

Series: Theological Treatises

The Prayer

A deep study of the most important means of communication with God, properly called, the breath of the soul.



Federico Salvador Wadsworth





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1. General Introduction

The search for God’s knowledge and his purpose for man constitutes the most exciting of all the adventures that the human mind can propose. The challenge of finding in the Holy Book the golden thread of the plan of salvation will reward the scholar, who will be able to understand the majesty of the effort of the One who “**who did not spare His own Son**” (**Romans 8: 32**).

The set of Bible tracts, of which you have in your hands one of the studies, has been prepared to provide the lay member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the knowledge required to teach others about how to grow “**in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**” (**2 Peter 3: 18**) as well as for “**be ready always to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason of the hope in you**” (**1 Peter 3: 15**).

The author is a regular member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1977, a church elder since 1979, a husband, father, and grandfather, with the joy of having his entire family in “**the faith once delivered to the saints**” (**Jude 1: 3**) and a full subscriber to the 28 official doctrines of the church.



I reiterate that these tracts have been prepared for the church member, so he must graduate the dose of knowledge that he must transmit to those who are interested in knowing Jesus, whom the prophet calls the “**Desire of all nations**” (**Haggai 2: 7**).

That's why, at the same time, we also wanted to include supplementary material to the Bible study that we hope will allow you to expand your current knowledge, as well as to be prepared to deepen on “**things the angels desire to look into**” (**1 Peter 1: 12**). Your ability to introduce these subthemes in harmony with the central concepts is key to the transfer of knowledge that you and I intend to pursue.

Since the knowledge of our God and His purposes will, by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit, always be in full swing, you will be able to find regular updates of each treatise (see the date yy.mm.dd that accompanies the name of the file). These updates, of course, will also correct some of the human flaws that may have gone unnoticed by the author. On the other hand, your well-meaning intention to help us improve these issues will always be welcome. These treatises were originally written in Spanish, my mother language, but translated to English by the author to reach more people, as the latter is considered

world-wide as the commercial and technical language.

2. Structure of the Theological Treatise

At the beginning of each treatise, we will present the general structure of the set of these using a numbered block diagram, called the General Treatise Map. This chart (shown on one of the following pages) will allow you to see where the tract you have in your hands fits concerning the other topics. To make it easier to locate, in addition to the numbering, it will be marked in a different color than the others. Collect the topics, update them, and arrange them in this sequence if you find it useful to your knowledge development.

The numbers in each block simultaneously establish the order of creation of these treatises and the logical dependence between them as well. The blocks from number 70 onwards represent, in turn, a set of special treatises. I have grouped them into 6 major themes:

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--------------|
| a. | Comparative Religions | Series 70.nn |
| b. | Chronologies | Series 75.nn |
| c. | Gospel Harmonies | Series 80.nn |
| d. | Genealogies | Series 85.nn |
| e. | Bible biographies | Series 90.nn |

The reading of these topics will give you the frame of reference to understand the most thematic treatises. These other topics have their own structure that will be related to the one mentioned here.

After the diagram of the whole, you will find a block diagram of the study itself, called the Treatise Map, where you will be able to notice the following:

- Each block of the diagram indicates the reference verse(s) at the bottom and a short phrase that corresponds to the logic of its inclusion in the topic.
- You will notice that there are some blocks, with different colored verses, that refer to parables that help to understand the central theme.



- c. Other blocks, which do not contain verses, expose issues that you might touch on when presenting the study; issues that have historical, geographical, scientific, technical, and other backgrounds. You will find in this study some information that will help you expose these concepts.
- d. These two types of blocks are not necessarily included in all studies.
- e. The arrows indicate the logical sequence in which the author thinks these topics should be presented. The sequence is set from left to right and from top to bottom. However, your initiative and the knowledge about your listeners' needs may point you in a different direction. Let yourself be guided in prayer by the One who cannot err.

At the end of this graphic phase, you will find the study in detail, which will follow, as far as possible, the structure of the block diagram. Some complementary materials to the study will be included at the end. I recommend that you read them in advance to find the exact moment to include them in your presentation.

To the extent possible, I have presented the source of some of these topics so that you can extend your understanding by reviewing them. I do not pretend to know everything these sources deal with, so I encourage you to go deeper and tell me how to improve this content. I have included some images found on the Internet to make your reading more enjoyable, I hope you like them.

The written phase of the study will contain:

- a. Headings for the main subtopics.
- b. Bible quotes (in red).
- c. Quotations from the Spirit of Prophecy (in green).
- d. Quotations from books or articles by various authors, aimed at expanding your knowledge on the subject (in blue).
- e. Comments on the mentioned quotations; in some cases, these will be presented before the quotation, as an anticipation of the statement, while in others they will be placed after it as a confirmation of the concept being held (in black).
- f. Maps, chronograms, genealogies, and other diagrams where appropriate to the subject matter.
- g. Complementary material grouped in a section that helps to understand some of the aspects that could arise when dealing with the central theme with other people. Not all topics necessarily contain this material.

Unless otherwise indicated, the quotes from the Holy Bible are from the King James Modern Version, my favorite in English. Sometime I will include other versions to compare or expand the understanding of a text.

When you develop a Bible study on this subject with non-church people, I recommend that you use the section corresponding to the study (with the verses included in the block diagram) without presenting the statements of the Spirit of Prophecy. Discuss the accompanying materials as they come up in the exposition, as well as in the question and answer phase.

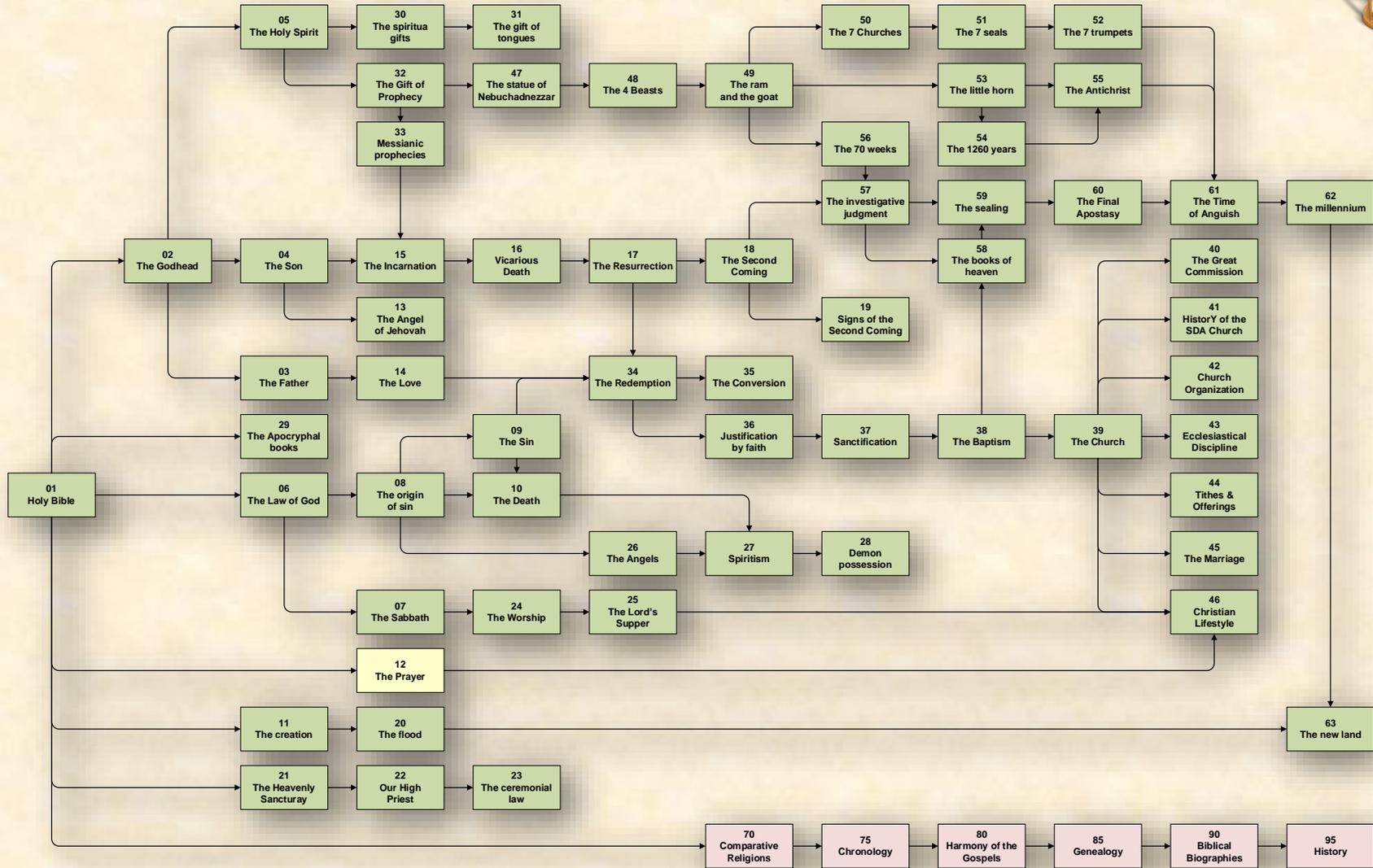
I have also prepared a file that includes all the block diagrams from the tracts so that they will be helpful to your memory when presenting the topic. I have also created a file with a copy of all the contents of the treatises so that you can review them without opening each of the documents, in case you are looking for a specific subtopic.

Allow me, as I have done so far, to address you personally during the study. I believe that this is how our Savior spoke to those He loved and wanted to save. Surely you will do the same with those who listen to you for this purpose.

This is a free material that has surely come to you from someone who appreciates you and wants you to know even more about Jesus and His wonderful plan of salvation. Spread the word in the same way, as you "have received freely, freely give" (**Matthew 10: 8**).

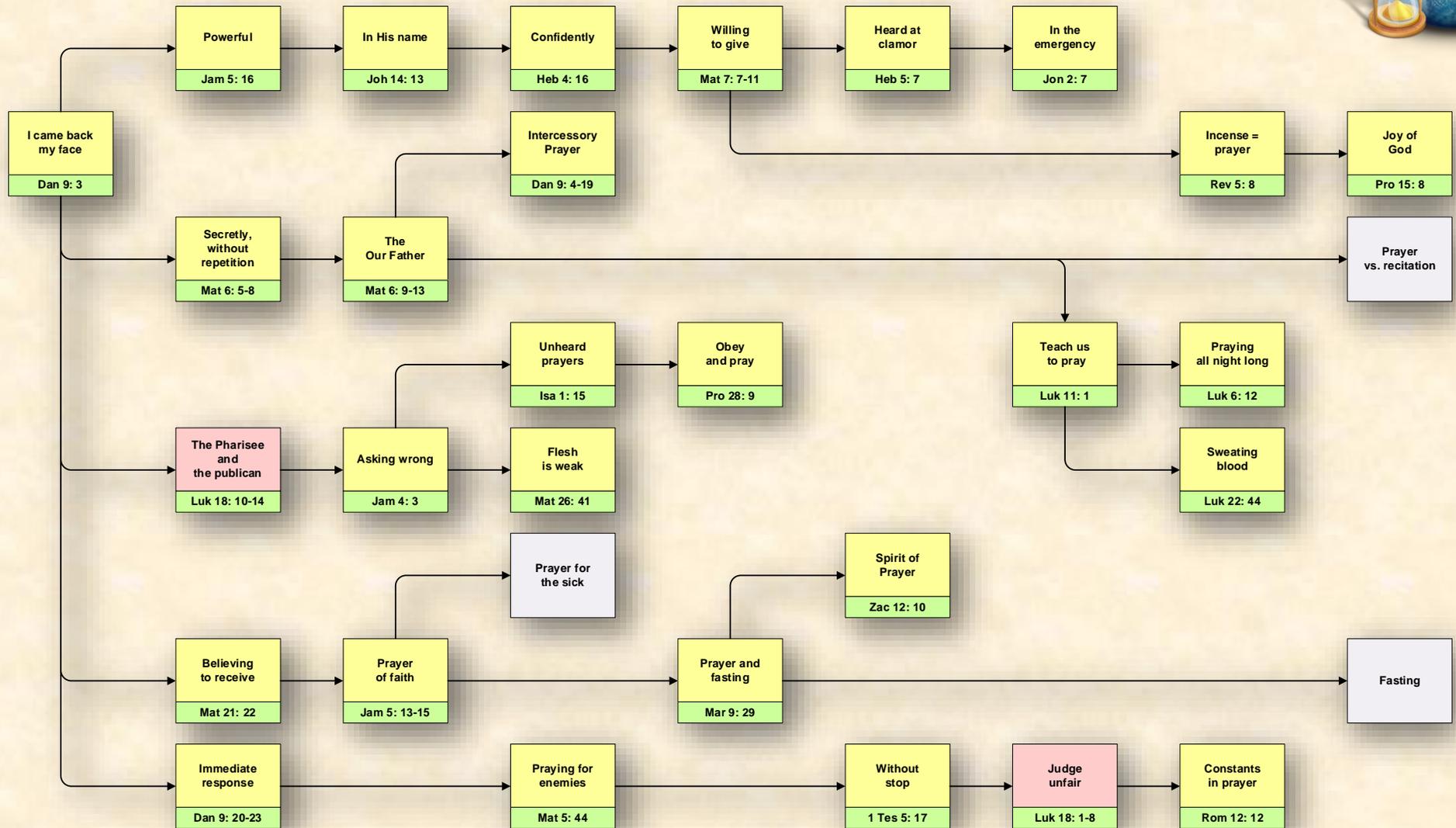


3. General Treatise Map





4. Treatise Map





5. Purpose of the Treatise

The purpose of the treatise is as follows:

- a. To present prayer as the breath of the soul.
- b. Establish the relationship between prayer and strength for Christian life.
- c. Show how to pray.
- d. Define the purposes of prayer.

6. Development of the theme

6.1. Introduction

I have the impression that perhaps this is the time when we pray the least. I believe that before, even among less religious people, prayer was something that was done at least as part of a certain routine or obligation. Parents used to pray with their children when they went to sleep, teaching them, and then, when they learned, reminding them to pray before going to sleep.

Also, before, people did not start eating without asking for a blessing on the food. I still remember when at Christmas our grandmothers would make us pray a little before midnight, before reverently bringing the image of the baby Jesus to put it in the manger of the birth (what they call the Bethlehem in other places). Today Christmas seems more like a secular party than anything else, where people think more of a party with dancing, fun, and drinking than of spiritual themes... but I don't want to get sidetracked.

Ask any young person now if he or she prays regularly and you're sure to get a sly smile as an answer, at least... If we add to this that what people really do is recitation and not pray, well... well, we complete the depressing picture of a world without prayer.

Of course, I would like to say that this is what happens in the world, in those who do not know the Lord, but the reality is that this situation has invaded the church and prayer has lost its place in this hurried world where we all run... most of us towards destruction, without knowing it. As I was saying, even among professed Christians the moments dedicated to prayer and meditation on spiritual things are increasingly conditioned by the "scarce" time we have, time that is dedicated much more to television, leisure, or anything else (including the smartphone) except communicating with God.

I think I understand that the purpose of prayer has also been lost and we have become a bit mechanical in this as well

6.2. Relationship with God

Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be substituted, and the health of the soul be preserved. Prayer brings the heart into immediate contact with the Well-spring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience.
Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, 254, 255

If there is one thing, we require to live the Christian life it is power... the source is at our disposal. But we must go to the source in need like Daniel. Our reasons for spending more time in prayer should include not only our spiritual need to overcome temptation and develop Christian character but also to do so for our needs and those of our people, for the church, for our leaders, because God gives wisdom to our rulers... there is no lack of reasons.

And I set my face toward the Lord God, to seek by prayer and holy desires, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.

Daniel 9: 3

Daniel knew that the end of the 70 years that Jeremiah had predicted would last for the desolation of Jerusalem and the time when the Jewish people would be held captive in distant lands was near. He decided





to pray fervently to God. The words used "**prayer**" and "**holy desires**" are, respectively: tephillah which means intercession, supplication, and takjanún which means fervent prayer. It was Daniel's purpose to intercede for his people and to plead fervently. But in addition to that he fasts, he dresses in sackcloth (coarse, loosely woven fabric, generally black, used to show mourning) and ashes (generally the use of sackcloth implied throwing ashes on himself, on his hair, or his shoulders also as a sign of pain for mourning). I understand that Daniel realized that he was unworthy to appear before God to remind Him of His promises of deliverance and he did so by humbling himself. The Holy Bible highlights Daniel as one of the most tested men who ever lived, yet he identifies with the spiritual situation of his people and intercedes for them. What an extraordinary example of the greatness of spirit and humility for all!

We will see more about this exemplary prayer later.

As Daniel exemplifies in his intercessory prayer, James urges us to pray "**for one another**". I think it is very positive to pray for others to overcome the powerful selfish tendencies that inhabit the heart. Of course, we also need to pray for ourselves, but intercessory prayer is powerful. I don't know what you think, but I like it when someone tells me they are praying for me, for my family; it makes me feel comforted and grateful to have people who esteem me or esteem mine. I've also noticed that no one gets upset or uncomfortable if I tell them I'm praying for them. Rather, his or her face lights up, smiles, is grateful... we can make people happy with few things better than prayer. This verse also holds that the "**effectual fervent prayer of a righteous one avails much**" which leaves me thinking. I will deal with this a little later... but we can go on having the idea that there will be different answers depending on our spiritual condition.

Confess faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous one avails much.

James 5: 16

I have become accustomed to ending my prayers by saying "I ask you (or we ask) in the name of Jesus". Well... this is not a magic formula let's say, but it is rather to understand that we can approach the throne of grace through the merits of Jesus. When the Bible speaks of God's name, you and I know that it refers to His character. When we ask like this, we are saying that there is no merit in us, that we depend on the merits of the Savior. We also do it because He asked us to do so. It is interesting to note that He says to ask the Father, but that Jesus will do it. Once again, the harmony of Divinity, their common purpose is highlighted.

And whatever you may ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 14: 13

We must confidently approach God to present our requests. We are not before a God who refuses contact with his creatures. God is willing to listen to us at all times. If you have no desire to draw near to God... for greater is your need to do so, for your soul thirsts for the refreshment of heaven. Do not fail to approach the throne of grace, your whole being needs to breathe through prayer.

Therefore let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4: 16

When my daughters were little, they always had a request on their lips, they always wanted to do something with us. Happily, even today, now married, they want to spend time with their parents... which continues to cheer us up as before, maybe even a little more... if this is possible. I would not understand a God who would deny something good or necessary to the children He loves. Sometimes my little girls wanted to do something that may be dangerous or inappropriate for them and even though they didn't understand it, we had to refuse. Maybe they even cried or were sad, but it was for their own good... even though they didn't understand it then.

Sometimes we do not understand when God denies us something... we are like children. I am sure that when I am in heaven with Jesus (at least I hope so), I will understand all those things that God denied





me and I will say: thank you for not giving me what I asked for. Surely, as in the case of my little daughters, I asked Him for something that I thought was good, but He who knows everything realized that it was not the most suitable for me or the good of my family.

You know, the verses I quote below do not say that God will give me what I ask for, they say that He will give me "good things". Maybe what I ask Him for is not good for me, maybe it's not good now... maybe I have to wait, or maybe it will never happen (in this case the answer is no) ... but I ratify my trust in Him who never fails.

Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you. For each one who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, if his son asks a loaf, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a snake? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him?

Matthew 7: 7-11

Notice what the verse says. It doesn't say that if I ask for a pizza God will give it to me, maybe He will tell me that I should eat a couple of apples (and He will be very right... because I like pizza very much) that are more convenient for my health.

Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God. The spiritual faculties lose their vitality, the religious experience lacks health and vigor...

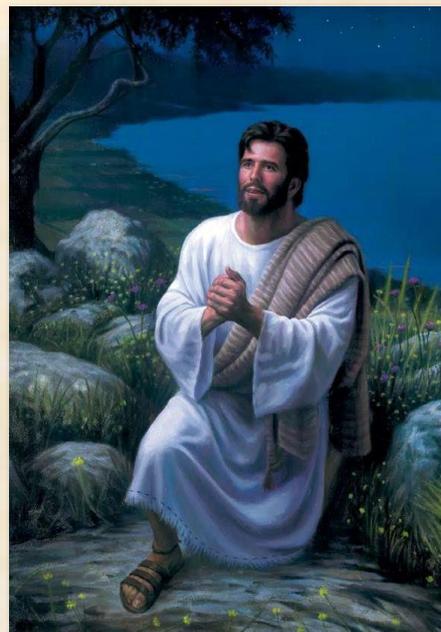
It is a wonderful thing that we can pray effectually, that unworthy, erring mortals possess the power of offering their requests to God. What higher power can man desire than this—to be linked with the infinite God? Feeble, sinful man has the privilege of speaking to his Maker. We may utter words that reach the throne of the Monarch of the universe. We may speak with Jesus as we walk by the way, and He says, I am at thy right hand.

Ellen G. White, Messages to Young People, 249, 250

Moving on to another point, the perfect example of a life of prayer and power (the consequence of prayer) is Jesus. Jesus prayed fervently to accomplish the exceptional work of man's redemption. I can imagine the struggles the Lord would have every day facing on one side the incomprehension of his people, the traps of the priests, and the cunning of the enemy... he needed the power of prayer. I once commented with you, in another treatise, that Jesus had to face all the demonic hosts because Satan had gathered them to this world for the final battle, the battle against the Son of Man, to ruin the plan of salvation. Jesus required the power of prayer so that, by keeping in permanent contact with his Father, he could remain faithful in the struggle. He must have prayed not to fail, for if he sinned, he not only failed the plan of salvation but would have been lost forever... I will expand on this in another treatise as it is very deep and would divert us from the subject.

For Jesus, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong cryings and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared,

Hebrews 5: 7



Even in the most desperate condition, God listens. In the case of Jonah, the reluctant prophet; God had to interrupt his flight to Tharsis to return him to Nineveh in the most improbable way. When Jonah, thrown from the ship to the sea during the storm, at his own plea, was almost touching the bottom of the sea, when as he tells his head was entangled in the seaweed of the bottom of the sea, when his lungs were about to burst and throw out the last breath he had taken, there he remembered God, prayed and found an answer in the great fish.

When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah; and my prayer came in to You, into Your holy temple.

Jonah 2: 7

Sometimes when I am praying to God, alone or with my wife, and we present to Him some repeated request I think that perhaps I am boring God with our insistence. Then I reflect and say that God is not like



me (maybe I would get bored hearing the same thing over and over again), thank God that He is not like me (come on, that sounds strange to say this) because God delights in being in contact with us, He knows that we are flesh, that sometimes we suffer for the things that happen and we only find refuge in Him (it is that to someone we have to tell) and He listens to us patiently and gives calm to our afflicted heart, even though we do not have the solution to our pressing problem. God is a loving Father, who wants the best for you and me, he will be more than willing to listen to you... look for him every day, every moment. For God "the prayers of the saints" are like incense, a pleasant smell.

And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having harps and golden vials full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Revelation 5: 8

Dear friend, God finds joy in listening to you, don't hesitate to tell him your problems and perplexities, let him enjoy the communication of the children He loves. Our daughters, with their husbands and our grandchildren, live in the USA, so when an internet phone rings at home in Peru, my wife is very happy and runs to get it because most probably it is one of them, or she can hear some words from our grandchildren... these communications are valuable to us. I know that my Father in heaven runs (symbolically speaking) to pick up the phone from the hotline when I call him, and he is happy, he is very happy...

The sacrifice of the wicked is a hateful thing to Jehovah, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.

Proverbs 15: 8

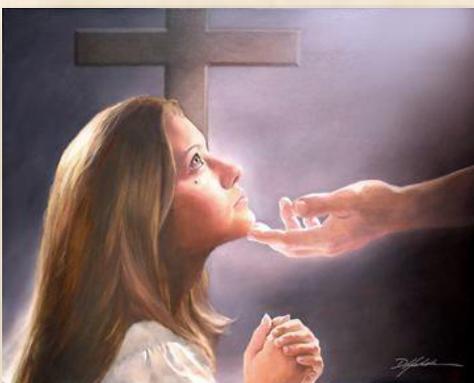
6.3. Prayer models

The Bible teaches us how to pray. Jesus' instructions, within it, are very precise:

- a. Praying in private, the public prayer that we sometimes have to do when we are in church or a small group should be audible out of consideration for those present, and should also be brief.
- b. Prayer should be an intelligent communication, not a set of "vain repetitions". Can you imagine if every time you called your father, a friend, or your wife on the phone, you repeated the same phrases to them, saying the same thing? Talk to the Lord as to a friend (do not lose sight of the majesty of the heavens, be careful to be light in your words) and tell him how you feel, how grateful you are to be his son... well, feel free to tell him your sorrows and joys and stay a little bit on your knees to wait for him to answer your heart.
- c. Be concise when talking to God, it's not the number of things we say but how much we open our heart to His influence. Remember that God knows your heart, that He knows what is wrong with you, that He knows your problems (or better yet, He knows the solution) ...

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, enter into your room. And shutting your door, pray to your Father in secret; and your Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly. But when you pray, do not babble vain words, as the nations. For they think that in their much speaking they shall be heard. Therefore do not be like them, for your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask Him.

Matthew 6: 5-8



In secret prayer, the soul should be laid bare to the inspecting eye of God... How precious is secret prayer—the soul communing with God! Secret prayer is to be heard only by the prayer-hearing God. No curious ear is to receive the burden of petitions. Calmly, yet fervently, the soul is to reach out after God; and sweet and abiding will be the influence emanating from Him who sees in secret, whose ear is open to the prayer arising from the heart. He who in simple faith holds communion with God will gather to himself divine rays of light to strengthen and sustain him in the conflict with Satan.

Ellen G. White, Our Father cares, 136, 137

There will be opportunities for public prayer, in the church, in family worship, in the small group... we must also follow the divine advice for these occasions.

Christ impressed upon His disciples the idea that their prayers should be short, expressing just what they wanted, and no more. He gives the length and substance of their prayers, expressing



their desires for temporal and spiritual blessings, and their gratitude for the same. How comprehensive this sample prayer! It covers the actual need of all. One or two minutes is long enough for any ordinary prayer. There may be instances where prayer is in a special manner indited by the Spirit of God, where supplication is made in the Spirit. The yearning soul becomes agonized and groans after God. The spirit wrestles as did Jacob and will not be at rest without special manifestations of the power of God. This is as God would have it.

But many offer prayer in a dry, sermonizing manner. These pray to men, not to God. If they were praying to God, and really understood what they were doing, they would be alarmed at their audacity; for they deliver a discourse to the Lord in the mode of prayer, as though the Creator of the universe needed special information upon general questions in relation to things transpiring in the world. All such prayers are as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. They are made no account of in heaven. Angels of God are wearied with them, as well as mortals who are compelled to listen to them.

Ellen G. White, Testimony Treasures, Volume 1, 277

Jesus also taught us the Lord's Prayer, the model prayer, which some repeat forgetting what the Lord mentioned earlier: "**do not use vain repetitions**". In presenting this model Jesus showed us the parts of prayer:

- a. A respectful and reverent reference to our God, praise.
- b. A desire that the Lord's will be done in us.
- c. Our requests and thanks for what he has done and is doing for us. I really should have said thanks and requests, in that order.
- d. A request for forgiveness for our sins.
- e. A plea to transform our hearts so that we are (forgiving and many other things) like Him.
- f. A request to help us successfully face our daily struggles.
- g. Recognition of His power and glory.

Therefore pray in this way: Our Father, who is in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil. For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Matthew 6: 9-13

This is not to say that we cannot use the model prayer from time to time, to complete our prayers... what we need to understand is that repeating it is not the only way to get in tune with heaven.

In my morning devotions, I have regarded it my privilege to close my petition with the prayer that Christ taught to His disciples. There is so much that I really must have to meet the needs of my own case that I sometimes fear that I shall ask amiss; but when in sincerity I offer the model prayer that Christ gave to His disciples I cannot but feel that in these few words all my needs are comprehended. This I offer after I have presented my special private prayer. If with heart and mind and soul I repeat the Lord's prayer, then I can go forth in peace to my work, knowing that I have not asked amiss...

Ellen G. White, That I May Know Him, 261

Another impressive prayer is that of Daniel, before receiving God's answer to the most shocking prophecy in Scripture: the 2,300 days of evening and morning. I have read this prayer many times and I marvel at the great man that Daniel was, at his humility, at his desire to intercede... please read it a couple of times at least. Look at what it contains:

- a. Praise and acknowledgment of God.
- b. Acceptance of the unworthiness of the people (in which the prophet is included, even though, I believe, he doesn't deserve it, at least in the same proportion) in contrast with God's justice, His mercy.
- c. An acknowledgment that what had happened to the people (falling back into slavery) was a consequence of their alienation from God.
- d. A request to God, without merit in those who ask, but trusting in the mercy and grace of a good God, for love of Himself.
- e. Trusting that God will do it, as He has promised.

And I prayed to Jehovah my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and awesome God, keeping the covenant and mercy to those who love Him, and to those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Your commandments and from Your judgments. Neither have we listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our rulers, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us the shame of our faces, as it is today to the men of Judah and to the people of Jerusalem, and to all Israel who



are near and who are afar off, through all the countries where You have driven them because of their sin which they have sinned against You. O Lord, shame of face belongs to us, to our kings, to our rulers, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him. We have not obeyed the voice of Jehovah our God, to walk in His Laws which He set before us by His servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel has transgressed Your Law, and turned aside, that they might not obey Your voice. Therefore the curse has been poured out on us, and the oath that is written in the Law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against Him. And He has confirmed His Words which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing on us a great evil. For under all the heavens it has not been done as it has been done to Jerusalem. As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this evil has come on us. Yet we did not make our prayer before Jehovah our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand Your truth. Therefore Jehovah has watched over the evil, and has brought it on us. For Jehovah our God is righteous in all His works which He does; for we did not obey His voice. And now, O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out from the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have brought fame to Yourself, as it is today, we have sinned, we have done wrong. O Lord, I pray You, according to all Your righteousness let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain. Because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a curse to all those who are around us. And now, O our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his holy desires, and cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, bow down Your ear and hear. Open Your eyes and behold our ruins, and the city which is called by Your name. For we do not present our prayers before You on account of our righteousnesses, but because of Your great mercies. O Jehovah, hear; O Jehovah, forgive; O Jehovah, listen and do. Do not delay, for Your own sake, O my God; for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

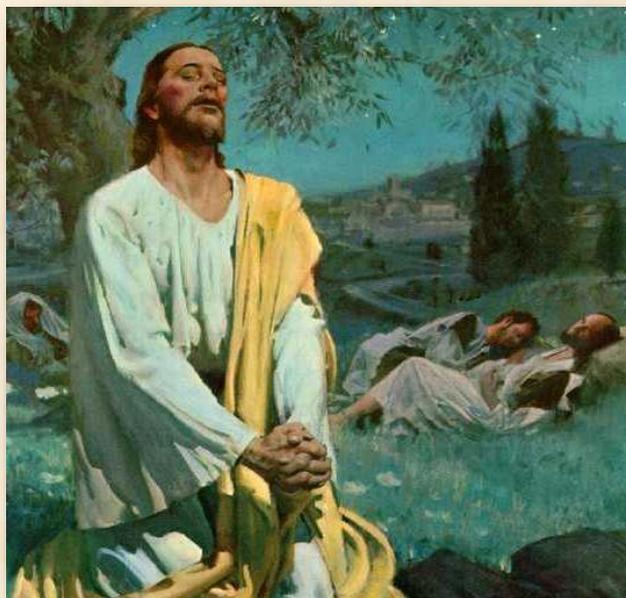
Daniel 9: 4-19

The disciples saw that Jesus was a man of prayer. It was logical that they would ask him to teach them how to pray. Sometimes when we give Bible studies and ask a person who is getting to know God to pray, he refuses to do so, saying that someone else should pray. We are unaccustomed to this. We tell him to speak to the Lord as a Father, as he would speak to someone who loves him and wants to do him good, someone who has all the solutions, even for the problems we don't know we have. When a person learns to pray, he then finds joy in talking to his Creator. The disciples asked Him and He taught them the Lord's Prayer that we have already spoken about.

And it happened as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught His disciples.

Luke 11: 1

With the eyes of imagination, I try to see one day in the life of Jesus with his disciples. I imagine the drowsy eyes of the disciples at night seeing their Master under some tree praying. Their eyes were closed when they saw Jesus given over to communication with his Father. I also imagine that when the first lights of dawn woke them up, they saw Jesus, perhaps in the same place, praying to his Father, very early in the morning. Perhaps they would think that Jesus did not even sleep... sometimes, many times, this happened. Maybe that's why he fell asleep in the boat during the storm... Don't forget to pray in the morning and before you go to sleep. Ask for strength in the morning, ask for forgiveness and rest at night, but in both cases praise and thank God for life, health, family, work, etc., etc.



And it happened in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray, and He was spending the night in prayer to God.

Luke 6: 12

We do not have the power of Jesus, because we have not prayed as Jesus did, we have not prayed unto blood as happened to him in the garden of Gethsemane. I once asked a doctor if this could happen (sweating blood), he said yes but did not give me much explanation. Then I investigated some articles and



found that the capillaries, which conduct the blood to our sweat glands (lodged in our pores), are connected to these through a very thin membrane that under conditions of very high stress can break letting drops of blood pass to the pores. Thank you, Jesus, for accepting to be my substitute, thank you for sweating blood for me!

And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Luke 22: 44

6.4. Hindered prayers

When a prayer asking God for something is not answered it may be for one or more causes. I can think of a few reasons:

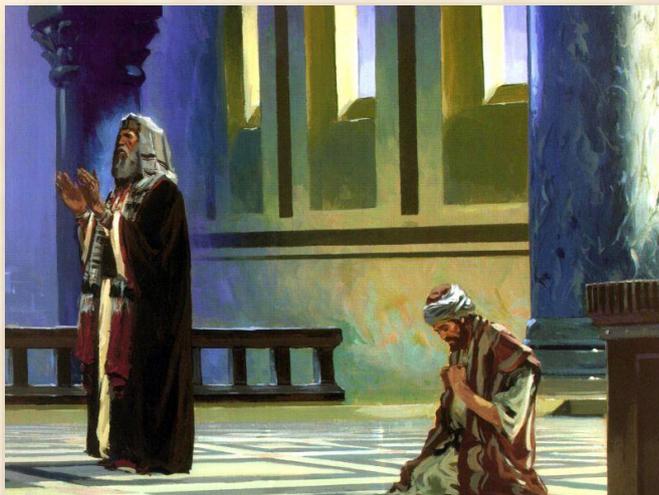
- a. The answer to what we ask is no. Do not believe that everything you ask is right and that God should say yes.
- b. The answer is no... now. Perhaps the time is not right.
- c. Your prayer never came... and there is no answer. This is really the only reason there may not be an answer.

A deep sense of our need and a great desire for the things for which we ask must characterize our prayers, else they will not be heard. But we are not to become weary and cease our petitions because the answer is not immediately received.

Ellen G. White, Our Father cares, 136

The parable of the Pharisee and the publican illustrates an important truth. The attitude in prayer is important. I would like to point out that Jesus shows the contrast between a person who is supposedly religious and very accepted in Jewish society and one who is considered an enemy (the publicans were the ones who collected taxes in favor of Rome and were usually despised by their fellow countrymen as traitors).

Let's look first at the Pharisee. He had gone forward in the temple (note that he says the publican was far away), with his forehead up (note that he says the publican "would not even lift up his eyes to Heaven", there was no sign of repentance (rather of self-exaltation) and dependence on supposed good works to "deserve" God's favor. But most importantly, he says he "prayed with himself", not with God.



On the other hand, the publican, as soon as he entered the temple, did not raise his eyes, beat his breast, and prayed that God would forgive him, recognizing himself as a sinner. The contrast in the attitude of both is remarkable. If the parable had ended there, we would all have understood the

purpose of presenting it. But Jesus wanted to end it by stating the result, contrasting the result in the justification of two opposing situations: humility and self-exaltation. How are you praying? Are you thanking like the Pharisee for not being like rapists, terrorists, or murderers, or like your annoying neighbor? Or instead of comparing yourself to them, are you comparing yourself to Jesus?

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed within himself in this way: God, I thank You that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice on the Sabbath, I give tithes of all that I possess. And standing afar off, the tax-collector would not even lift up his eyes to Heaven, but struck on his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself shall be abased, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.

Luke 18: 10-14

In other cases, God cannot grant us what we ask for because if he gave it to us, we would not make good use of it. I am sure that many of the things that God denied me would have been counterproductive to my Christian life or my family's. I don't need to ask myself, or consult God because it doesn't help me win



the lottery (of course... since I don't ever play it will be a little difficult for me to win it) because I know that God doesn't approve of gambling. I don't have to ask God if I can cheat in business, because the Bible already answered me negatively to that.

You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it upon your lusts.

James 4: 3

In Isaiah's time, the people of Israel were in such a bad spiritual situation that God could not hear them. God may not listen to me because my life is not in harmony with what He expects of me. We have to reorder our life concerning the Lord so that our prayers are not hindered.

And when you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood.

Isaiah 1: 15

Pray to face temptation, fight on your knees with the Lord to overcome the evil inclinations of your irregular heart (like mine), try to overcome it by the power of the Third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, capable of transforming our lives. Many times we wish to be liberated from our sins, from our inclinations to evil, but there is no strength in us because "the flesh is weak". Prayer can empower us.

Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Matthew 26: 41

Again, attitude is important. I always tell my graduate students (not in theology but business) that attitude is more important than aptitude. I have known brilliant people, intellectually speaking (probably had a high IQ and had excelled in their studies), but unable to work as a team or manage their lives. Instead, over the years I have seen people who may be less gifted but who have achieved, better than those, the great goals of life. That is why I maintain, which is supported by scholars on this subject, that attitude is more important than aptitude.

How far your prayers go depends on your attitude to prayer... If you wish to be heard, do not turn your attention away from the law of God, from the admonitions of God in his word, from the counterclaim of the wise... Have an attitude...

He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is a hateful thing.

Proverbs 28: 9

6.5. Purpose and Results

I have found through life (not only my own but in the experience of people very close to us) enough answers about the effectiveness of prayer to be able to convince the most recalcitrant opponent. I have also verified that many times God does not answer as we expect and it will be one of the many questions I will have for my Redeemer up there in the skies... well, we will have time... why in some case God did not grant us what we were asking Him with such intensity.

I have also commented that it is possible that my spiritual condition has prevented my prayers from reaching the throne of the Almighty or that I was asking wrongly and the Lord knew it... as he loves me, he did not grant it.

The verse quoted below tells me that if we believe we will receive it. In my experience, I must also acknowledge that I have sometimes asked without trusting the outcome, and well... nothing. It is not possible to relate to God without faith.

And all things, whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.

Matthew 21: 22

Ask, then; ask, and ye shall receive. Ask for humility, wisdom, courage, increase of faith. To every sincere prayer an answer will come. It may not come just as you desire, or at the time you look for it; but it will come in the way and at the time that will best meet your need. The prayers you offer in loneliness, in weariness, in trial, God answers, not always according to your expectations, but always for your good.

Ellen G. White, Messages to Young People, 250

We need to know how to pray. It is not tame, spiritless prayers that take hold of the divine attributes. Prayer is heard by God when it comes from a heart broken by a sense of unworthiness. Prayer was instituted for our comfort and salvation, that through faith and hope we may lay hold on the rich promises of God. Prayer is the expression of the desires of a soul hungering and thirsting for



righteousness. Prayer is a heaven-ordained means of success. Appeals, petitions, entreaties, between man and man, move men and act a part in controlling the affairs of nations.

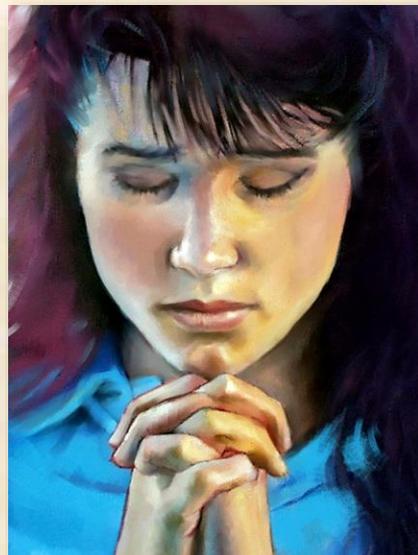
But prayer moves heaven. That power alone that comes in answer to prayer will make men wise in the wisdom of heaven and enable them to work in the unity of the Spirit, joined together by the bonds of peace.

Ellen G. White, In Heavenly Places, 75

I remember a few years ago when my youngest daughter was still at home with us (my two daughters now happily married and living in the USA) she was studying English at a very well-known institute. There, she obtained her ARELS (Association of Recognised English Language Services) and Oxford University qualifications, which helped her to study her career in the USA, having fulfilled the requirements of the TOEFL (Test Of English as a Foreign Language).

When she had finished her studies to take her exam for Oxford, she was surprised to find that the final exam was on a Sabbath. She showed her concern to my wife and both of them went to the director of the institute to ask her to change the date of the exam. She told them that this was impossible, that the University was holding this exam on the same day all over the world and that it could not be changed, that it did not matter whom we may ask.

My wife and daughter decided to write a letter to Oxford University, as you know one of the leading English universities in the world, asking that she could take the exam another day because she was an Adventist and wanted to keep the day of the Lord, the Sabbath. The lady who had attended them in Lima was surprised that they wanted to do that and even smiled at the innocence (in her opinion) of the request. They sent the letter with a prayer, asking God that her request would be answered.



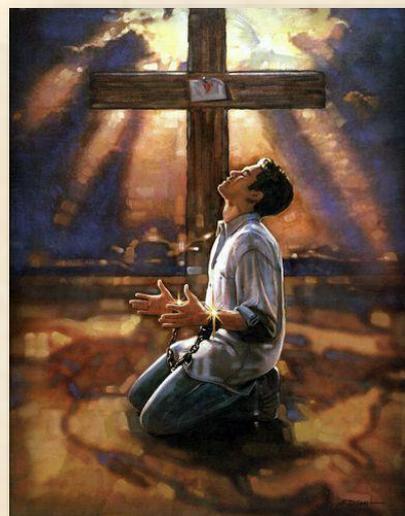
A short time later the director called them to say that she had received a reply from Oxford. To her surprise (she could not believe it) the University had changed, as a result of this request, the examinations all over the world for Friday morning. My daughter has never forgotten this... nor have we, I hope the director has not forgotten either. A great university granting the request to an unknown young Peruvian girl who wanted to honor her God. Of course, my wife and daughter did not apply to the university (although it seems that way) but to God, who can do everything. It wasn't like the director said, that it didn't matter whom we asked. It does matter...

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will cure the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. And if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him.

James 5: 13-15

I am very pleased to know that the church prays, that there are intercessory prayer groups, that while the pastor or the evangelist is preaching at a conference to win souls, there is a group of brethren in prayer so that the Holy Spirit can subjugate the souls of the listeners.

In another prayer meeting, in another church, we had the surprising visit of a young member who came from the provinces to be treated by the doctors in Lima. When the time came to make the requests, he asked for us to pray for him, he had a brain tumor; it had been detected in a hospital of his land and he was looking for the healing of such a terrible evil in the capital. The church prayed for this young stranger. Sometime later, the young man returned to another prayer meeting. He gave his testimony: the doctors who had reviewed his file were surprised that there was no tumor. They said it couldn't be, that the machines can't be wrong, etc., etc. God did it once again. A few weeks ago, the same thing happened to the carnal sister of a dear church sister, this time in the United States. The tumor is





gone too... by the power of prayer into it. Don't ask me to explain how it works, it just does. May God continue to pour out "the spirit of grace and prayer" among his people and may we always contemplate "him whom they have pierced" and trust him to do the impossible, as long as it is his will.

In giving us His Son, the Father gave the most costly gift that heaven could bestow. This gift it is our privilege to use in our ministration to the sick. Let Christ be your dependence. Commit every case to the Great Healer; let Him guide in every operation. The prayer offered in sincerity and in faith will be heard. This will give confidence to the physicians and courage to the sufferer.

I have been instructed that we should lead the sick in our institutions to expect large things because of the faith of the physician in the Great Healer, who, in the years of His earthly ministry, went through the towns and villages of the land and healed all who came to Him. None were turned away; He healed them all. Let the sick realize that, although unseen, Christ is present to bring relief and healing.

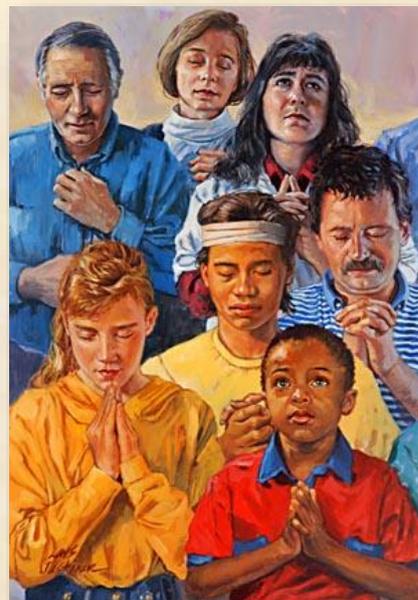
Ellen G. White, Ye Shall Receive Power, 200

In his efforts to reach God's ideal for him, the Christian is to despair of nothing. Moral and spiritual perfection, through the grace and power of Christ, is promised to all. Jesus is the source of power, the fountain of life. He brings us to His Word, and from the tree of life presents to us leaves for the healing of sin-sick souls. He leads us to the throne of God, and puts into our mouth a prayer through which we are brought into close contact with Himself. In our behalf, He set in operation the all-powerful agencies of heaven. At every step we touch His living power.

God fixes no limit to the advancement of those who desire to be "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (**Colossians 1: 9**). Through prayer, through watchfulness, through growth in knowledge and understanding, they are to be "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power" (verse **11**). Thus, they are prepared to work for others. It is the Saviour's purpose that human beings, purified and sanctified, shall be His helping hand. For this great privilege let us give thanks to Him who "hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (verses **12, 13**)

Ellen G. White, Lift Him Up, 264

A few long years ago, at a prayer meeting in the church on a Wednesday night, a church supporter who regularly attended and wanted to be baptized confessed in front of everyone that she could not give up smoking. That she had tried several times since she began to know the Lord, but she could not. She said that when she passed by someone who smoked she felt an "uncontrollable" desire to smoke and fell over and over again. She asked the church to pray and we did. A few weeks later she told her testimony, after her baptism, she said that since that night every time she smelled the cigarette smoke, she disliked it. She said that she could not explain, except through prayer, how this change had occurred. She was blessed with an aversion to tobacco, but... I also remember being on the deathbed of a brother who died as a faithful man. He had been an alcoholic before he met the Lord and he confessed to us that he was always tempted to drink and had to struggle every day. I don't know why the Lord would choose to act one way or another. I trust, however, that He will always do it for our good.



The struggle, at times, to free a soul from the enemy demands joining fasting to prayer. We need to focus on prayer, to be prepared like Jesus who had to cast out demons that His disciples could not.

And He said to them, this kind can come out by nothing except by prayer and fasting.

Mark 9: 29

And I will pour on the house of David, and on the people of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of prayers. And they shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be bitter over Him, as the bitterness over the first-born.

Zechariah 12: 10

Scientists are surprised to find that patients who pray heal faster and in greater proportion than those who do not pray. They are also surprised, even more, when they find that patients who are prayed for (not



that they pray, but that others pray for them) are healed faster and more often than those who are not prayed for. There is a kind of power...

When she was 26 weeks pregnant my oldest daughter had Preeclampsia (a tremendous increase in blood pressure that has no explanation and whose only cure is to induce labor). My granddaughter was born weighing 616 grams (let's say one-fifth of what a baby weighs in a normal delivery). The first few days we were all allowed to see her and be in the room with her, but on the third day, the care was extreme. Then we found out that it was the terminally ill baby protocol. There was no hope that she would survive so they let her spend her few days of life with those who loved her.

When we learned that my daughter was in trouble, we took the first plane from Seville, Spain to Lincoln, Nebraska. By the time we arrived, the little girl had been born. We had asked our pastor, who was also a great friend, to pray for our daughter (her life was also in danger) and her baby. He sent a letter to 300 Adventist pastors in Europe to do the same. We also asked my wife's prayer groups in Peru, our family and friends, and the whole world. Soon a battalion of good people was praying for a mother and her baby.

When she was born so prematurely, it was a surprise that during the second day she was removed from the artificial lung because... she was breathing, which supposedly a baby so premature could not do. We were told, however, that she could eventually be blind, deaf, dumb or brain-deficient, or some combination of these terrible deficiencies. For months our knees were bent, and I know that many who received our weekly email review of Isabella's progress. Every ounce that went up was a joy, every report indicating that her eyes were forming well was another...



Today our Isabella is twelve years old, she is a normal, beautiful, healthy kid with a beautiful smile (she looks like her maternal grandmother, I say) and she is the joy of the whole family. The doctors and nurses are surprised at how well she is and all because of the prayer. The picture is from when she was 6 months old, it is my favorite, I have it on my computer desktop.

Every day we thank God for this gift, for having saved (in passing) my daughter's life twice in that trance, and for having supported my son-in-law who also carried a tremendous emotional burden. I remember that there were people who never knew us, until now at least, who wrote asking us about Isabella, they were among the many anonymous people who prayed for this to be possible. May the Lord return them in great blessings in their lives and the lives of their loved ones!

Once again, sometimes prayers are answered as we expect, other times... unfortunately not... We lost a granddaughter before she was born, whom we hoped to see grow up in the kingdom of heaven and God answered our prayers that Lilly would come to the world also healed after a similar situation.

When the sick pray for the recovery of health, the Lord does not always answer their prayer in just the way they desire. But even though they may not be immediately healed, He will give them that which is of far more value—grace to bear their sickness.

Ellen G. White, In Heavenly Places, 82

When we ask God with fervor when our life is in harmony with what God expects of us, then God responds and I will do it with alacrity, as was the case with Daniel.

And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my cry before Jehovah my God for the holy mountain of my God; yes, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, touched me in my severe exhaustion, about the time of the evening sacrifice. And he enlightened me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I have now come out to give you skill and understanding. At the beginning of your prayers the commandment came out, and I have come to explain. For you are greatly beloved; therefore understand the matter, and attend to the vision:

Daniel 9: 20-23

In this case, God sent Gabriel, the covering cherub that replaced Lucifer, from His throne to attend Daniel's prayer How fast does an angel fly? Well, a lot... because Daniel hadn't finished his prayer and



Gabriel was already there. Wonderful God, interested in the pleas of his children! I confess that it is easy for me to pray for my daughters and their husbands, for my four grandchildren, for my family, brothers, nephews, etc.; but I must also confess that it is not so easy for me to do so for those who have done us wrong, many times on purpose... it is much more difficult, but we must pray to have the heart of Jesus, who prayed on the cross for those who crucified him.

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

Matthew 5: 44

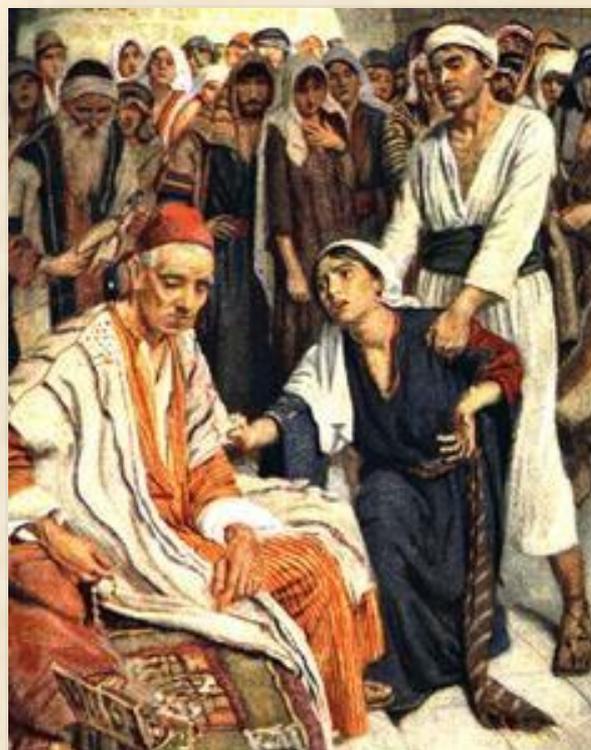
Prayer must be continuous, we should pray without ceasing, at all times. It is true that there will be special moments of prayer, like in the morning service or when we go to bed or when we take our food, but we can pray at any time and place, in the car, on the bus, on the street, or even at work. When I was in Japan on a scholarship, I was impressed by some Muslim colleagues; at a certain time of day they would pull out some little rugs, point them to Mecca and pray... they didn't care what they said... I don't know how many Christian executives would tell their board members (as Muslim executives do) that they are going to take a moment to pray... and do it in front of them.

Pray without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5: 17

Jesus also used a parable, that of the unjust judge, to present by contrast God's willingness to listen to our requests and attend to them. Jesus maintains that God will respond because he is a million times (this is not a mathematical calculation, nor a hyperbole) better than the judge in the story, he will not do it to get rid of an insistent pedegree, he will do it because he loves us and wants to do us good. But I must insist, persevere, that is my part in the equation.

In the meantime, I would like to tell you that this parable has a lot to do with the events of the end time and the remnant church... but we will deal with that in one of our prophetic studies.



And He also spoke a parable to them to teach it is always right to pray, and not to faint, saying, A certain judge was in a certain city, not fearing God, nor respecting man. And a widow was in that city. And she came to Him, saying, Avenge me of my adversary. And he would not do so for a time. But afterward he said within himself, Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, that she not wear me down in the end. And the Lord said, hear what the unjust judge says. And shall not God avenge His own elect who cry day and night to Him, though He has been long-suffering over them? I say to you that He will avenge them speedily. Yet when the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?

Luke 18: 1-8

Do not cease to pray. If the answer tarry, wait for it. Lay all your plans at the feet of the Redeemer. Let your importunate prayers ascend to God. If it be for His name's glory, the soothing words will be spoken, "Be it unto thee according to thy word".

We can never weary Christ by earnest supplications. We do not depend on God as we should. Let us leave unsaid every word of complaint. Talk faith and courage while waiting for God... Be afraid to doubt, lest this become a habit that will destroy faith. The dealing of the heavenly Father may seem dark and mysterious and unexplainable; nevertheless, we are to trust in Him.

Oh, how precious is Jesus to the soul who trusts in Him! But many are walking in darkness because they bury their faith in the shadow of Satan... Never for a moment should we allow Satan to



think that his power to distress and annoy is greater than the power of Christ to uphold and strengthen...

Every sincere prayer that is offered is mingled with the efficacy of Christ's blood. If the answer is deferred, it is because God desires us to show a holy boldness in claiming the pledged word of God. He is faithful who hath promised. He will never forsake the soul who is wholly surrendered to Him.

Ellen G. White, Our Father cares, 148

That is why Paul urges us, as the Word of God often does, to be constant in prayer.

rejoicing in hope, patient in affliction, steadfastly continuing in prayer,

Romans 12: 12

7. Complementary material

7.1. Praying or praying

The enemy of God has created a counterfeit of prayer. He has made man believe that God is pleased with the repetition of prayers as if they were magic.

But when you pray, do not babble vain words, as the nations. For they think that in their much speaking they shall be heard. Therefore do not be like them, for your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask Him.

Matthew 6: 7, 8

The Greek word translated here as "babble vain words" is battologéo which means "to chat tediously, to babble (as parrots do when they repeat what they have learned) or to speak without thinking what is said, to babble". The Greeks, for example, prayed to the gods repeating the same formula for each god; as there were so many, they included the formula "for the forgotten god" or erected statues to the "unknown god" as Paul mentions. Today, in the Catholic religion, the faithful, contradicting God, perhaps many unknowingly, repeat prayer formulas once and again and suppose that He delights in them.

I remember when I was a boy (I was Catholic at that time) and I went to confession, the priest at the end gave me as a penance a number of Our Father and Hail Mary (I will not say how many so as not to incriminate myself) and I remember that he repeated them as a poem to get out of it as soon as possible. I also remember when in church we repeated time after time the Kyrie Eleison (Lord, have mercy), a kind of antiphonal prayer where the faithful repeated time after time formula to each intervention of the priest. When I was a child the priest even said his words in Latin so, besides, I had no idea what he was saying.

I also remember that on the roof of the house of some very dear aunts (my mother's sisters, my mom already rests in the Lord) there was an image of the Virgin Mary (the so-called Mary Help of Christians). At the foot of the image was a short prayer. According to Catholic theology, if I repeated it, I was entitled to a plenary indulgence of one year. That is, the forgiveness of my sins for one year by repeating a short prayer... How convenient, isn't it?

Recitation, like in Hail Mary or Our Father, the repetition of these pre-designed prayers, is totally different from prayer, which is an intelligent way to communicate with God, thanking Him specifically for His blessings, asking Him for our needs or concerns, praying for strength to face illness or the like. It is a dialogue, not a magic formula to satisfy God. While recitation repeats established and meaningless prayers for the specific situation in which I find myself, in prayer I can turn my soul to God and tell him my concerns or thank him for his blessings. There is no resemblance even between recitation and prayer, even though they seem to have the same purpose.

7.2. Fasting

Let me say a few words about fasting. Some people mistakenly think that fasting is to "soften" God, as a kind of sacrifice so that God will agree to do what we ask of Him. This is not so. Fasting is to prepare ourselves, to free our body from the burden of processing food, and to be in better condition so that our clear mind can connect with the heavenly waves (this is rhetoric, just in case).

You have not noticed that when you eat some heavy or abundant food, you get certain drowsiness, you notice that your mind cannot concentrate and that you would like to take a nap. What happens is that the energies of the body are concentrated in the stomach during digestion (depending on how much and what you have ingested) and this reduces the forces to attend to the intellectual (by the way also the spiritual). Let me digress on this subject. Sometimes on Sabbath, we have such a special breakfast (and voluminous, above all) that we fall asleep at the time of worship. Be frugal and your eyelids will not be so



heavy when it is time to feed on the Word of God. It doesn't always depend on just that one preacher being boring?

Returning to the point, fasting does not always imply stopping eating completely, in many cases it is better to have a diet of juices and fruits, which are digested quickly so that our mind and our energies are quickly released. This is especially good for children and teenagers as well as the elderly (it suits me... I'm already close, or maybe I'm already here). Fasting is very much linked to prayer, as Christ showed in the following passage, paralleling those we have quoted on how to pray.



And when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, of a sad face. For they disfigure their faces so that they may appear to men to fast. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to fast, but to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly.

Matthew 6: 16-18

Just as God urges us to practice secret prayer, He also tells us that fasting must be kept secret. We should not go around proclaiming that we fast, like the Pharisee in the parable we told earlier.

Fasting was practiced by the Jews as an act of merit, and the most rigid among them fasted two days in every week.

Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, 276

But true fasting is something different from what we think, it is getting in tune with God through our deeds rather than our words. We cannot fast as a replacement for obedience or godly living. It is a complement, not a replacement, not a penance as some believe. This is a passage from Isaiah that I like very much because it speaks of practical piety concerning fasting and prayer. Read it carefully.

Cry aloud, do not spare, lift up your voice like a ram's horn, and show My people their rebellion, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and one who did not forget the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in drawing near to God. They say, why have we fasted, and You do not see? Why have we afflicted our soul, and You take no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and crush all your laborers. Behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness; you shall not fast as you do today, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast and a day pleasing to Jehovah? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed ones go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to break your bread to the hungry, and that you should bring home the wandering poor? When will you see the naked and cover him; and you will not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break out as the dawn, and your health shall spring out quickly; and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of Jehovah shall gather you. Then you shall call, and Jehovah shall answer; you shall cry, and He shall say, Here I am. If you take the yoke away from among you, the pointing of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall your light rise in darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. And Jehovah shall always guide you and satisfy your soul in dry places, and make your bones fat; and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not.

Isaiah 58: 1-11

The Pharisees sought to exalt themselves by their rigorous observance of forms, while their hearts were filled with envy and strife. "Behold", says the Scripture, "ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?" **Isaiah 58: 4, 5.**

The true fast is no mere formal service. The Scripture describes the fast that God has chosen, — "to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free,



and that ye break every yoke”; to “draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul”. **Isaiah 58: 6, 10**. Here is set forth the very spirit and character of the work of Christ. His whole life was a sacrifice of Himself for the saving of the world. Whether fasting in the wilderness of temptation or eating with the publicans at Matthew’s feast, He was giving His life for the redemption of the lost. Not in idle mourning, in mere bodily humiliation and multitudinous sacrifices, is the true spirit of devotion manifested, but it is shown in the surrender of self in willing service to God and man.

Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, 277

A people are here addressed who make high profession, who are in the habit of praying, and who delight in religious exercises; yet there is a lack. They realize that their prayers are not answered; their zealous, earnest efforts are not observed in heaven, and they earnestly inquire why the Lord makes them no returns. It is not because there is any neglect on the part of God. The difficulty is with the people. While professing godliness, they do not bear fruit to the glory of God; their works are not what they should be. They are living in neglect of positive duties. Unless these are performed, God cannot answer their prayers according to His glory.

Ellen G. White, Testimony Treasures, Volume I, 213

The object of the fast which God calls upon us to keep is not to afflict the body for the sin of the soul, but to aid us in perceiving the grievous character of sin, in humbling the heart before God and receiving His pardoning grace. His command to Israel was, “**Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God**”. **Joel 2: 13**.

Ellen G. White, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings, 87

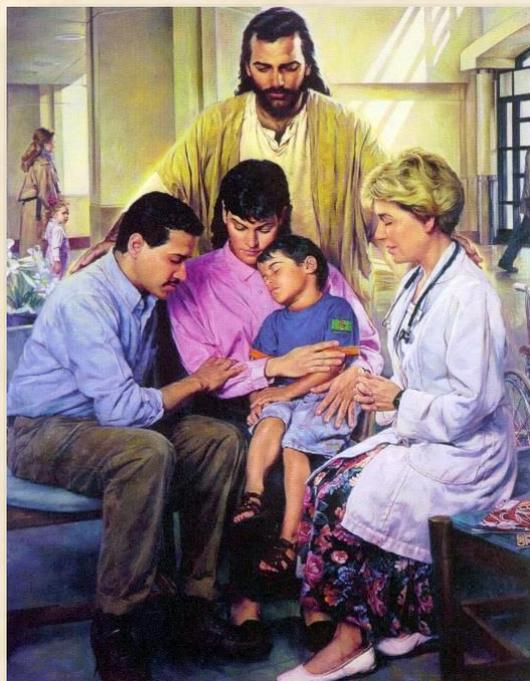
7.3. Prayer for the sick

I have quoted these verses before and would like to extend their application a little to prayer for the sick.

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will cure the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. And if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him.

James 5: 13-15

Here we present the Christian practice of anointing a sick person (note that I am not talking about extreme unction, which is a Catholic concept that deforms this concept somewhat). I have participated several times as an elder and once as a sick person. Note that it is the sick person who takes the initiative to call on the elders. Even if he cannot do it himself because of his health condition, he can ask his relatives to invite the elders to pray for him.



The next thing that catches my attention is that the elders pray for the sick person and anoint him with oil. The oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and is not a magic element, but, once again, a symbol to bless him in the name of God. It is also important to mention that it is a prayer of faith, that is, a prayer in which one trusts that God will answer. Faith, it is understood, must be exercised by all who participate in the prayer.

It is said that this “**prayer of faith will cure the sick**”. I would like you to notice that this word “**will cure**” appears in other versions as “**will save**”, a translation (the first one) which sometimes leads to confusion. People may assume that the anointing will result in the healing of the body, which does not always happen. If this were so, none of the sick would die. The best translation is the second one, and we use because that prayer can save us, it can heal our spiritual side, it can comfort us in moments of trial, it can help us overcome with tranquility and security those trances to which we will all be subject.

But the central part, which I always keep in mind when I perform this rite, is that it is an important opportunity to make an analysis of our spiritual situation. I always invite the sick, and all those who are family or friends, as well as the officiants, to make a prayer for our sins so that we are worthy to intercede, be forgiven, and cleansed so that we can be in harmony with God. I have always been comforted when I have



participated or officiated in these circumstances, and those who were sick have testified with their gratitude, for many times they have been relieved of their burdens or have been comforted in times of great distress.

I must admit that although there have been tears, the joy of making peace with God fills the hearts of the sick, their families... and those of us who participate.

God bless you.