

# ***Making Friends for God: The Joy of Sharing in His Mission***

## ***Prayer Power: Interceding for Others***

Lesson #4 for July 25, 2020

Scriptures: Revelation 12:7-9; Ephesians 1:15-21; 6:12; Hebrews 7:25; Daniel 10:10-14; 1 John 5:14-16; James 5:16.

1. In this lesson we will recognize the absolutely essential facts that: (1) A great controversy is in progress, and (2) Satan is doing everything he possibly can to thwart our plans and to misrepresent God. So, how should we relate to the great controversy? One of our key weapons is prayer. The followers of Jesus were decimated when He was crucified. But, hopes revived when they discovered that He had risen from the dead. So, what were they to do next? The book of Acts records what happened to them especially over the next few weeks but also the next few years.

As the disciples waited for the fulfillment of the promise, **they humbled their hearts in true repentance and confessed their unbelief. As they called to remembrance the words that Christ had spoken to them before His death they understood more fully their meaning. Truths which had passed from their memory were again brought to their minds, and these they repeated to one another. They reproached themselves for their misapprehension of the Saviour. Like a procession, scene after scene of His wonderful life passed before them....** These days of preparation were days of deep heart searching. **The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised.**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*\* 36.1-37.2.†

2. What does God do when we pray? We do not begin to understand His actions; but, we know that He works alongside our prayers to draw those we pray for to Himself.

**1 John 5:14-17:** <sup>14</sup>We have courage in God's presence, because we are sure that he hears us if we ask him for anything that is according to his will. <sup>15</sup>He hears us whenever we ask him; and since we know this is true, we know also that he gives us what we ask from him.

<sup>16</sup> **If you see your brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray to God, who will give them life. This applies to those whose sins do not lead to death. But there is sin which leads to death, and I do not say that you should pray to God about that.** <sup>17</sup>**All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which does not lead to death.**—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation*\* (2nd ed., 1 John 5:14–17). New York: American Bible Society.†

3. It would be impossible to understand how God answers our prayers when we pray for others without a clear understanding of the great controversy. That controversy, of course, began in heaven.

**Revelation 12:7-9:** <sup>7</sup> Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, who fought back with his angels; <sup>8</sup>but the dragon was defeated, and he and his angels were not allowed to stay in heaven any

longer. <sup>9</sup>The huge dragon was thrown out—that ancient serpent, called the Devil, or Satan, that deceived the whole world. He was thrown down to earth, and all his angels with him.—*Good News Bible*.\*

4. And notice what we accomplish when we join God in this cosmic conflict.

**2 Corinthians 10:4:** The weapons we use in our fight are not the world's weapons but God's powerful weapons, which we use to destroy strongholds. **We destroy false arguments.**—*Good News Bible*.\*<sup>†</sup>

5. While Satan will do everything that God will allow him to do to try to force us to do his will, God respects our freedom. The heavenly angels must constantly prevent Satan and his angels from manipulating and forcing human beings to do his will. So, one of the major tasks of the heavenly angels is to hold back the forces of evil so as to give us an opportunity to make free choices.

6. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who directs the heavenly angels.

**John 16:7-8:** <sup>7</sup>But I am telling you the truth: it is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you. But if I do go away, then I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will prove to the people of the world that they are wrong about sin and about what is right and about God's judgement.—*Good News Bible*.\*

7. God's kingdom is based on love. There can be no coercion in love. Freedom, complete freedom, must be possible in order for love to fully exist. When we pray for someone else, God has an opportunity to say to the Devil: "Step back. I am not violating this person's freedom; I am acting in accordance with his friend's prayers."

The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. **This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened.** To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, "with healing in His wings." Malachi 4:2.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 22.1.<sup>†</sup>

8. Consider this statement carefully.

**It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask.**—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*,\* Book 4, 348.3 (1884); *The Great Controversy*\* 525.2.<sup>†</sup>

9. So, what can the example of Jesus teach us about prayers of intercession? Jesus had a specific time and specific places where He offered prayer to God. (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 9:18)

10. Just before He chose His disciples, Jesus spent the entire night in prayer with His Father.

**Luke 6:12:** At that time Jesus went up a hill to pray and spent the whole night there praying to God.—*Good News Bible*.\*

11. Can you guess what They were talking about that night? Remember that, each day, Jesus had a plan set out for His day that had been worked out between Himself and His Father

in His nighttime prayers. Jesus did not use His divine power for His own benefit or for performing miracles while on this earth. He followed His Father's instructions; God-given power was used as needed.

12. How did Jesus relate to Peter in the upper room after Peter had boasted that he would follow his Lord all the way to death?

**Luke 22:31-34:** <sup>31</sup> “Simon, Simon! Listen! Satan has received permission to test all of you, to separate the good from the bad, as a farmer separates the wheat from the chaff. <sup>32</sup>But **I have prayed for you**, Simon, that your faith will not fail. And when you turn back to me, you must strengthen your brothers.”

<sup>33</sup> Peter answered, “Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you and to die with you!”

<sup>34</sup> “I tell you, Peter,” Jesus said, “the cock will not crow tonight until you have said three times that you do not know me.”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

13. Given what we know about the great controversy and Satan's work, we can be sure that Satan was doing everything he possibly could to destroy Peter's influence and to prevent him from taking his intended place in the future Christian church.
14. From that Thursday night when Peter boasted so proudly until Jesus arrived in heaven was only three days. Did Jesus continue to pray for Peter? Even from His throne in heaven? Does He pray for us even now?

**Zechariah 3:1-5:** <sup>1</sup> In another vision the LORD showed me the High Priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD. **And there beside Joshua stood Satan, ready to bring an accusation against him.** <sup>2</sup>The angel of the LORD said to Satan, “**May the LORD condemn you, Satan! May the LORD, who loves Jerusalem, condemn you. This man is like a stick snatched from the fire.**”

<sup>3</sup> Joshua was standing there, wearing filthy clothes. <sup>4</sup>The angel said to his heavenly attendants, “Take away the filthy clothes this man is wearing.” Then he said to Joshua, “I have taken away your sin and will give you new clothes to wear.”

<sup>5</sup> He commanded the attendants to put a clean turban on Joshua's head. They did so, and then they put the new clothes on him while the angel of the LORD stood there.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

15. Every one of us must with humility acknowledge our total dependence upon God when we pray; but, we must never give up praying.
16. The apostle Paul also prayed for his many friends in the various churches that he helped to establish. One excellent example of that is found in Ephesians 1:15-21. Ephesians 1:15 begins with some very puzzling words. Why would Paul who had spent three years in Ephesus say: “For this reason, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus...”? Paul had worked very closely with the Ephesian brethren for three years. But, scholars recognize that the book of Ephesians was not written only to the Ephesian church. Instead, it was intended to be an encyclical. That means that while the letter went to the church at Ephesus, it was to be copied by them and sent to all the other churches that Paul had started or built up. Thus, in this letter, Paul was addressing all church members wherever they were located.

**Ephesians 1:15-21:** <sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord

Jesus and your love for all God's people, <sup>16</sup>I have not stopped giving thanks to God for you. **I remember you in my prayers** <sup>17</sup>and ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, **to give you the Spirit**, who will make you wise and reveal God to you, so that **you will know him**. <sup>18</sup>I ask that **your minds may be opened** to see his light, so that **you will know what is the hope to which he has called you**, how rich are the wonderful blessings he promises his people, <sup>19</sup>and how very great is his power at work in us who believe. This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup>which he used when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. <sup>21</sup>Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

17. And notice what Paul prayed for. **He prayed for the Holy Spirit to come upon them so that they would have a better knowledge of God. He prayed for their minds to be opened so they could understand more clearly what plans God had for them.**
18. Consider also Paul's prayer for the Philippian church members. It is important to recognize that the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians were written by Paul from prison in Rome. We believe that the letter to the Philippians was written even later, just before he expected to be released from prison in Rome.

**Philippians 1:3-11:** <sup>3</sup> I thank my God for you every time I think of you; <sup>4</sup>and **every time I pray for you all**, I pray with joy <sup>5</sup>because of the way in which you have helped me in the work of the gospel from the very first day until now. <sup>6</sup>And **so I am sure that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus**. <sup>7</sup>You are always in my heart! And so it is only right for me to feel as I do about you. For you have all shared with me in this privilege that God has given me, both **now that I am in prison and also while I was free to defend the gospel and establish it firmly**. <sup>8</sup>God is my witness that I am telling the truth when I say that my deep feeling for you all comes from the heart of Christ Jesus himself.

<sup>9</sup> **I pray that your love will keep on growing more and more, together with true knowledge and perfect judgement**, <sup>10</sup>so that **you will be able to choose what is best**. Then **you will be free from all impurity and blame on the Day of Christ**. <sup>11</sup>**Your lives will be filled with the truly good qualities which only Jesus Christ can produce, for the glory and praise of God**.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

19. Could these words of Paul be spoken about us and our churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How would you feel about having Paul pray for you?
20. **Another example of a great intercessory prayer is the story of Daniel**. Based on Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10, Daniel already knew that God was going to allow the nation of Judea to be in captivity for 70 years. Daniel was then quite elderly and knew that 70-year period would be coming to a close. So, he decided the time had come for him to fast and pray to see if he could get more details about God's plan for His people.

**Daniel 10:4-14:** <sup>4</sup> On the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of the year, I was standing on the bank of the mighty River Tigris. <sup>5</sup>**I looked up and saw someone who was wearing linen clothes and a belt of fine gold**. <sup>6</sup>**His body shone like a jewel. His face was as bright as a flash of lightning, and his eyes blazed like fire. His arms and legs shone like polished bronze, and his voice**

**sounded like the roar of a great crowd.** [Compare Revelation 1:13.]

<sup>7</sup> I was the only one who saw the vision. Those who were with me did not see anything, but they were terrified and ran and hid. <sup>8</sup>I was left there alone, watching this amazing vision. I had no strength left, and my face was so changed that no one could have recognized me. <sup>9</sup>**When I heard his voice, I fell to the ground unconscious and lay there face downwards.** <sup>10</sup>**Then a hand took hold of me and raised me to my hands and knees; I was still trembling.**

<sup>11</sup> **The angel said to me, “Daniel, God loves you. Stand up and listen carefully to what I am going to say. I have been sent to you.” When he had said this, I stood up, still trembling.**

<sup>12</sup> **Then he said, “Daniel, don’t be afraid. God has heard your prayers ever since the first day you decided to humble yourself in order to gain understanding. I have come in answer to your prayer.** <sup>13</sup>The angel prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me for 21 days. Then Michael, one of the chief angels, came to help me, because I had been left there alone in Persia. <sup>14</sup>I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the future. This is a vision about the future.”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

21. We need to understand several things very clearly in order to interpret this passage. First of all, while Cyrus was the king of the Persian Empire, the Bible speaks of the Prince of this world as being Satan himself. (John 12:31; 14:30)
22. If the *Prince of Persia* represents Satan, then who is Michael? The term *Michael* means, “Who is like God?” That expression is used five times in the Bible. (Revelation 12:7; Jude 9; Daniel 10:13,21; and Daniel 12:1) In each of these cases, the one “who is like God,” namely Jesus Christ, is in direct conflict with the Devil. As a director, working through the Holy Spirit and all of the angels, His ultimate goal is to completely eliminate and destroy the influence of Satan and his evil angels on the lives of human beings.
23. Try to imagine what exactly was happening when Daniel was told that Jesus Himself had come to restrain or beat back the Devil to prevent him from forcing the emperor of Persia to damage or destroy God’s people.
24. Finally, we need to make another important point about prayer. **Prayers need to be focused.** We sometimes teach our children to pray for all the colporteurs and missionaries which is a nice thought but not God’s plan. Jesus prayed specifically for Peter. Paul prayed for his churches and, no doubt, thought of individuals in each of those churches as he was doing so. He prayed for his young colleagues, Timothy, Titus, and even John Mark.

**Job 16:21:** [Job said:] I want someone to plead with God for me,  
as one pleads for a friend.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

25. Many years later, the children of Israel had asked to be given a king like the nations around them. Samuel tried to prevent this because he knew the evils that would result. But, after the Lord told Samuel to go ahead and give them a king, God still made a solemn promise.

**1 Samuel 12:22-24:** [Addressed to the children of Israel after they demanded a king:] <sup>22</sup>The LORD has made a solemn promise, and he will not abandon you, for he has decided to make you his own people. <sup>23</sup>**As for me, the LORD forbid that I should sin against him by no longer praying for you.** Instead, I will teach you what is good and right for you to do. <sup>24</sup>Obey the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. Remember the great things he has

done for you.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

26. So, what should be the relationship between our praying for family and friends and our working for them through our example and our teachings? In 1 John 5:14-16, which we read at the beginning of this lesson in Item #2 above, God directs us to be constantly on watch for those around us committing sin. We should pray for them that they be forgiven. And this is very important because Ellen White told us:

Satan cannot endure to have his powerful rival appealed to, for he fears and trembles before his strength and majesty. **At the sound of fervent prayer Satan's whole host trembles.**—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*,\* vol. 4b, 105.1 (1864).<sup>†</sup> Compare *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 346.0.

27. One of the puzzling things found in 1 John 5:16 is the idea that there are some sins which lead to death while there are other sins which do not lead to death. What kind of sins lead to death? What is sometimes called *the unpardonable sin* happens when a person has refused to listen to God's advice for so long that he can no longer "hear" God, and God must finally give up on him/her and let him/her reap the awful results of his/her choices.

**It is part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*\* 525.2.<sup>†</sup>

28. What should we think about statements that Peter was the foundation of the church?

**Matthew 16:17-20:** <sup>17</sup> "Good for you, Simon son of John!" answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup> **And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.**"

<sup>20</sup> Then Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

29. The Roman Catholic Church claims this special privilege was given exclusively to Peter. However, later, Jesus said:

**Matthew 18:18-19:** <sup>18</sup> **And so I tell all of you: what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.**

<sup>19</sup> "And I tell you more: whenever two of you on earth agree about anything you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

30. Clearly, these prayers were to be answered on behalf of all of the disciples. So, God must be incredibly busy answering prayers. Of course, He has the Holy Spirit and all the heavenly angels to assist Him. But, we are specifically instructed to:

Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. "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. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Psalm 147:3. **The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.**—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*\* 100.1.†

Ministering angels are waiting about the throne to instantly obey the mandate of Jesus Christ to answer every prayer offered in earnest, living faith.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*,\* book 2, 377.1.

31. How should this impact our churches today?

**Just as soon as a church is organized, let the minister set the members at work. They will need to be taught how to labor successfully. Let the minister devote more of his time to educating than to preaching. Let him teach the people how to give to others the knowledge they have received.** While the new converts should be taught to ask counsel from those more experienced in the work, they should also be taught not to put the minister in the place of God. **Ministers are but human beings, men compassed with infirmities.** Christ is the One to whom we are to look for guidance.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*,\* vol. 7, 20.1.†

There are times when it is fitting for our ministers to give on the Sabbath, in our churches, short discourses, full of the life and love of Christ. But **the church members are not to expect a sermon every Sabbath.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*,\* vol. 7, 19.2.† [What happens at your church?]<sup>‡</sup>

32. Paul spent a lot of time in prison. After four or five years in prison, first in Palestine and then in Rome, imagine how he felt when he realized that church members in various places were praying for him. He really appreciated those prayers. (See Philippians 1:19; Colossians 4:2-3; and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2.)

33. Do you have a clear understanding about how the great controversy affects you personally as a Bible-believing Christian. We believe that the great controversy has already been won by the life-and-death of Jesus. Furthermore, we know that, ultimately, God will win. But, there will be a lot of trouble between now and then! Should we be praying every day for those we care about? How are we to pray for our friends?

34. So, what exactly is the role of our prayers?

**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*\* 93.2.†

35. Prayer is our means of staying in constant contact and communion with God. We need God's help every moment to hold back the forces of evil from overcoming us. God will not use excessive force. However, He allows us the freedom to make free choices. And, as we said earlier, when we pray for others, it allows God to step in and do things for that individual or group without violating his/their freedom in any way.

36. If we are daily being changed into God's image, our prayers will come to be more and more

in line with God's will for our lives and the lives of our friends. We can claim God's promises.

37. Think for a moment about that very critical time in the plan of salvation when Jesus took His disciples out to the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He was crucified. Jesus Himself was offering prayers with deep sighs and tears, even sweating blood. He wished so desperately that His disciples would be praying for Him also. Of course, we know that three times He came back to Peter, James, and John; each time He found them sleeping! How do you suppose Peter, James, and John felt about that experience later as they thought back on it? Was the problem that they allowed themselves to be overcome by Satan? Or, were they just tired? Jesus desperately needed all the help and support He could get at that point in time. Ultimately, He ended up walking the path alone.
38. So, what should be our general guidelines for prayer? **First**, We need to have a time every day specifically set apart for prayer. Jesus often went out first thing in the morning to speak with His Father.
39. **Second**, Jesus had a specific place where He prayed. There were, no doubt, special spots in each of the towns or villages where He spent time. Those were places where He could have some privacy and pray to His Father.
40. **Third**, Jesus also prayed openly and out loud. Did He want the Devil to know what He was praying about? Apparently, some of His prayers, even in the Garden of Gethsemane were out loud. (Matthew 26:39,42,44) The book of Hebrews says that He "offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear." (Hebrews 5:7, NKJV\*)
41. Some people feel that it is safer to be silent when one prays because they do not want the Devil to know what they are thinking and saying. But, God through Ellen White advises:
- Learn to pray aloud where only God can hear you.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* April 22, 1884, par. 2; *Our High Calling*\* 130.4.
42. And why would God tell us that? Praying out loud makes it easier for us to stay focused on what we are praying about. And we need not worry about Satan's interference because:
- At the sound of fervent prayer, Satan's whole host trembles.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 1, 346.0 (1862); *Spiritual Gifts*,\* vol. 4b, 105.1 (1864).
43. Are you prepared to set aside a specific time and place to pray daily and watch for God's answers?
44. Make a list of those for whom you are praying, and see what happens.
45. It may be appropriate when we are praying for a particular individual or group to ask others to join us in praying for them.
- Why do not believers feel a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are out of Christ? Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another?—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol.7, 21.3.
46. Would you like to be a partner with God? Would you like to see Him perform miracles as a result of your prayers? The greatest miracle that could possibly happen is when a sinner comes back to God.

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