

Glimpses of Our God
The Promise of Prayer

Lesson #10 for March 10, 2012

Scriptures: Colossians 4:2; Romans 12:12; Matthew 26:34-44; Hebrews 11:6; James 4:2; John 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

1. This lesson is about prayer and the role prayer should play in the life of a Christian.
2. We have been told repeatedly not only through Scripture but also through the writings of Ellen White that the three major ways in which we grow our Christian experience are through Bible study, prayer, and witnessing. How would you describe your prayer experience? Does God answer your prayers? Do we need to kneel down in order to pray? If faith is a relationship with God as with a friend, He speaks to us through Scripture, and we speak to Him in prayer. Our thoughts while studying are also a kind of communication.
3. Prayer has sometimes been described as “practicing the presence of God.” Is that what it means to “pray without ceasing”? (1 Thessalonians 5:17) If we continually practice the presence of God—recognizing that He is constantly present with us—could we sin while “praying”? Do we need to “feel” God’s presence? What would that mean?
4. Is God omnipresent? What does that mean? Does that describe the Holy Spirit only? Or, is God the Father omnipresent also? Did Jesus give up His omnipresence during and after His time here on this earth?
5. Do you sometimes feel like your prayers do not go beyond the ceiling? How do our prayers reach heaven? Or, is it that God is ever present with us through His omnipresence, and so our prayers do not need to reach beyond the ceiling? What about our guardian angels? Aren’t they present with us?
6. How is the Holy Spirit’s work related to our prayers? How do you understand Romans 8:26? How does that work? Compare these words from Ellen White:

Our heavenly Father waits to bestow upon us the fullness of His blessing. It is our privilege to drink largely at the fountain of boundless love. What a wonder it is that we pray so little! God is ready and willing to hear the sincere prayer of the humblest of His children, and yet there is much manifest reluctance on our part to make known our wants to God. What can the angels of heaven think of poor helpless human beings, who are subject to temptation, when God’s heart of infinite love yearns toward them, ready to give them more than they can ask or think, and yet they pray so little and have so little faith? The angels love to bow before God; they love to be near Him. They regard communion with God as their highest joy; and yet the children of earth, who need so much the help that God only can give, seem satisfied to walk without the light of His Spirit, the companionship of His presence.—*Steps to Christ*, p. 94.

7. Do you understand how prayer works? Is the purpose of prayer to change God? Or, is it to change something in the world around us? Or, to change us? When we pray—especially if we are asking God to forgive us our sins—does that bring us conviction of our sin? Do we need to know how prayer works in order to take advantage of it?
8. Certainly, the best example of praying that we could possibly have is Jesus Himself. What examples of prayer can you think of from the life of Christ?

- 1) At His baptism, the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove. A voice said, "This is My beloved Son." (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22) The entire Trinity was present and active in response to Jesus' prayer.
 - 2) Jesus thought it was necessary to pray all night in preparation for His calling the disciples and sending them forth to work for Him. (Luke 6:12,13) What do you think He was praying for? Was He praying for guidance? Strength? Wisdom?
 - 3) The glory of God came down on the mount of transfiguration. (Luke 9:28,29)
 - 4) In the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:34-44) It is very interesting to note that in this example, God did not answer the prayers of Jesus in the way He asked for!
9. Why do you think Jesus spent so much time in prayer? There are suggestions that He frequently spent long periods—or even entire nights—in prayer. (Luke 6:12) Have you ever tried to do that? Apparently, Jesus came forth from those times of prayer refreshed as if He had been sleeping all night! What was the secret of His prayer life?

The Saviour loved the solitude of the mountain in which to hold communion with His Father. Through the day He labored earnestly to save men from destruction. He healed the sick, comforted the mourning, called the dead to life, and brought hope and cheer to the despairing. After His work for the day was finished, He went forth, evening after evening, away from the confusion of the city, and bowed in prayer to His Father. **Frequently He continued His petitions through the entire night; but He came from these seasons of communion invigorated and refreshed, braced for duty and for trial.** (*Gospel Workers* 256.1)

Would we pray longer and more fervently if we could have that kind of experience?

10. When Jesus prayed to the Father, was the Holy Spirit present? Did Jesus feel like He was meeting with His best Friends? Did the Holy Spirit have to plead with the Father on behalf of Jesus? In those prayer sessions, did they plan each day's activities in advance? Did Jesus need to have those prayer sessions to find out in advance what kind of attacks Satan would make on Him the following day? Certainly, we would recognize that Satan did everything he possibly could to prevent Jesus from accomplishing what He came to accomplish.
11. In order to maintain His close relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, did Jesus need to spend so much time in prayer? Is that one of the main purposes of prayer?
12. Read Hebrews 11:6. What is the relationship between faith and prayer? What would happen if you prayed to God without recognizing your need for faith? Hebrews 11:6 seems to imply that for prayer to be effective, we must believe that God exists and that He has the power to do what we ask Him to do. So, what do we need to do to please God? How do we develop a right relationship with Him? Is a right relationship with God the same as faith?
13. Ellen White specifically stated, "Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend." (*Christ's Object Lessons* 129.3) How do you think God should react if the only time we talk to Him is when we give Him our want list? What is the purpose of prayer if we know for sure that God already knows what we need and all about us? (Matthew 6:8) God knows us. Don't we need to know Him better?
14. Does learning how to pray correctly strengthen our faith? If faith is a close relationship with God, wouldn't talking with Him strengthen that relationship?

15. How is Bible study related to prayer? Wouldn't the very best prayers be offered before and after we spend some time learning about God through Bible study? Doesn't the idea of a conversation suggest that God is speaking to us just as we are speaking to Him? Have you ever had the experience of speaking to God excitedly because you have just discovered something really important and significant in the Bible or perhaps in the writings of Ellen White?
16. If we learn how to pray correctly, would that be a means of helping us to empty ourselves of self? What about "dying daily"? (Luke 9:23) If done correctly, would Bible study and prayer gradually change us from seeking to do our own will to seeking to do God's will?
17. Read Daniel 9:3,4,15-19. Notice that Daniel's prayer was answered quickly when he not only prayed to God but also when he recognized that the real issues in the great controversy were—and are—about God and His reputation. How often do we pray to God to help us represent Him correctly? Do we represent God correctly to our children? (Romans 1:18) Or, do more of our prayers sound like selfish requests for God to do something that we want? Daniel cared about his Friend's reputation. Do we?
18. Read James 4:2 and Luke 11:9,10. Are we guilty of not asking God to help us? What does it mean to ask, seek, and knock? Read James 5:16-18. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* implies that Elijah prayed and the rain stopped; and then, Elijah prayed again, and the rain started. Was it Elijah's idea to have the rain stop? Or, was Elijah instructed by God to pray in that manner? Wasn't Elijah following God's instructions just like Moses did?
19. Read Genesis 18:22-33. Abraham is described in the Bible as a friend of God. (2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23) Have you ever suggested in prayer that God ought to do what is right? Was Abraham able to pray that way because he was a friend of God? Should God have struck Abraham down for his impudence? What would have happened if Abraham had gone down as far as to four—or three—people? Would God have said, "No"? Should God have saved Lot and his two daughters and wife out of Sodom? Would it not have been better for God to leave them there considering what happened to their descendants? Would Abraham have understood if Lot had been killed?
20. Read 2 Chronicles 7:14. Is this verse a key to praying correctly? Do we need to repent and turn away from evil before we begin praying? Or, is that part of the purpose of praying? How do we humbly seek God? If we all did this, would there be a general revival in the church? Would there be a cleansing from sin?
21. Does this verse imply that God *does not* answer our prayers when we are misbehaving? Or, that He *cannot*? Which one of us stops sinning before we pray so that God can answer us?
22. Do we need to live out our prayers?

If we regard iniquity in our hearts, if we cling to any known sin, the Lord will not hear us; but the prayer of the penitent, contrite soul is always accepted. When all known wrongs are righted, we may believe that God will answer our petitions. Our own merit will never commend us to the favor of God; it is the worthiness of Jesus that will save us, His blood that will cleanse us; yet we have a work to do in complying with the conditions of acceptance.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 95.

23. Does this quotation suggest that the major reason why our prayers are not answered is that

we come to God as sinners? Or, with the wrong attitude? Can we come in any other way?

24. Read Hebrews 10:38; Deuteronomy 4:29; Luke 9:23; John 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:3. What does it mean to search for God with all your heart, to forget self, and to take up your cross? If we are not obeying all of God's commandments, is it that we do not love God?
25. Can we actually be transformed from selfish human beings into loving and kind disciples of Jesus through our own power? No! How is this accomplished? How do we actually become more like Jesus? If we were truly in an attitude of prayer at all times—practicing the presence of God—would we pray for things which are not according to God's will?
26. In light of the great controversy, what is the role of prayer in our lives? Are there prayers which God cannot answer because of the great controversy? Are there prayers that He is able to answer because of the great controversy? Do we always pray in light of our understanding of the great controversy? (See 1 Peter 5:8)
27. Which prayers in the Bible would you point out as being perhaps the most significant and the most important? The Lord's prayer? (Matthew 6:9-13) The prayer of Jesus as recorded in John 17? The prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple? (1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 6; compare Haggai 2:9) The prayers of Jesus in Gethsemane? (Matthew 26:36-46) What kind of communication was going on between God and David in 2 Samuel 2:1,2? Was David compliant with all of God's requirements while traveling with his two wives?
28. One of the puzzling stories in the New Testament is the story Jesus told about the persistent widow and the unjust judge. (Luke 18:1-8) What are we to learn from that story? Does God want us to be persistent in prayer because He is not paying attention? Or, because He does not want to answer our prayers? Certainly, that cannot be true. Or, was Jesus contrasting this awful judge with His own responses to our prayers?
29. Read Luke 8:22-25 and Luke 5:18-25. In these instances, Jesus spoke directly and commanded the waves to be still and the paralytic to be well. He did not stop to pray to God to ask God to respond. Was that presumption on Jesus' part? Was He acting as God in those instances? Or, had He and the Father planned for these days in advance, and Jesus knew exactly what was coming? Could we plan our days with God as He did? We are told that Jesus did not exercise divine power for His own benefit. (*Desire of Ages* 119.3) Furthermore, He sent His disciples out to perform the same kinds of miracles that He was doing. Could we exercise that power today if we had the same kind of relationship with Jesus as they did? Since we are not vying to be prime minister of God's kingdom, could we have an even better relationship with God?
30. Would it be correct to say that Jesus had constant communication with His Father? Day by day, as He went about His activities, was He always in touch with the Father?
31. Will the 144,000—the final group of saints here on this earth—have that kind of relationship with God? How can we move into that kind of relationship so that we might be a part of that group?

© 2012, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials, and we might even want to share good ideas with others. So, let us know.

Info@theox.org

Last Modified: February 2, 2012

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\Glimpses\SS-10-Glimpses-2012_03_10-Fin+.wpd