my spiritual power and quenching the sparks of revival?

Application Questions:

1 Share some practical ways that you have found to make Bible study more meaningful in your own life.

2 Have you experienced a spiritual revival on an academy or college campus; at a camp meeting or evangelistic meeting; or in your local church? What characterized that revival? Did its influence extend for any length of time? Why do revivals tend to be short-lived at times?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: *The devil will keep us so busy and occupied with the things of time that the things of eternity are crowded out. The earthly strangles the heavenly. When we spend time alone with God in His Word, we may not sense that we are growing at all. We may discern little change in our lives. We may seem to be making little progress in the Christian life. Growth may seem slow, but it is occurring. Gradually, imperceptibly, the Holy Spirit is changing us.*

1 How many of you have ever had a child who seemed to be growing extremely slowly and then entered a growth spurt and really grew rapidly in a short time? Describe this growth spurt. When did it occur? How much did the child grow?

2 Did this growth spurt merely take place at a certain point of time, or did the body prepare for it for years? Compare our growth in Christ to the growth in our physical bodies. Although parents cannot make their child grow any taller, what can they do to cooperate in this growth process? How does this apply to our Christian growth? What can we do to cooperate with God in the growth process?

Suggestion: Is there a teenager who has just experienced a growth spurt whom you could interview about his or her experience and then compare that to the Christian life? If that is not possible, have members discuss their own growth spurts or those of their children or grandchildren. The point you want to leave with your class is that growth will occur if we have fellowship with Christ through prayer and the study of God's Word.