

The Holy Spirit and Spirituality

The Holy Spirit, the Word, and Prayer

Lesson #10 for March 11, 2017

Scriptures: John 15:7; Matthew 7:7; Psalm 66:18; James 1:6-8; 1 John 5:14-15; Acts 2:38.

1. This lesson will talk about faith, prayer, Bible study, and the fulfillment of God's will in our lives. The purpose of prayer is to draw us closer to God; it actually lifts us into His presence. Our lives can be transformed by the combination of Bible study and prayer. We need to ask God how we can accomplish His will. We need to have faith and trust God that He can and will accomplish His will in our lives; then, we need to receive and claim what He has promised. But, God must always be at the center of our prayer lives.
2. Do you find that your personal prayer experience matches this ideal? How many of our prayers are really based on selfish motives? How many other church members do we truly pray for on a regular basis? Do we also pray for nonmembers that they may come to know our wonderful heavenly Father?
3. Read John 15:7. Clearly, it is not Christ's intention for us to have our selfish desires fulfilled through prayer. So, for what is it that we are supposed to pray? If we were truly abiding in Jesus as He suggested in John 15, would that change our prayer lives?
4. What do you think the disciples of Jesus prayed for daily as they fought with their fellow disciples over who would be greatest in the earthly kingdom that they were hoping would be set up? How often do you pray to God just because He is your Friend—without asking for anything? Could we just chat with God? Think about your conversations with your spouse or best friends; are you constantly asking them for things? If God became the center of our lives, how would it affect our prayers? God is interested in every aspect of our lives. He wants us to talk to Him about our worries, our fears, our wishes, our hopes, our desires, our successes, our joys, our failures—in fact, everything. Are you doing that in your prayer life?
5. Prayer does not change God; it changes us because we are brought into the life-changing presence of God.

Through nature and revelation, through His providence, and by the influence of His Spirit, God speaks to us. But these are not enough; we need also to pour out our hearts to Him. In order to have spiritual life and energy, we must have actual intercourse with our heavenly Father. Our minds may be drawn out toward Him; we may meditate upon His works, His mercies, His blessings; but this is not, in the fullest sense, communing with Him. In order to commune with God, we must have something to say to Him concerning our actual life.

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* 93.1-2. Compare *4T* 533.3; *Pr* 280.2. [Bold type is added.]

6. Do you feel comfortable opening your heart to God as to a friend? Would you be comfortable having God visibly seated next to you as you watch television? Or, a movie?

7. Review the details of your prayer life. What do you pray for? When do you pray? Why do you pray for those things? Do you need to make changes in the way you pray? Do you pray frequently? How often do you beg for God to change you so that you can have a better relationship with Him?
8. There are three main aspects that we need to remember when we talk about prayer: 1) We need to *ask* God to fulfill His promises to us. 2) We need to *believe* and *trust* God that He, in fact, will do those things. Then, 3) We need to prepare our lives to *receive* and *claim* what He has promised. These are sometimes called the “ABCs of prayer.”
9. We all believe that God knows us and understands us better than we do ourselves. He knows not only our past and our present, but also our future. There is nothing about us that He does not understand. So, when we ask God for something which is in accordance with His will, that gives Him permission in the setting of the great controversy to give it to us. If God were just giving us what He knows that we need but for which we have not asked, then Satan would cry, “Foul!”
10. Read Mark 11:24; 1 John 5:14-15; and Psalm 66:18. If we are asking for something that we know God is anxious to give us, what could possibly hinder the answering of those prayers? If our requests are selfish, how would that promote the kingdom of God? We must ask for forgiveness; and then, with God’s help, we must seek to forsake our sins in order to really benefit from God’s gifts. We truly can ask God for anything; nothing is too small or too great or too unimportant to talk to God about.
11. However, there are some conditions to be met when we ask for something from God. If we are not willing to submit to His will and especially if our requests reflect only our selfish and sinful desires, there is no way God will answer such prayers. (See Isaiah 59:1-2.)

So it is with every other one of God’s requirements. All His gifts are promised on condition of obedience. God has a heaven full of blessings for those who will co-operate with Him. All who obey Him may with confidence claim the fulfillment of His promises.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* 145.1.
12. Surely, none of us have any doubts about God’s generosity. So, we should come boldly to Him with our thoughts and our desires.

The Lord is not glorified by the tame supplications which show that nothing is expected. He desires every one who believes, to approach the throne of grace with earnestness and assurance.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 7, 1901, par 8; *YRP* 284.5.
13. We have talked at some length about faith and how that relates to the Holy Spirit and to God. *Faith* is a word which describes our relationship with God. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that without faith it is impossible to please Him.
14. There are about 3000 promises that God has made to us that are recorded in His Word. Can we claim in faith those promises which He has already made?
15. How can we know that we are asking according to God’s will unless we are very familiar with the Bible? People have twisted God’s Word to support almost every imaginable position.
16. Read James 1:6-8. Do we really want to be as unreliable as the angry waves of the ocean? So, God says you must be clear on why you want what you want, and it must be in accordance with His will. How does that work? Could we correctly trust in God’s promises

if we are hardly acquainted with the Scriptures or the One behind all of Scripture? Our faith is based on the absolute certainty of the reliability of God's Word. We know for sure that He exists and He wants to have a meaningful relationship with us. In that context, we can pray, claiming His promises. But, God does not ask us to trust Him as a stranger. If we entertain doubts about the reliability of His Word or the reliability especially of His promises, how can He give us anything?

17. Are we prepared to take God at His word? Hebrews 11:1 (NASB) says: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." We may not yet see how God will fulfill His promises to us; but, we must believe and have faith that He will do so. His promises to us may not be fulfilled in the way we hope or at the time we hope; but, we must trust Him to do it in the way He knows is best. And we must remember that God will not violate the freedom of any of His children; so, we should not ask Him to do so! With God nothing is impossible. (Luke 1:37) Should we pray for backsliding children?

Prayer and preaching, without the exercise of living faith in God, will be in vain. But the touch of faith opens to us the divine treasure house of power and wisdom; and thus, through instruments of clay, God accomplishes the wonders of His grace.—Ellen G. White, *5T* 228.2.

18. So, how do we "grow" our faith? (Romans 10:17)
19. When we have asked God for what we believe is in His will for us to have and we trust Him to be faithful in fulfilling His promises, then we must claim, in faith, the fulfillment. Prayer is not just a way to get things; prayer is communication with God. How do you communicate with your closest friends?
20. So, how do we claim the things for which we have prayed?
21. Read 1 John 5:14-15. One way in which we can claim God's promises is by thanking Him for fulfilling them on our behalf.
22. We must believe that "for any gift He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received."—Ellen G. White, *Education* 258.1. Is that presumptuous?
23. This may seem to be a very tall order for us of little faith. Read Luke 8:11. Jesus compared His Word to a seed. We know that, genetically, an entire, fruitful, apple tree is contained in that tiny apple seed. Just so, the gift of God is contained in His promises.
24. One excellent example of how we are to pray, to have faith, and to claim God's fulfillment is the story of the resurrection of Lazarus as recorded in John 11. We know, in fact, that Jesus was well aware of what God planned to do on that occasion. John 11:11 assures us that Jesus did what He did because He was carrying out God's will as They had already planned.
25. Read John 11:39-41. It is interesting to notice that Jesus thanked the Father in advance for resurrecting Lazarus; Lazarus was still dead. The stone was still rolled in front of the grave; but, Jesus knew what was coming. Could we claim God's promises in that way?

The Lord says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." Ps. 50:15. He invites us to present to Him our perplexities and necessities, and our need of divine help. He bids us be instant in prayer. As soon as difficulties arise, we are to offer to Him our sincere, earnest petitions. By our importunate prayers we give evidence of our strong confidence in God. The sense of our need leads

us to pray earnestly, and our heavenly Father is moved by our supplications.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 172.2.

26. How do you think our prayer lives would be changed if we actually practiced praying in that way on a daily basis? Would we see answers to our prayers? Are we prepared to ask for things we know are consistent with God's promises?
27. Read Ephesians 3:16 and Acts 2:38. Without a doubt, the most important gift that God could ever give us is His Holy Spirit. And by giving us the Holy Spirit, God is, in fact, giving of Himself. So, what prevents Christians from receiving the Holy Spirit in His fullness? There is only one major obstacle that is really important, and that is us. Usually, we are unprepared to receive the Holy Spirit according to God's plan. We need to repent of our sins; we need to recognize that God's plan for our lives is the very best one possible; and then, we need to seek each day to live lives closer and closer to the pattern Jesus laid down for us. The Holy Spirit can hardly wait for us to cooperate with Him in that way.
28. That is a tall order for selfish human beings. But, we must never question God's willingness to do it.

The heavenly Parent is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children.—Ellen G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power* 284.3; *ST*, August 7, 1901, par. 6. Compare Luke 11:11; Matthew 7:9-11.

29. But, as we have studied in previous lessons, the purpose of receiving the Holy Spirit is not to benefit us or even to emphasize our relationship with the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is given to help us build up the body of Christ, His church.
30. Read Ephesians 2:18. Compare Galatians 3:28. How do you understand these words?
Ephesians 2:18 (GNB): It is through Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of the Father.
31. Without that relationship with God that we call faith, we can hope for nothing. Our spiritual lives will go nowhere. That relationship is built up through Bible study which the Holy Spirit will help us to understand and prayer. The Holy Spirit will teach us how to pray.
32. But, every Christian knows that there are times when we pray for things which we think are right, but, they do not seem to happen. So, what should we do when God does not seem to respond to our prayers?

But be not discouraged if your prayers do not seem to obtain an immediate answer. The Lord sees that prayer is often mixed with earthliness. Men pray for that which will gratify their selfish desires, and the Lord does not fulfill their requests in the way which they expect. He takes them through tests and trials, He brings them through humiliations, until they see more clearly what their necessities are. He does not give to men those things which will gratify a debased appetite and which will prove an injury to the human agent and make him a dishonor to God. He does not give men that which will gratify their ambition and work simply for self-exaltation. When we come to God we must be submissive and contrite of heart, subordinating everything to His sacred will.—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 19, 1895, par. 9; *In Heavenly Places* 89.3; *BLJ* 17.3.

33. Try to answer for yourself the question, "What has prayer done in your life?" What spiritual

impact does it have on you?

34. A careful reading of the Bible and/or a careful search of the writings of Ellen White will demonstrate that God asks of us really only three things: 1) Bible study, 2) Prayer, and 3) Witnessing to others. So, why is witnessing necessary? You don't really understand something until you have been able to explain it to someone else. In how many of these three steps is the Holy Spirit involved? How can we experience more of His presence and power? Do we truly and honestly pray that the Holy Spirit will be able to use us to accomplish God's goals? Or, do we more often pray that God will help us to accomplish our own goals?
35. God is more than eager to give us the Holy Spirit. And through the Holy Spirit, He seeks to help us understand the life and teachings of Jesus Christ from Genesis to Revelation. If we will allow Him to do so, the Holy Spirit will fill our hearts and our lives in ways which are completely unimaginable to us at this time.
36. How often do you pray about things because you want to talk to your best Friend about them? God is prepared to give us the very best gifts. (Psalm 84:11; James 1:17)
37. The most meaningful way to enjoy a better relationship with God is to combine Bible study and prayer. Through Bible study God talks to us; through prayer we respond back to Him. That is the closest we can come to real conversation with God. Read a section of Scripture, and think about it; then, talk to God about that passage. There may be portions of it which you cannot fully understand. In some cases you may need to read the passage in a variety of versions. Then, when you think you have understood it, thank God for what you have learned. That is what William Miller did, and he started the advent movement!

If you search the Scriptures with a meek and teachable spirit, your efforts will be richly rewarded. "The natural man receiveth not of the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." [1 Corinthians 2:14] The Bible should be studied with prayer.—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 4, 1889, par. 6; 3SDABC 1152.3; YRP 23.2. [Content in brackets is added.]

38. Unfortunately, for many Christians prayer has become more of a duty than a delight. It might even be monotonous as we repeat familiar phrases over and over again. We may not be able to see how God is involved in any way. What could you do to make your prayer life more meaningful? Do you have a favorite place in which to pray? Do you have a regular time to meet with God in Bible study and prayer?
39. When we observe Jesus in prayer, we notice at least four things:
1. Jesus recognized that prayer was essential to His spiritual life. Throughout the Gospels, we see Him in prayer often (*Luke 11:1*). [Compare *Luke 6:12*.]
 2. Jesus had specific places that He prayed and specific times to pray (*Mark 1:35*).
 3. Jesus regularly prayed aloud (*Heb. 5:7, 8*).
 4. Jesus completely was surrendered to the Father's will in all of His prayers (*Matt. 26:39*).—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 134. [Content in brackets is added; italic type is in the source.]

40. When our prayers, our Bible study, and our claiming God's promises are answered in meaningful ways that we can observe, how does that affect our faith? Would that make it easier for us to believe 1 John 5:14? The word *confidence* used in the *New King James Version* in this verse is *parresia* in the original Greek. The meaning of this word was freedom of speech—the freedom in any truly democratic society to speak openly and boldly. God offers us that perfect freedom. We should hold nothing back.
41. Consider these words in one of the most amazing passages ever written regarding prayer.

Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. “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.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* 100.1. [Bold type is added.] God cares about absolutely everything that happens to us!

42. Have you tried recently to go boldly and confidently before the throne of grace? (Hebrews 4:16)
43. One of the great principles in prayer is to make sure that we are asking according to God's will. Our prayers are not to take the form: “Lord, Your will be changed”; but instead, we need to remember to pray: “Lord, Your will be done.” Notice these words from William Barclay:

In the last analysis the only true prayer is the prayer which says, “Thy will be done,” and whose only request is for grace to accept that will and strength to do it.—William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude, The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) 137.

44. Why do you think God's people are often more preoccupied with getting something from God than knowing the God from whom they desire something?
45. Do you feel the Holy Spirit's presence? Why is it that, sometimes, even though we know from Scripture that God is everywhere present, sometimes, He seems so far away? How can we become more fully aware of His presence?
46. Are we prepared to pray as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Lord, if it is your will, I ask You to do this for Me”? (See Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; and Luke 22: 42.)
47. Think about your Sabbath school class. What might that class do with this fresh understanding of how to pray that would bring the Holy Spirit closer to them individually and to their class? Could an individual Sabbath school class have a real impact on the entire church?

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