

# The Holy Spirit, the Bible, and Prayer



## SABBATH—MARCH 4

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** John 15:7; Matthew 7:7; Psalm 66:18; James 1:6–8; 1 John 5:14, 15; Acts 2:38.

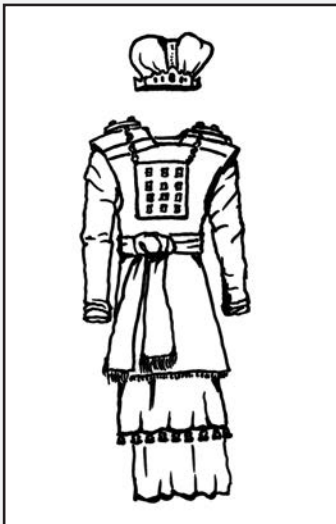
**MEMORY VERSE:** “In the same way, the Holy Spirit helps us when we are weak. We [do not] know what we should pray for. But the Spirit himself prays for us. He prays through groans too deep for words. God, who looks into our hearts, knows the mind of the Spirit. And the Spirit prays for God’s people just as God wants him to pray” (Romans 8:26, 27, NIV).

**BEING TRULY SPIRITUAL GOES TOGETHER WITH PRAYER.** There is no real spiritual life without strong prayer. Our need for repentance (turning away from sin) is very important. But perhaps one of the greatest and most urgent needs is a new prayer life. The good news is that even in our prayers we have the help of the Holy Spirit. Prayer draws us closer to God. It brings us near to Him.

God is more than able to supply all of our needs according to His riches (Philippians 4:19). And God is always at the center of all true prayer and spiritual life. After all, both prayer and the spiritual life are rooted in His Written Word (the Bible).

We should never base our spiritual lives on our unsteady experience or our feelings. We should not base our prayers on false spiritual exercises or on ideas that cannot be trusted. Instead, the Bible must guide our spiritual lives. We must follow God’s will (plan). And it is shown to us in His Word. The Holy Spirit also awakens in us a desire to seek God in prayer. He leads us to lift up one another in our prayers.

## PRAYER THAT IS PLEASING TO GOD (John 15:7)



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Many prayers “wear” what may seem like “spiritual clothes.” In other words, they may seem holy and religious. But they are not. Instead, sometimes our reasons for praying are selfish.

**Read John 15:7. In this verse, why is living in Jesus and His words living in us important for our prayers? What different purpose will our prayers have if we do not live in Jesus?**

First, we must search for Jesus and find Him. Then we must enjoy spending time with Him. Finding God and spending time with Him are more important gifts than anything else He might give to us. If God comes first in our lives, we will want to do what He wants. His thoughts will shape our desires. For this reason, God must be at the center of prayer. Then we will begin to pray in the way He wants us to pray. We will start to see our whole lives through His eyes.

God is deeply interested in us. He wishes to be included in all parts of our lives. He wants us to share everything with Him. He wants us to tell Him about our worries, our fears, our wishes, our hopes, our desires, our successes, our joys, and our failures. And we can talk about these things with Him. God is a good Friend. And He will help us to see everything about ourselves through His eyes.

Prayer, however, does not change God. Prayer changes us. Prayer brings us to God, who changes our lives.

“Prayer opens the heart to God. He is our Friend. We do not need to make known to God what we are. That is not the purpose of prayer. Instead, prayer helps us to receive God into our hearts. Prayer does not bring God down to us. Instead, prayer lifts us up to Him.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 93.

What a powerful quote! It captures the truth of what prayer does to us and for us. Prayer makes us open containers for God’s riches. He pours out His grace (forgiveness; mercy), His power, and Himself on our lives. Who has not, at some point, experienced how prayer can draw us closer to God?

**Think about your prayer life. What do you pray for? When do you pray? Why do you pray? What do your answers tell you about your own spiritual condition (state)? What do they say about your own relationship to God? What changes might you need to make?**

## THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT PRAYER INVOLVES ASKING GOD (Matthew 7:7)

**Read Matthew 7:7. This verse says we must ask God for what we want before we can receive anything. We know that God knows everything. So, why is it still important for us to ask Him for what we need?**

Asking shows our desire for God's support and help. It also shows our trust in God. And we come near to God through prayer. We must remember, too, that asking God to help us gives Him permission to work on our behalf.

**Read Mark 11:24; 1 John 5:14, 15; and Psalm 66:18. What do these verses say about why no prayer request is too big for God? Why is it good to know that God is generous and loves to give to us out of all that He has? What does God need from us before He can answer our prayers?**

We truly can ask God for anything. No request is too small or unimportant for Him. No request is so big that God cannot handle it. He is all-powerful. So, by faith, we may claim every promise in the Bible. And by faith, we may receive the promised gift from His hands according to His plan (2 Corinthians 1:20).

But there are some conditions (requirements) that need to be met (completed) first in order for us to receive what we ask for. We must be willing to give our lives fully to God. We must put ourselves completely under His control. Our prayers also must not be selfish or come from our sinful desires. And this is all because God will not answer such prayers (read Isaiah 59:1, 2).

There is another important condition that we need to meet in order for our prayers to be answered. We must be willing to follow God's plan for our lives and to be obedient. "All God's gifts are promised to us. But first a condition needs to be met. We must obey Him. Then He can give us His gifts."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 145.

We also know that God is generous. Yet, it gives us courage to come boldly to Him. "The Lord is not glorified by dull and lifeless prayers that do not ask anything of Him. He wants every one who believes to come boldly to His throne of grace. He wants them to ask for what they want, believing that He hears their prayers."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 7, 1901.



**We come near to God through prayer.**

## THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT WE MUST HAVE FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES WHEN WE PRAY (Mark 11:24)

**Yesterday, we learned that prayer involves asking God for what we need. Now read Mark 11:24. In this verse, what else does Jesus say we must do when we pray?**



**We must believe that God will do what is best for us in His time.**

Asking is not enough. There is something else that also needs to be included in our prayers: faith. The book of Hebrews tells us that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6, NIV). We must remember, then, that there are more than three thousand promises in the Bible. And here is how we must claim God’s promises: we must kneel down before God. We must open the Bible to any one of those promises. We must have a heart as pure and simple and trusting as a small child’s. We must ask God to keep His promise to us. And we must believe that He will do what is best for us in His time.

**Read James 1:6–8. How do these verses describe the person who has no faith? Why is faith necessary to receiving the promised gifts?**

We must come to God believing that He lives. And we must come to Him believing that He will reward those who search for Him. What kind of prayer gets results? Effective prayer must be accompanied by two beliefs. First, we must believe that God can answer our prayers. And second, we must believe that God will do so according to His divine plan.

In the Bible, believing is related to trusting. We can trust someone only when we know the other person to be trustworthy. Suppose we doubt that God will keep His promises. Then we will not move forward in faith to claim God’s promises. And we cannot expect to receive anything from Him. To believe means to take God at His Word (the Bible). It means that we depend on God and His promises. We trust Him, even when our feelings tell us to doubt.

Faith, then, always opens the door to the divine treasure-house. God works through the Holy Spirit to move the hearts of men and women to trust the Word of God. And our faithful prayers move the all-powerful arm of God.

**What helps you to grow stronger in faith? How does Jesus help you to believe that He is willing and able to help you in your times of need?**

## THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT WE MUST CLAIM GOD'S PROMISES (1 John 5:14, 15)

We must claim the things that God promises us when we pray. If we do not, then what we believe or how much we believe will make no difference.

**Read 1 John 5:14, 15. These verses say that we can be sure that God hears us. And we can be sure that we have what we ask for from Him. What does John say is the reason we have for trusting these promises?**

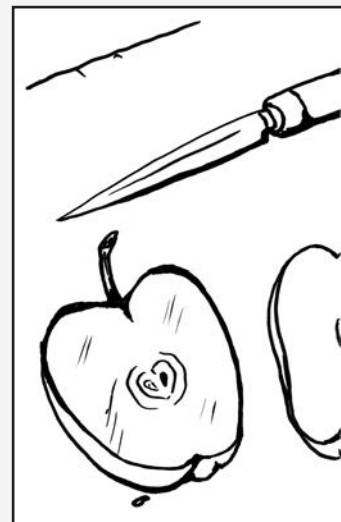
We must ask God for what we need in keeping with what He wants. And we must believe His promises. Then we need to claim what He has promised. We can claim God's promise by giving thanks to God. But we must thank Him even before we receive what we ask for from Him. In this way, the promises become part of our hearts. They live within us. Ellen G. White said, "We may ask for any gift God promises. Then we are to believe that we receive the promise. And we are to give thanks to God that we have received it."—Adapted from *Education*, page 258.

In Luke 8:1–11, Jesus shows how the Word of God is like seed. A whole apple tree, for example, is contained in an apple seed. In the same way, the gift of God is contained in His promise. We must claim the promise.

John 11 shows that Jesus prayed in this way. In John 11:39–41, we read that Jesus thanked the Father for bringing Lazarus back to life. But Lazarus was still in the grave. Jesus received the answer to His prayer when He thanked God. We must remember, then, that we are God's children. We also are to live on God's promises.

"The Lord says, 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you.' Psalm 50:15 [NKJV]. He invites us to bring to Him the things that puzzle us. We are to tell Him our needs. We are to tell Him of our need for divine help. He asks us always to be ready to pray. We are to ask Him for what we need when trouble comes. Our urgent prayers show our strong trust in God. The sense of our need leads us to pray earnestly. Our heavenly Father is moved by our asking."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 172.

**Why is it so important to always bring everything to God in prayer?**



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**PRAYING FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT (Ephesians 3:16)**

**Read Ephesians 3:16 and Acts 2:38. What do these verses tell us about receiving the Holy Spirit in our lives?**

The Holy Spirit is a blessing. He brings all other blessings into our lives.

But there is one major obstacle to receiving this blessing: us. We get in the way. We often are unprepared to receive the Holy Spirit.

So, here is what we need to do to receive the Holy Spirit. We first need to repent (turn from sin). Then we need to surrender our lives fully to Jesus. That is exactly what the church in the New Testament did. And it is the Holy Spirit that even helps us to do that.

First, then, we answer the Holy Spirit's call. He calls us to repent. Turning away from sin shows that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. So, we need to be humble (not proud). We must have faith. And we need to confess our sins. Then God can wash us clean from all sin. In other words, we need to understand just how fallen we are. We must have a sense of how much we need God and His grace (mercy and forgiveness) in our lives. Without Him, we are lost. We are dead in our sins. And we are in danger of losing eternal life.

Second, earnest prayer helps us to do what God needs us to do so that He can give us the Holy Spirit. Then all we have to do is to ask God for His Spirit. And God will gladly give His Spirit to us. "God is our heavenly Parent. He is willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. He is more willing to give us His Spirit than earthly parents are willing to give good gifts to their children."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Ye [You] Shall Receive Power*, page 284.

We also must remember that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to lift up Jesus. The Spirit is given to us to help us to be like Christ. The Spirit helps us to serve others. He helps us build up the body of Christ, the church. So, any worship practice in church or at home that lifts up the Spirit above Jesus Christ is wrong. For it is through Jesus that we "come to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 2:18, NIV).

**Why is the gift of the Holy Spirit the greatest gift that Jesus could give us? What has been your experience with having the Holy Spirit in your life? How different would your life be without this gift?**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “Asking to Give,” pages 139–149, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*. For helpful and encouraging promises, read Ellen G. White, *God Has Promised* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1982).

Without prayer, we have no spiritual power in our lives. Prayer connects us to the Source of all spiritual power. Without prayer, we also have no living link with God.

Truly, we have been given wonderful promises about how God answers prayer. But what about the times when we do not get what we pray for? What about the times when we have done everything God has asked us to do, but we still do not get what we asked for? “Do not be discouraged if your prayers do not seem to be answered right away. The Lord sees that prayer often is mixed with selfishness. In other words, we pray for the things we want. And the Lord does not answer our prayers in the way we might expect. Instead, He tests us. He brings us through situations that make us feel ashamed of our sins. Then we will more clearly see what we truly need. Also, God does not give us those things that will satisfy a hunger for sinful things. He does not give us anything that will hurt us or cause us to dishonor Him. He does not give us those things that will fill us with pride. We must come to God with a heart that has given everything to Him.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, page 89.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 In what ways does prayer have an effect on your life? That is, what effect does prayer have on you when you pray? In what ways are you different after you have prayed than before you prayed?
- 2 Suppose someone has prayed and prayed for something. But he or she has not gotten the answer he or she hoped and prayed for. For example, suppose he or she prayed for the healing of a sick child. What would you say to this person? How do we learn to trust God even in these situations?
- 3 In class, talk about your own experiences with prayer. What does prayer mean to you? What have you learned about prayer that could help others who might be struggling with understanding the purpose of prayer?
- 4 Why is it important to pray even if we do not fully understand how it all works?