

Spiritual Exercises for Adventists

“PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16

Chapter 2

PRAYER

“Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications; in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.” Psalm 143:1

I KNOW what you’re thinking--many books have been written about prayer, so what more can be said? Well, I agree that prayer’s an essential component of life for the Christian, but I’d like for us to examine it as a component of Spiritual Exercise—maybe a little different perspective.

It is important to realize that those “who in their self-confidence feel no need of watchfulness and unceasing prayer, are near some humiliating fall.” ⁽¹⁾

So, we accept the reality of our need for a lot of prayer!

Maybe you think you don’t qualify because the Bible says that the “fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” and you don’t feel righteous. Or you might feel that you aren’t qualified to pray; that God can’t accept your prayers. We are told that “The enemy holds many of you from prayer, by telling you that you don’t feel your prayers are worthy, and that you would better wait until you realize more of the spirit of intercession, lest

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your prayers should be a mockery. But you must say to Satan, ‘It is written’ that ‘men ought always to pray, and not to faint.’ We should pray until we do have the burden of our wants upon our souls; and if we persevere, we shall have it. The Lord will imbue us with his Holy Spirit.”⁽²⁾

Two years ago I read an entire book about prayer, and as I read I was careful to take notes because I was asked to write a report about it for our church newsletter.

Reading is a pleasure for me, but that book was very difficult. It was well written by a highly respected author whose name you would recognize, and the layout was easy on the eyes, but the content just didn’t stick in my mind. After I finished the book I couldn’t remember anything I’d read, and I had to use my notes to construct my report.

I respected what the author wrote so I didn’t speak harshly. I even praised the book, because I know most people will really enjoy it and get something from it.

Maybe it’s the subject; PRAYER: a subject that’s so very personal. Talking about my prayer life is something I’m not comfortable with, something that maybe should remain very, very private.

But why should I feel that way? Why shouldn’t my prayer life be an open book? Am I afraid to admit it isn’t what I want it to be?

As an active Adventist I’m eagerly watching and reading about world events that point to a soon return of our Saviour. I’m watching for the 2nd advent and I’m cautioned that the “only way to watch humbly is to watch prayerfully.”⁽³⁾ Isn’t that a beautiful way of saying it? It gives me another reason to spend more time in prayer.

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We know that Jesus was a man of prayer; we know He went outside to be alone in the early morning or late at night to pray.

The physician Luke tells us in chapter 6 verse 12 that “it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”

Jesus set the example that others have followed. For example when Mrs. White was about 15 she became concerned for some of her friends in the Methodist church who were not enthused about the impending Advent of Christ in 1844. She was so concerned that one night she waited for her twin sister to fall asleep, and then Ellen quietly slipped out of bed and knelt in prayer. She prayed for her friends the entire night, pleading for the Holy Spirit to be moved to encourage and help them so they would not be lost. She followed our Lord in prayer at an early age. No wonder she was chosen a year later for the work she did so well throughout her life as a messenger from the Lord.

But we might not realize how important it was for Him also. Note this quote from the book *Desire of Ages*, page 117:

“From the time of Adam to that of Christ, self-indulgence had increased the power of the appetites and passions until they had almost unlimited control. Thus men had become debased and diseased, and of themselves it was impossible for them to overcome.”

Did you get that? Jesus, being a human, couldn't have been successful if He hadn't prayed *a lot!* His sacrifice for our sins would have failed if He hadn't prayed *much*. This is a big deal, and if I had written *Desire of Ages*, I would have devoted a very long chapter on this subject. This quote is taken from the chapter where Jesus is in the wilderness for 40 days. Most of us think the first 39 days were to weaken Him to prove how strong He

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was, and at His weakest point, just before He died of hunger, He was tested and was successful. But there is another way of looking at this. That is, an additional purpose that doesn't exclude the one already mentioned. The first 39 days was also a time for Jesus to prepare for those tests with the use of prayer and meditation. There were no distractions, no interruptions, no noise, all was at peace as He communed with the Father in prayer and meditation for 39 days.

We know that Jesus didn't use His divine power for Himself during His ministry, so He must have relied on the power of prayer; the same power that's available to us each and every day.

You might need to put this book down and stop reading; spend a few moments or longer and think about this for awhile. Just let it sink in and reinforce the importance of prayer. Do you think mankind has improved in the past 2,000 years? Are we less self-indulgent? Less debased? So if you believe like I do that mankind is worse now than at the time of Christ, then you will conclude with me that we need prayer a lot more than Jesus did.

Remember, we are told "His humanity made prayer a necessity and privilege. He required all the stronger divine support and comfort which His Father was ready to impart to Him..."⁽⁴⁾ Therefore, it matters not to me if Jesus' human genome was that of Adam before the fall or that of the apostolic age. The fact remains, I cannot succeed without God's help.

These Spiritual Exercises not only bring us closer to God, but they help us resist the devil's attacks. I prefer to always think about the offensive and not be too concerned about the

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defensive. And if we're close enough to God, then the defensive issues will be handled with God's help.

I've talked to a lot of people about prayer for many years, and I've never met anyone in my generation who admitted that he or she spent a significant time each day in prayer. On reflection this is a very serious thing. We all agree that we should be more faithful in our discussions with God, but there is no structure to help and guide us into an improvement.

However we do have this counsel to underscore the importance of daily prayer:

“The hour of prayer should not be neglected for any consideration. Do not talk and amuse yourselves till all are too weary to enjoy the season of devotion. To do this, is to present to God a lame offering. At an early hour of the evening, when we can pray unhurriedly and understandingly, we should present our supplications, and raise our voices in happy, grateful praise.”⁽⁵⁾

Later in this book I will demonstrate and provide some help in this department. But before we go further, let's examine the five types of prayer: Praise, Confession, Thanks, Petition and Recitation.

It seems to me that all prayers, excepting emergency conditions, should begin with praise because it sets the tone for the conversation. It also adjusts my mind to an appropriate attitude. It forces me to recognize my position as a defective human with no right to even speak to my creator or any member of the trinity for that matter. Only because of Jesus Christ am I able to even talk with God, and when I praise Him it takes me to the foot of the cross where I can be broken and molded by His grace. It also creates a moment loaded with emotion. I don't

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know about you, but I need emotion. I like having an emotional experience with God, and when I look at the cross as a mirror and see my true condition as a sinner; no, more than that—I see myself with significant character flaws. I might not have sinned yesterday, but that means nothing because I know there are weaknesses inside. Certain conditions of life set me up for constant failure. Some of us have short tempers while others can't resist the temptation to shoplift. Some can't resist lusting while others covet. We call ourselves a work-in-progress—another way of saying that we are broken inside.

So the cross is where we meet Jesus and where we admit our true condition and where we cry for help.

In order to see how far from perfect we really are, it's important to first realize as much as possible how great God is. I like to put into words His glory and His attributes. If I can imagine, as much as possible, how great He is, then when I look at myself the chasm is larger and helps me realize how weak and miserable I really am, how much of a worm I am, how much of a disgusting sinner I really am. Then and only then can I experience contrition, and only then can I better understand what a great gift is grace!

So, let's look at Praise.

REFERENCES

- 1 *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 11, 1881.
- 2 *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 30, 1888.
- 3 *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, page 326.
- 4 *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, page 202
- 5 *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Nov. 29, 1887.