

International Women's Day of Prayer

March 2, 2019

WALKING WITH JESUS

Includes afternoon workshop

Can We Trust God When He Says, "Follow Me"?

Written by Cordell Liebrandt
and
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Prepared by Department of Women's Ministries
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
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Seventh-day Adventist® Church

GENERAL CONFERENCE
WORLD HEADQUARTERS



WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

September 18, 2018

Dear Sisters,

Joyful greetings to you. Once again Women's Ministries (WM) International Day of Prayer is here. As you prepare for this day, plan to spend more time in prayer the week before and the week after this day. Prayer is a vital part of our daily relationship with Jesus. Prayer brings us close to God's throne. Prayer strengthens us. In prayer we can tell God all our concerns, even things we would not tell any other person on earth. The Holy Spirit takes our prayers and presents them before the Father in words that truly express our heart.

This Day of Prayer we are calling you to "...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people" (Ephesians 6:18, NIV). We all pray for our families and friends, but this Day of Prayer spend time praying for those we do not know – government leaders (call them by name), church leaders in our fields, the homeless, widows, suffering children everywhere, those being persecuted for their faith, the lonely, the abused... The list goes on. Add as you see best. Maybe you can add one group listed to your prayers each day.

Our sermon for this Day of Prayer focuses on discipleship. Prayer is an important part of discipleship. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to prayer (Matthew 11:1). In many places in our world church we think of discipleship as nurturing and growing new believers. But discipleship never ends in our own lives; it is a lifelong process. The sermon focuses on the call to discipleship, the cost, and consequences of discipleship. Our prayer is that this message and the entire packet of resources will encourage you to make prayer a daily part of your discipleship process and that you will pray for those who are nameless and faceless to you but whom God is also calling to His fold.

Blessings and joy to you,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heather Dawn Small".

Heather-Dawn Small, director

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Prayer Focus

As women we are called to pray, and Ellen White, a woman of prayer, gives us this counsel:

There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God. There is nothing that can prevent us from lifting up our hearts in the spirit of earnest prayer. In the crowds of the street, in the midst of a business engagement, we may send up a petition to God and plead for divine guidance as did Nehemiah when he made his request before Artaxerxes. A closet of communion may be found wherever we are. We should have the door of the heart open continually and our invitation going up that Jesus may come and abide as a heavenly guest in the soul (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 98, 99).

Our focus this year is **Prayer for the Cities**. Suggestions for how to pray for the cities include:

- Pray for the leaders
- Pray for stability and peace
- Pray for religious tolerance
- Pray for fathers and families
- Pray for the women
- Pray for the children
- Pray for health
- Pray for education
- Pray for the homeless
- Pray for the fatherless
- Pray for the lost

Always remember the six issues that impact women globally and keep them in constant prayer.

1. Abuse
2. Poverty
3. Health
4. Illiteracy
5. Workload
6. Leadership opportunities

“Let sincerity and faith characterize your prayers. The Lord is willing to do for us ‘exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or do.’ Ephesians 3:20. Talk it; pray it” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 273).

About the Author

Sermon: Walking with Jesus

Cordell Liebrandt believes God calls and equips His children to further His mission to the world and she is passionate about helping to empower others to develop their full potential to this end. As a graduate of Helderberg College, in South Africa, she currently serves as pastor of a three-church district and serves as chaplain at two schools and two universities in the Cape Conference. Additionally, she has served as Conference, and Union, Women’s Ministry director. She is also a presenter for Finding Grace, on Hope TV. Cordell is married to Allistair, her greatest supporter and minute man in a ministry that is close to her heart.

[Bible verses in the sermon are quoted from NKJV.](#)

Workshop: Can We Trust God When He Says, “Follow Me”?

Karen J. Pearson believes in the power of a prayer-honoring God and is happiest when teaching others how to pray effectively. She has worked in women’s ministries for the past 30 years, and is a speaker, writer, and editor of the *Ellen G. White Comments on the Sabbath School Lessons*. She produced, scripted, and presented Stones of Remembrance on 3ABN. Karen worked as director for publicity and public relations at Pacific Press® Publishing Association for nine years. Additionally, she has ministered as a shepherdess with her husband, Michael, for almost 40 years, and currently serves as associate pastor of the Meridian SDA Church, in the Idaho Conference.

[Bible verses in the workshop are quoted from NASB.](#)

Program Notes

Please feel free to translate, adjust, and edit the resource packet *according to your division’s needs*, including the best Bible version for your use. Also, you are free to adapt the packet *according to your cultural audience*. When your division has translated the assigned packet for French, Portuguese, and Spanish, please send us a digital file to share with our sisters who need it.

Outline of Service

Call to worship:

Scripture: Luke 9:57-62 (NKJV)

⁵⁷ *Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."*

⁵⁸ *And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His Head."*

⁵⁹ *Then He said to another, "Follow Me."*

But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

⁶⁰ *Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."*

⁶¹ *And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house."*

⁶² *But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."*

Hymn of praise: 574, O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Pastoral prayer:

Call for the offering:

Responsive reading: 789, Growing in Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Special music:

Sermon: Walking in Discipleship with Jesus

Hymn of response: 590, Trust and Obey, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Closing Prayer:

Sermon

Walking with Jesus

By Cordell Liebrandt

The story is told of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application that asked, “Are you a leader?” Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, “No,” and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: “Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower.”

In a world of more than 7 billion people the kingdom of God needs people who will be followers of Christ. The problem is that many of us who profess to be disciples of Christ focus on being leaders and have forgotten our first responsibility, as Christians, is to be His humble followers. Before becoming a leader, the disciple must to study the Master closely as a follower.

All who follow Christ will be led daily to the divine presence where in prayer and Bible study they discover the meaning of discipleship and what the attachment to Jesus and His cause will require. The disciple listens and learns. The way he views many things may be incorrect and he must submit to new understanding about what true greatness means.

Prayer provides time for the disciple receive instruction from the Master and engage in dialog. Ellen White cautions us, “It is impossible for the soul to flourish while prayer is not a special exercise of the mind.”¹ She also writes, “Those who are engaged in service for the Master need an experience much higher, deeper, broader, than many have yet thought of having. Many who are already members of God’s great family know little of what it means to behold His glory, and to be changed from glory to glory.”²

“Our deepest longing as fallen humankind is to return to intimacy with the divine,” writes a Women’s Ministries colleague. “We hunger for God to know us and to love us unconditionally; we yearn to be loved—not lost. When we crave living intimately with God as His sons and daughters, when we desire to look like Jesus in both our words and deeds, we have entered into discipleship. As we commune with Jesus, the spiritual discipline of prayer

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2 (1871), p. 189.2.

² White, *Gospel Workers* (1915), p. 274.3.

binds our hearts so closely to His own that we will follow Him into eternity—no matter the cost of discipleship.”—Rebecca Turner

As the disciple grows to trust the Master, he obeys without question and commits completely to carry on the work of the Master in the same manner. A successful, victorious Christian must first walk in the footsteps of Jesus, who said . . . “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

This morning as we examine our scripture passage, Luke 9:57-62, we will learn of three followers of Christ and their dialog with Him. These three experiences will reveal to us the meaning of being a true disciple of Christ.

⁵⁷ *Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.”*

⁵⁸ *And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His Head.”*

⁵⁹ *Then He said to another, “Follow Me.”*
But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰ *Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.”*

⁶¹ *And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.”*

⁶² *But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

Verse 57: In the first case, we immediately encounter a person of *inconsiderate impulse*. He offers to follow Jesus without waiting to be called. That’s why Jesus warns him about not knowing what he is doing. He does not seem to understand what life with Him involves.

Verse 59: In this second case, Jesus meets a person who is bedeviled by *conflicting duties*. To him Jesus immediately extends an invitation with the most compelling words: “Follow me.” But this man’s response indicates that he was faced with the loss of a loved one. If so, he is probably grieving and wants to bury his father before he follows Christ. He feels a strong compulsion to follow Christ but is consumed by other pressing responsibilities which take first priority. This person is at a critical point in his life. Should he comply with the sacred

duty to follow Jesus? He knows that nothing on earth, however important, must be allowed to come between Christ and him.

Verse 61: In the third case, we encounter one who has a *divided mind*. He expresses his willingness to follow Jesus by saying, 'I will follow you, Lord', but, concludes by saying he must go back and say good-bye to his family. We see that he knows following Christ is the right thing to do, but first wants to complete his own affairs—on his own terms.

These may be plausible reasons for not wanting to follow Jesus without delay. How many of us have used similar excuses? Or we rashly offer our services and then break our promise.

This morning we will consider three aspects of discipleship. First, the Call to Discipleship; next, the Cost of Discipleship; and finally, the Consequences of Discipleship. *Jesus warns us that before we answer the call, we need to count the cost and understand the consequences. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).*

The Call to Discipleship

The first command to "Follow Me" reverberates through the centuries to us. Deciding to answer this summons of Jesus is the most life-changing decision that anyone is required to make. But the world is full of voices, all clamoring for our attention, many demanding our time, energy, and commitment. For some of us it may be the appeal to join some organization, support some worthy cause, or follow some new trend.

Through the ages many charismatic figures call disciples to themselves, so-called *christs* develop cult followers, and pop stars attract huge followings. Yet, amid this cacophony is a voice that demands to be heard—the call to discipleship. Many have chosen to ignore the invitation to follow Him, but it continues to go out as it did more than two thousand years ago. Jesus invites men and women to true discipleship with the words "Follow Me."

The experience of Simon Peter and his brother Andrew (Matthew 4:18-20) illustrates the first call to discipleship. Jesus finds them fishing along the shores of Galilee and says: "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Matthew tells us that they immediately leave their nets and follow Him. This prompt response is repeated in the call to James and his brother John. They immediately leave their boat and their father and follow Jesus without hesitation

(vs. 21, 22). They leave their occupations, possessions, and family. *The call to discipleship has no room for indecision or hesitancy and demands immediate action.*

They *immediately* leave *everything* behind because being called to follow a Rabbi is the highest honor. These fishermen haven't shown enough intellectual promise—not enough spiritual tendencies perhaps—to be accepted into the apprenticeship of other rabbis. They understand Jesus now to mean, *you are worthy to be my students, to become rabbis like me, to carry on my ministry in my name when I am gone.* The Messiah calls His people into a new covenant relationship with Him. *The call to discipleship originates with God and not man.* Christ calls men and women to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Him. The invitation to discipleship is a call to obedience—Jesus calls and we respond.

Like Peter and Andrew, Jesus calls us to become fishers of men. Jesus calls many to follow Him as disciples. Not all are willing to commit absolutely or to make new disciples even when it appears they are walking in discipleship. Some follow Christ because He performs astounding miracles, others hope to get a high position in His coming kingdom, and still others follow out of pure curiosity.

The Cost of Discipleship

Verse 57, **Case #1:** Reading our scripture passage in Luke 9:57, we see Jesus and His disciples journeying along a road where they meet someone who volunteers to follow Jesus as a disciple. “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go,” he promises with *inconsiderate impulse.*

Jesus has not asked the man to follow Him, yet we wonder why Jesus is not excited by the prospect of having this man volunteer his service as disciple. We need to carefully consider Jesus' reply to the volunteer in verse 58: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” Christ has nothing of this world to offer him. Jesus understands the man is hasty in his response and has not given due consideration to the cost of following Christ. The Lord reads the heart of the volunteer disciple and knows he is not prepared to make the necessary sacrifices.

The cost of discipleship is forsaking everything and everyone for a life of privation and self-sacrifice.

Statistics tell us that since Christ's death and resurrection more than 2,000 years ago approximately 43 million Christians have become martyrs because they chose to follow Christ

no matter the cost. Even in world news reports today, we hear martyrs are killed or imprisoned for their faith.

On April 9, 1945, seven men were marched to the gallows in Nazi Germany. They were hanged for daring to resist Hitler's Nazi Regime and for standing up for the gospel. Among them was a young pastor by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who had written a most thought-provoking and uncomfortable book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. In it he writes about the high cost of following Christ and warns of the danger of settling for cheap grace.

Cheap grace, he wrote, is the enemy of the church because it demands nothing of us. It seeks forgiveness of sins without demanding obedience and discipleship.

Those who think Christianity is easy and leads to a life of prosperity should ponder the words of Christ recorded earlier in the same chapter of our scripture passage. In Luke 9:23-25 Jesus says that if we desire to follow Him, we must be willing to put aside all thoughts of personal comfort and take up our cross daily. *The cost of discipleship is being called daily to pick up our crosses and follow Him*. Jesus adds that it does not do a man any good to gain worldly riches but then be lost for eternity.

Arguably, the most difficult aspect of discipleship is accepting the concept of no earthly gain. It goes against our very nature. We all have a strong desire to promote self, to determine the course of our own lives, and to work hard for all the material comforts of life.

The cost of discipleship is separation from our previous existence. In other words, our priorities will change, *must* change, in order for obedience to Christ to take first place.

Martin Luther once said, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing."

In discussing the cost of discipleship, we must also consider the cost Christ Himself paid to provide the opportunity for us to become His disciples.

- Our discipleship opportunity cost Jesus the praise and adoration of the angels in heaven, which He exchanged for a life of ridicule, mockery, and scorn.
- Our discipleship opportunity cost Jesus the glory and splendor of heaven, which He exchanged for a life of suffering and humility.
- Our discipleship opportunity cost Jesus unity with the Father in heaven, which He exchanged for the wall of separation with the Father.
- Our discipleship opportunity cost Jesus His very life, which He exchanged for an agonizing death on the cross.

Jesus loves the lost and was willing to pay the cost of sin to redeem us. That is how much value He places on us.

The Consequences of Discipleship

Case #2: In verse 59, the second encounter is with a would-be disciple who receives the command, “Follow Me.” He is willing to follow Christ, but has *conflicting duties*, and says first he needs to bury his father. Because the father would have been buried the same day he died, going back to bury his father might indicate a delay in following Jesus as the result of many obligations attached to his role of son and heir.

This common near-eastern idiom, “let me go and bury my father,” certainly refers to the man’s obligation as a son to help his father on the farm or business until the father dies. That may have taken quite some time to complete.

In verse 60, Jesus responds to the called disciple in an unusual manner. He says, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.” Jesus may have meant that those who are spiritually dead should bury the dead. On another occasion Jesus tells His listeners: “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:25-33). As it is translated it may sound harsh, but Jesus is stressing the point that no one else should take first place in our lives. *The consequence of discipleship is accepting the commands of Jesus as our greatest priority.*

Case #3: In verse 61, yet another person wants to follow Jesus but he has a *divided mind*. He is obligated to go back and bid farewell to loved ones.

At face value it seems as if the man simply wants to tell his family about his decision to follow Christ and then bid them farewell. Closer study, however, shows that he would need time to set his affairs in order. In other words, he wants certain conditions to be fulfilled first. If he returns home to say goodbye, others might influence his decision negatively. He would have opportunity to listen to other people with their views. Or he might become too busy and distracted to return to Jesus. *The consequence of discipleship is loving our families, but not allowing them to interfere with our love for God and the desire to obey His commands.*

Many people have the desire to follow Christ, but there are so many barriers for doing so that they never really overcome them. However reasonable the excuse might be for not following Jesus immediately, someone or something is considered more important than Christ.

As a result, we tell the Lord that we will follow Him, then we add a “BUT” to it. Or we might offer to follow Him but need to do something else “FIRST.”

Many who are called respond with a promise to follow Jesus, but few are true to that promise. We may have the desire to stick to our promise, but we often are diverted from that course by the strong currents of life. Who of us have not made a promise, fully intending to keep it, only to find ourselves breaking that same promise?

Many would-be Christians converting from other belief systems have been lost because family members use emotional pressures to dissuade them from following Christ. The Bible is clear on this: We must obey God rather than man.

Many of Jesus’ sayings are hard to hear because they always demand much from His listeners. Jesus always asks for all that we are and all that we have. There are no half-measures, ifs or buts. Quite often we are asked to give more than we are willing to let go of. Hold your place in Luke 9 and turn back to Matthew 19, verses 16-22 as we read the story of the rich young ruler.

¹⁶And, behold, one came and said to him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

¹⁷And he said to him, “Why call you me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if you will enter into life, keep the commandments.”

¹⁸He said to him, which? Jesus said, “You shall do no murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness,

¹⁹Honor your father and your mother: and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

²⁰The young man said to him, “all these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”

²¹Jesus said to him, “if you will be perfect, go and sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”

The apostle Matthew continues by telling us the man’s tragic response to this call of grace.

²²But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

We see in this story that being obedient to the law and yet not following Jesus are two distinct possibilities. *A consequence of discipleship is being obedient to the law but always doing so with Christ.*

Turn back to Luke 9. In verse 62, Jesus adapts a common saying of the day to convey a deep spiritual truth. We need to listen to closely. “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” What does it mean to put your hand to the plow? This proverbial expression means to undertake some form of business or to take on a task or responsibility. It also implies that if we want to be successful in this venture, we need to always look forward and never look back.

There may be times when we look back with regret at things we have undertaken and wished that we had not. In a spiritual sense we need to embrace discipleship wholeheartedly and never look back with regret.

Christ warns us that looking back may disqualify us from the kingdom of God. He says: “Remember Lot’s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it” (Luke 17:32, 33). Lot’s wife was not committed to going forward with the angel; her heart was still in Sodom. When she looked back, she became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26).

In commenting about this indecision between moving forward and looking back, James writes, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8).

In the same way, if we come to Christ with all our worldly desires and are not willing to give up those things that prevent God from being our first priority, we are not fit for the kingdom of God. We must keep our focus on moving forward and allowing God to lead us, not in looking backward to family, friends, and worldly pleasures.

As a result of our indecision, we begin to distrust God and that causes many of us to disqualify ourselves from the kingdom of heaven. When we say, “I will follow You, but first...” we show that we are afraid to trust God with our lives and our possessions. Instead, we place our trust in things that do not offer us an eternal salvation, such as our possessions, our jobs, our social standing, and our money.

Proverbs 3:5 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.” Although suffering and privation do not in themselves lead to salvation, they point to the complete trust that we place in Christ.

A similar idea is found in Hebrews 10:38: “Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” Paul suggests that discipleship is only possible when we live by faith, but we are in danger of losing our salvation when we throw away that faith.

That great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said, “Trusting God leads to salvation, not trusting means not being saved by Him.” *A consequence of discipleship is the possibility of looking backward, losing sight of Jesus, forgetting to trust in Him and losing our salvation.*

This morning we have seen that true discipleship requires us:

- To answer the call of Jesus decisively and willingly—because there is no room for delay.
- To follow in obedience—even to the point of suffering and sacrifice.
- To trust completely in the Lord and respond in faith with no indecision.
- To make a relationship with the Lord our first priority—this includes daily prayer and study of God’s Word.
- To deny ourselves of worldly pleasures that cause us to look backward instead of forward.

Although life is uncertain, this one thing is certain. Whatever we accumulate and whatever worldly gain we work so hard for won’t last. It is all temporary and will have no value in eternity. It will all vanish like mist before the rising sun. In stark contrast stands what Jesus offers us—life eternal in heaven and on the recreated earth. We will live throughout the ceaseless ages with our God which is worth more than anything this world can offer us.

In conclusion, let’s examine our lives today and ask the hard questions of ourselves:

- What comforts or possessions am I placing before the Lord in my life?
- What relationships are more important to me than my relationship with Christ?
- Who or what am I depending on in my life for security and well-being?

We need to trust Jesus for there is no other way to be a beloved disciple

We have been blessed with an eternal truth and a great message to give to a waiting world; and the call by Jesus, “Follow Me,” is still relevant to each of us today. There are billions of people waiting to hear the good news. Will you extend yourselves, give up your comforts, sacrifice everything, and make disciples for the Lord?

God bless you as you pray earnestly for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in response to our commitment to true discipleship.

—end of Sabbath sermon—

Sabbath School Program

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

By Cordell Liebrandt

Program Overview:

Opening Hymn: 501 – T’is the Blessed Hour of Prayer, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Opening Prayer:

Welcome:

Introduction:

Special Music:

Scripture: Luke 11:1, (NASB)

And it came about, that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray. . .”

Program: Lord, Teach Us to Pray

Testimony of Answered Prayer: Optional

Closing Hymn: 482 – Father, Lead Me Day by Day, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Closing Prayer:

Introduction:

In 1990 the Department of Women’s Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists instituted the International Women’s day of Prayer. This is a special day which takes place on the first Sabbath in March where women throughout the world are united in prayer.

A Man of Prayer

And it came about, that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray. . .” (Luke 11:1) NASB.

As with the disciples God places a desire in our hearts to speak to Him in prayer. Deep, sincere prayers are not natural to us, but need to be learned, experienced and felt. Now, more than ever, is the time for God’s people to plead with Him: “Lord, teach us to pray!”

Is it the desire of your heart this morning to learn how to pray those life-altering prayers which connect us with heaven? I believe that God is calling His people today—to become a people of prayer! Jesus’ source of strength and power was His close connection in prayer to His heavenly father.

“It was from hours spent with God that He came forth, morning by morning, to bring the light of heaven to men. The disciples had come to connect His hours of prayer with the power of His words and works. Now, as they listened to His supplication, their hearts were awed and humbled. As He ceased praying, it was with a conviction of their own deep need that they exclaimed, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’” Luke 11:1. —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 102.

Never has the need for earnest prayer been greater! Never have His people been more easily distracted. If we are ever going to become a people of prayer: NOW IS THE TIME!

Do you want to become a people of prayer? Do you want your church to become known as a church that knows how to pray? Oh, I do! That is my heart’s longing—that when our neighbors, our communities are in crisis and desperate for God, that they will turn instinctively to us—because they have come to know we are a praying people!

People of Prayer

Let’s look at three things that will help get us to that place:

First, we must recognize our need—like the disciples: “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Now, the disciples seem to have had an advantage over us. They physically heard Jesus praying.

Have you ever listened to someone praying, who really knew how to pray?

When we hear people, who have a living connection with God, praying—it ushers us in to the presence of God. That’s what the disciples experienced when they heard Jesus pray. It gives us a hunger, a longing, to have a similar experience.

When I listen to Jesus praying in John 17, I hear His intensity, His passion and His love for us, and it makes me aware of how much I still need to learn about prayer. It shows me my need, and my prayer becomes an echo of the disciples’ prayer: Lord, teach *me* how to pray!

There are many different kinds of prayer such as intercession, petition, and confession prayers.

We follow these steps while learning to pray:

1. We must recognize our need for prayer if we are to become a people of prayer.

“When on earth, Jesus’ needs were the same as ours, and He asked His Father for strength to meet the duties of each day. He knew He must have God’s help to carry on His work. He is our example. . .”—*Steps to Jesus*, p. 93.

2. We must also pray often and with persistence. Why often and with persistence?

“Unless we pray often, we are in danger of growing careless. We may be led to turn from the right path. Satan does not want us to receive grace and power through prayer to resist evil.”—*Steps to Jesus*, p. 94.

So, what happens when we choose to persist in prayer? And, let’s be honest, becoming persistent is something we have to be intentional about. When we choose to persist in prayer, we can expect to see something happen—because prayer changes things. Prayer changes us.

3. As we pray consistently. . .our lives will be transformed in the following ways.

Our motives for prayer begin to change.

Instead of praying from a sense of duty, we will discover that we just can’t get enough of God. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!” the psalmist exclaimed. When this occurs, our motive for praying becomes one of wanting to experience the goodness of who God is, rather than just checking off prayer from the to-do-list.

When we pray persistently, our desires for God’s will to be done is strengthened. We will want for God’s will to be done—even above our own will.

When we choose to persist in prayer, our faith in God will grow. Praying often transforms us. “We need to take hold of Christ, and to retain our hold of Him until we know that the power of His transforming grace is manifested in us.”—*This Day with God*, p. 285.

4. Not only does praying persistently transform us—it has the power to transform the lives of those we love.

5. And finally, if we would become a people of prayer, we will pray, because by praying we come to know Him, and we are able to receive His love.

So, how does prayer help us come to know Him?

“Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.”—*Steps to Jesus*, p. 92. We talk to our friends. . .in fact, we love to talk to our friends. That’s how we get to know each other. That’s how friendships grow—by talking and listening to one another. Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. We come to know God by spending time talking with Him and listening to Him.

So, how does prayer help us to receive His love?

We come to see ourselves through His eyes. “What does Jesus see when He looks at me?

“Our heavenly Father waits to give us His full blessing. In prayer we can receive His boundless love. What wonder it is that we pray so little.”—*Steps to Jesus*, p. 93.

I invite you to join me in committing to become a people of prayer.

—end of Sabbath School program—

Sabbath Afternoon Workshop

Can We Trust God When He Says, “Follow Me”?

By Karen J. Pearson

Program Overview:

Scripture Reading: “For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end” (Psalm 48:14, NASB).

Prayer

Special Music (optional)

Presentation: “Can We Trust God When He Says, “Follow Me”?”

Breakout Session

Wrap Up and Conclusion

Closing Song: 623, I Will Follow, Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal

Prayer

Presentation:

The day begins just like every other day. As David leads his father’s sheep in search of green pastures and still waters there is no sign anywhere that something momentous is about to happen. No indication that today God will make clear His call and anointing on the life of one young shepherd boy. He is just an ordinary boy, after all. The youngest of Jesse’s eight sons, David spends his days roaming the hills around Bethlehem, with his sheep always in sight.

When the prophet Samuel enters Bethlehem that morning, the city elders are quick to ask, “Do you come in peace?” He sees their anxiety and calms their fears when he says, pointing to the heifer he brings with him, “I have come in peace to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” Then he invites Jesse and his sons to join them.

Hidden in the folds of his robe, Samuel has hung the horn filled with anointing oil. He keeps it there, waiting for the Lord to show him which of Jesse’s sons has been chosen to replace Saul as King of Israel. As Eliab, Jesse’s firstborn, steps forward Samuel is impressed. The young man is tall and strong and, to Samuel’s mind, looks perfect to fill the role of King of Israel. *Surely this must be the Lord’s anointed*, Samuel thinks to himself.

But the Lord says, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

One by one, seven of Jesse’s boys come before the prophet, and one by one, the Lord indicates that He has not chosen them. Puzzled, Samuel turns to Jesse and asks, “Are these all your sons?” And then Jesse remembers David and sends for him promptly at Samuel’s urging. When David joins the others, the Lord says to Samuel, “Arise, anoint him; for this is he.” And in front of everyone Samuel takes the horn of oil and anoints the young shepherd boy—the future King of Israel, “and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward” (v. 13).

The day after the anointing is just another ordinary day. The day after that is the same. And the day after that. And each day that follows is marked with the same ordinariness. David must have wondered when he’d be called to the palace to take his place on the royal throne, to wear the royal crown, to rule his subjects rather than lead his father’s sheep. Living as God’s anointed one doesn’t always look the way we think it should. After all, when God calls us to do something for Him, and sends His Holy Spirit to be with us, we often have an expectation that things will fall into place and run smoothly. Let’s look at what happened to David after his anointing.

Time passes slowly. He continues to watch after his father’s sheep. And then one day Jesse sends him to go and check on his brothers who were fighting in Saul’s army. Before long, David finds himself faced with a belligerent giant who shouted out curses against God across the valley separating the two armies. Outraged, David assures the King that the God who was with him while he protected the sheep against lions and bears, is the same God who will be with him as he faces the giant. You see, David had learned a lesson we all must learn: We can trust the God who says, “Follow Me.”

David kills Goliath and returns home to once again tend sheep. Occasionally, he is summoned to the palace to play his harp and soothe the anxious mind of the troubled king. Until one day, when Saul picks up a javelin and tries to kill him. David flees for his life, and for the next several years hides from King Saul. In caves, among foreigners who serve idols, David suffers moments of despair when he cries out, *Why Lord? Where are You? You sent Your prophet to anoint me as king, yet here I am, hiding in caves. Where are You, Lord?*

But, in spite of the difficulties, David chooses to believe that he can trust that the One who called him. In the same way David called to his sheep and they followed him, David listens for the voice of his Shepherd, and follows wherever He leads. As his sheep had trusted him, so David trusts his Divine Shepherd.

Ultimately, the shepherd boy becomes King of Israel and God calls him a man after His own heart. In spite of the serious mistakes David makes as king, in spite of the sins he commits, he loves his God and follows his Shepherd.

Hundreds of years after David died, on a cold winter's day, Jesus is walking along the portico in the glorious temple built by David's son, King Solomon. Jesus is surrounded by many who are curious, and many more who are looking to find a reason to destroy Him (see John 10:22-39). "Tell us," they say, "how long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly" (v. 24).

And Jesus replies, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works I do in My Father's name bear witness to the fact—but—you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one, and nothing, shall snatch them out of My hand!" (vs. 25-28).

Then, those children of Abraham, God's chosen people, bend down and pick up stones to stone their Messiah. But Jesus is held in His Father's hand, and no one can snatch Him away, outside of His Father's will. Jesus trusts His Father. He knows the will of His Father because He goes aside every day to commune with Him. He recognizes the sound of His Father's voice.

What about us? Do we recognize that voice? Do we hear His voice above the noisiness of life? Do we hear His whisper through the many distractions? Through the giants in our path? Inside the dark caves that are so often part of our journey? Do we despair, like David, of ever reaching the palace?

Like Jesus and David—we must listen for the voice of our Shepherd—for it is the only way we will ever learn to trust Him when He says, "Follow Me." We listen to Him in the quiet place of prayer. "When," as Sister White writes, "every voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul [will make] more distinct the voice of God."³ Do we know His voice? Do we recognize the voice of our Shepherd? And when He speaks, do we hear His love for us and trust that we can follow wherever He leads?

Breakout Session:

1. Depending on the size of your audience, divide them into groups of 5 to 10.
2. Have each group assign a leader to help facilitate discussion and answer the following questions:
 - a. What are some of the giants or caves you have faced in your life?
 - b. Why is it difficult to trust God in every situation?
 - c. Do you think previous life experiences impact your ability to trust God and, if so, what are some positive ways you can address this issue?
 - d. How do we "listen" to God in prayer?
 - e. How can we know whether or not it is His voice we hear?
 - f. What role does the Bible play in "hearing" God's voice?
 - g. To what extent does the Bible inform your spiritual walk?

³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (1898), p. 363.

- h. Identify any steps you will take to grow your level of trust in recognizing God's voice and following His will, regardless of where you currently may be in your walk with Him.
3. After giving sufficient time for discussion, have each group leader give feedback from their group.

Wrap Up and Conclusion:

Can we trust God when He says, "Follow Me?"

I want to encourage you with this assurance, no matter what giant you are facing, no matter how long you may have been camped out in your cave, you can trust the God who calls you. He speaks His word to you when He says,

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. . . . You are precious in My sight. . . . Do not fear, for I am with you," (Isaiah 43:1–5, NASB).

In the words of the psalmist, "For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end" (Psalm 48:14, NASB). Yes! We can trust God when He says, "Follow Me"!

Closing Hymn: I Will Follow Thee, 623 SDA Hymnal.

Closing Prayer:

—end of Sabbath afternoon workshop—

Prayer Quotes

Meaningful Prayer Quotes

The Invitation: “Live your life in such a way that when your feet hit the floor in the morning Satan shudders and says . . . ‘Oh no . . . she’s awake!’”

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” – Philipians 4:6-7 (NIV)

“Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” [The Parable of the Persistent Widow] – Luke 18:1 (NIV)

“Therefore He [Jesus] is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.” – Hebrews 7:25 (NIV)

“There is nothing too great for God’s power and nothing too small for His love.” – Corrie ten Boom

“The greatest tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.” – F. B. Meyer

“When you neglect to offer prayer for the sick [physically, emotionally, spiritually], you deprive them of great blessings; for angels of God are waiting to minister to these souls in response to your petitions.” – Medical Ministry, p. 195

“Ministering angels are waiting about the throne to instantly obey the mandate of Jesus Christ to answer every prayer offered in earnest, living faith.” – 2 Selected Messages, p. 377

“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.” – Great Controversy, p. 525

“When you ask God to help you identify and appreciate the unique gifts He has given your children [people], you invite Him to show you your kids [others] as He sees them: glimmering diamonds in the rough.” – Praying the Scriptures for Your Children, by Jodie Berndt, p. 47

As you pray God’s blessing on your children, release your plans and trust God to accomplish His.” – Praying the Scriptures for Your Adult Children (Trusting God with the Ones You Love), by Jodie Berndt, p. 33

“When all other courses of action have been eliminated, when we stand at the edge of the abyss, when we approach God with empty hands and an aching heart then we draw close to the true heart of prayer.” – Jerry Sittser, p. 32

“So my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and steady and always enthusiastic about the Lord’s work, for you know nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.” – 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NLT)

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