

The Promise of Prayer



SABBATH—MARCH 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Colossians 4:2; Romans 12:12; Matthew 26:34–44; Hebrews 11:6; James 4:2; John 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

MEMORY VERSE: “Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17, NKJV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: In many places in the Bible the Lord calls us to pray. Prayer is an important part of our walk with Him.

ELLEN G. WHITE GIVES US THESE WORDS ON PRAYER: “Our heavenly Father waits to give us the fullness of His blessing. It is our privilege [honorable right] to drink largely at the fountain of boundless [limitless] love. What a wonder it is that we pray so little! God is ready and willing to hear the sincere [honest] prayer of the humblest of His children. But it seems that we are often not very willing to make known our wants to God. What can the angels of heaven think of us poor helpless humans, who do not pray for help when they are tempted? God loves us so much and is ready to give us more than we can ask or think. But we pray so little and have so little faith. Meanwhile the angels love to bow before God. They love to be near Him. They think it is a big honor to be close to God and count [think of] this closeness as their highest joy. But the children of earth, who need so much the help that only God can give, seem satisfied to walk without the light of His Spirit. They fail to appreciate the companionship of God’s presence as they should.”—Adapted from *Steps to Christ*, page 94.

SUNDAY—MARCH 4**THE POWER OF PRAYER**
(Matthew 26:41)

One day a young man received a letter from a former co-worker. The co-worker had retired several years earlier. The two workers had not gotten along. The one who had left had treated the other one badly. But the worker who was still there opened the letter and started to read. Part of the letter read, "You know, I do not understand how prayer works, and never did. But I do know that we have been told to pray. Over the past few weeks, while I've [I have] been praying, God tells me how terribly I treated you all that time. I see that I was wrong, un-Christlike, and a terrible witness for my faith. I know I should have done this a long time ago. But I do sincerely apologize. I have to claim Christ's forgiveness for what I have done, no matter how unworthy [not deserving] I am. And now I ask for your forgiveness too."

In many ways, this story gives a good example of the power of prayer. Prayer is not only about asking God to do the impossible. (There is no question that God can do that.) But prayer also can cause a greater miracle: it can change the human heart.

As the person wrote, prayer is not always easy to understand. Why ask God for something if He knows about it already? Will God not do something if we do not ask for it first? Can our prayers really change what the Creator will do?

We may not understand how prayer

works. But one thing is certain: without it, our walk with the Lord is sure to fail.

What is the main point that is found in each of the following verses? Matthew 26:41; Luke 18:1; 1 Timothy 2:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Peter 4:7; Colossians 4:2; and Romans 12:12.

There is no question that as Christians we are told to pray and to pray often. That we might not understand how prayer works is, really, not that important. Most of us do not fully understand how anything works anyway. If we waited until we fully understood all the issues (problems) regarding our faith, then it would not be faith at all, would it? The very word *faith* suggests that there are many parts about it that we do not fully understand. But there is one thing for sure. Anyone who prays hard regularly for God's will to be done can say that prayer can, and does, change our lives.



As Christians, we are told to pray, and pray often.

What is your understanding of prayer? How has it influenced your life? Where would you be in your Christian walk without prayer?

MONDAY—MARCH 5

JESUS, THE PRAYING MESSIAH (CHOSEN ONE) (Luke 3:21, 22)

What do Luke 3:21, 22; Luke 9:28, 29; Luke 6:12, 13; Hebrews 5:7; Matthew 14:23; Luke 22:31, 32; and Matthew 26:34–44 teach us about Jesus and prayer?

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, was the One who was without sin, without fault. He was the One who lived in perfect union (togetherness) with the will of the Father. But He clearly had a powerful prayer life. (The above verses do not even include Jesus' prayer in John 17.) If Jesus, the perfect One, needed to pray in order to deal with the things He faced, how much more do we? Christ's example of prayer makes it very clear how important prayer needs to be in our walk with the Lord. It is hard to imagine anyone having any kind of relationship with God without that person praying. If communication is important for keeping a relationship with other people, how much more important is it in a relationship with God? Jesus gives us an example. It is up to us to make the choice to follow it.

How regular is your prayer life? How easily do you forget to pray? Do you pray regularly or just when

you are in trouble? How can you learn to make prayer more important in your whole walk with the Lord?



If Jesus felt the need to pray, how much more do we?

TUESDAY—MARCH 6

THE PRAYER OF FAITH (Hebrews 11:6)

What important principles (rules) does Hebrews 11:6 teach us about what is required for prayer and what it means to us?

Prayer is a way of coming to God and of opening oneself up to (being honest with) Him. We do not pray so that God will know the things that we need. Jesus Himself says that “ ‘your Father knows what you need even before you ask him’ ” (Matthew 6:8, NIV). We pray because prayer is a way of exercising (using) our faith in God. It is a way of making our faith stronger, more real, and useful. Who has not experienced how prayer can help to make one's faith grow and improve one's relationship with God?



Prayer makes our faith stronger.

Prayer is a way of helping to empty the soul of self. It is a way to die daily. It is a way to reconnect with God on a very personal level. It is a way to remind yourself that you are not your own. Prayer helps you to remember that you have been bought with a price. Without prayer you would be left alone. You would fall and die in a world full of powers and forces that could quickly crush you into the dirt.

So often we are told to “seek [look for] the Lord in prayer.” What does that mean to you? Read Daniel 9:3, 4; and Zechariah 8:21.

Every prayer is an act of faith. Who can see his or her prayers go to heaven? Who can see God receive them? Often we pray without seeing quick results. But we have faith that God hears and will answer in the best way possible. Prayer is an act of faith. In prayer we reach out beyond what we see or feel or even fully understand.

How much of your prayer life is really meaningful and heartfelt (honest)? How can you pray in a way that will draw (pull) you closer to God?



Prayer is a way to die daily.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 7

“BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK” (James 4:2, KJV)

One of the questions that those who pray often ask is, “Can my prayers really make God do something that He might not do if I did not ask?” That is a good question. To answer it, all we can do is go to the Word of God and read what it says.

What do James 4:2; Luke 11:9, 10; and James 5:16–18 say about our prayers and the actions of God?

Prayer changes us and influences our relationship with God and others. But the Bible is very clear that our prayers influence what God does. We ask and He answers, one way or another.

How do we see the principle in Genesis 18:22–33 at work here?

No matter what people understand about this truth, God answers human prayers. God said that He does. So, we have to accept His Word.

“But they make themselves low in my sight. They pray and look to me. And they turn from their evil ways. Then I will listen to them from heaven. I will forgive their sin. And I will heal their land. After all, they are my people” (2 Chronicles 7:14, Nlrv). What does this verse teach us about prayer?

Notice that God is not going to heal the land of the people of Israel just because they ask. They are asked to pray. But prayer is only one part of their lives that the people must reform (change).

Perhaps the most important example of this principle (rule) is here: “If we admit that we have sinned, he will forgive us our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure” (1 John 1:9, Nlrv). Here, we find a powerful connection between prayer and God’s action in our life. We confess our sins, and He forgives them. It is a method that God uses to cleanse us from sin and make us pure. This clear idea suggests to us that if we do not pray, do not confess, we are not forgiven. There is no question. In these cases, God acts in answer to our prayers.

THURSDAY—MARCH 8

FOLLOWING THE RULES (Hebrews 10:38)

Someone sits in a restaurant. He eats a large meal filled with fatty food. He washes it all down with a soft drink. Then he finishes it off with a large bowl of chocolate ice cream covered in hot fudge. That night, when going to bed (after having a little snack), he gets on his knees to pray. Part of his prayer is, “O Lord, please help me lose weight.”

What is wrong with this picture?

The fact is, we can expect God to answer our prayers. But there are things we need to do first. We need to live out our prayers. We need to do all that we can, in our power, to see them answered. This is not showing a lack of faith. Instead, it is part of what living by faith is all about.

“If we hold any known sin in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us. But the prayer of the truly sorrowful soul is always accepted. When all known wrongs are made right, we may believe that God will answer our prayers. Our own good marks will never gain us the favor of God. It is Jesus’ goodness that will save us. His blood will cleanse us. But we still have a work to do in following the rules of acceptance.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 95.

Ellen White is not saying that we have to be perfect in order to have our prayers answered. She is clear, too, that our acceptance with God is not based on us or on our good

works. It depends only on the goodness of Christ for us. She is saying that we have to have faith and that we must surrender to God's will so that He can work in our lives.

How do Hebrews 10:38; Deuteronomy 4:29; Luke 9:23; John 14:15; and 1 Thessalonians 4:3 help us to understand what it means to comply (agree and follow) with the conditions (rules)?

These are the conditions (rules) necessary for us to have a prayer life that works. But the most important condition is our own sense of need, our own sense of helplessness, our own sense that we are sinners in need of grace.¹ We need to admit that our only hope depends on the Lord, who has done so much for us. To be too sure of ourselves will cause us to spiritually crash.

What are the things you are praying hard for? As you pray, ask yourself, What could I be doing differently that could help to give me the answer that I want so badly?

FRIDAY—MARCH 9

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. . . . Prayer puts the heart in touch with God and strengthens the religious experience." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pages 254, 255.

1. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

2. presumption—expecting God to answer all of your prayers in the way you want them to be answered.

"When we do not receive the answers we ask for, we are still to believe that the Lord hears and that He will answer our prayers. We are so limited in our understanding that we sometimes ask for things that would not be a blessing to us. Our heavenly Father in love answers our prayers by giving us what will be best for us. He also gives us what we ourselves would desire if we could 'see' all things as they really are. When our prayers do not seem to be answered, we are to hold to the promise. This is because the time of answering will surely come, and we shall receive the blessing we need most. But if we say that prayer will always be answered in the very way and for the special thing that we want, this is presumption.² God is too wise to make mistakes. He also is too good to hold back any good thing from His children who walk uprightly. So do not fear to trust Him, even though you do not see the quick answer to your prayers."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 96.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What do you say to someone who asks, "Why pray, if God knows all things ahead of time?"
- ② Who at times does not struggle with the question of answered and unanswered prayer? For example, someone prays that his car not break down on a trip and, when the car does not

break down, he gives credit to God for answered prayers. This is fine. But what do you say to the person who prays that his child will not die, but the child still dies? How do we understand these things? Or can we?

③ What is the work of the Holy Spirit in our prayer life?

④ Imagine someone new arrives in class and asks, “Can you teach me

what it means to pray? How should I pray? Why should I pray? And what should I expect when I do pray, and what should I not expect?” How would you answer this person?

SUMMARY: There is no question that there are a lot of things about prayer that we do not understand. But those who pray do know one thing for sure: prayer will change your life, and for the better, too.