

The Devotional Life - Part 2

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Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.
Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University

Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

Your comments on the first installment of this Bible study on "The Devotional Life," clearly reveal that many of us are struggling to develop and maintain a healthy devotional life. Several of your messages were heartfelt confessions of what you perceive to be a sterile devotional life. While reading your messages I felt that I was serving like a Catholic priest listening to the confessions of his parishioners.

May I reassure those who feel disappointed by their devotional life, that there is no reason to despair. The fact is that there is room for improvement in the quality of the daily devotions of most of us. Recognizing the problem is the first step toward finding a solution. Also we need to remember that God understand, not only our prayers, but also our frustrations over our feeble attempts to communicate with Him.

In the first part of this Bible Study we looked at the biblical basis for our devotional life. We considered especially the Biblical view of prayer as an enjoyable, heartfelt, and intelligent conversation with God as with a loved and respected friend. We discussed also such practical questions as the reasons for praying and the time and place of prayer.

In this second and final part of our study we examine the following three topics:

1. The Devotional Reading of the Bible
2. The Content and Pattern of Prayer
3. Conditions for Answered Prayers

You should find especially helpful the study of Christ's model prayer, which consists of an opening address, three petitions about God, three petitions about our needs, and a closing doxology. This Bible study emphasizes that the goal of our devotional life is not only the consecration of special times and places for the worship of God, but also the consecration to the Lord of all the aspects of our daily life.

REPORT ON THE RECENT TRIP TO KOREA AND JAPAN

From January 15 to 27, 2003, I spent 12 delightful days in South Korea and Japan. Truly I can say that the inspiration and encouragement I received from our Korean and Japanese fellow-believers, far surpassed whatever contribution I was able to make to their fuller understanding of biblical truths.

In both countries our believers face considerable Sabbath problems because of the six days working week. Saturday is a school day and a working day for most people in both South Korea and Japan. Students are expected to attend school on Saturday and most people have to work on that day. This is true even in the military service. This means that some Adventists face considerable problems, especially during their military service.

In South Korea some Adventists young men are in jail at the present time for refusing to work on Saturday. The President himself of our Korean Union, Elder Shin Kei Hoon, told me that he was in jail for three years for refusing to work on Saturday during his military service. I could relate to the problems our believers are facing in these countries, because I experienced similar challenges while growing up in Rome, Italy.

Every five years the Korean Union organizes a Sabbath School Congress which brings together the Sabbath School leaders from all their 900 churches. The goal is to develop new methods to make the Sabbath School a meaningful experience for our members. Our Korean leaders believe that a dynamic Sabbath School program is vital to the spiritual growth of their churches.

This year the congress was held in a very elegant hotel, called Lake Hill, which is located three hours away from Seoul in a panoramic national park. The hotel had a luxurious ballroom which accommodated the 800 plus Sabbath School superintendents attending the congress, each representing a local church.

The reception and response was overwhelming. Each of the eight lectures I delivered had been translated in Korean ahead of time and published in a perfect bound book of 190 pages. A copy of the book was given to each participant. I can honestly say that I have never spoken at a campmeeting or a congress where the attendance and the interest remained constantly high throughout all the meetings.

The last session was scheduled for Sunday morning at 6:00 a.m., that is, three hours before departure time. At that early hour of the morning I expected only few brave souls to show up. What a surprise to see the ballroom filled to capacity at 6:00 a.m.! Can you believe it? It is evident that our Korean believers are most eager to take advantage of every opportunity to deepen their understanding and experience of biblical truths.

On Monday, January 20, I was invited to lecture on the latest Sabbath/Sunday developments to the faculties and students of Sahmyook University Theology Department. Sahmyook has the distinction of being the largest Adventists University in the world. It is also regarded as one of the best universities in South Korea. Because of space limitations at present they can accept only one student out of 5.6 applicants. The current enrolment of college and graduate students is about 6000, of which 80 per cent are non-Adventists. The outreach efforts to non-Adventist students is very successful. Last year they baptized over 900 students.

Of all the Adventist Universities I have visited in North America and overseas, there is no question that Sahmyook surpasses them all, both in enrolment and in the number of modern and very attractive buildings. For example, the swimming pool and other sport facilities are housed in a magnificent glass building that looks like an American corporate headquarter. The campus spreads out over many acres and has three churches to accommodate the various age groups. The auditorium has a seating capacity of 3000 seats. The building program is in full swing, with new dormitories being erected to accommodate the many students who want to attend.

Most of the money for building such an impressive university comes directly from the sacrificial giving of the 170,000 Adventist members living in South Korea. In addition to Sahmyook University, our church operates two colleges, a hospital, and a publishing house. All of these impressive institutions are a monument to the faithfulness of our members.

From South Korea I flew to Tokyo, Japan, where I spoke from January 23 to 26 at the Tokyo Central SDA Church. The meetings were well-attended by both Japanese and foreigners which make up about half of the Central Church membership. The three stories church building, housing the Central SDA Church is filled every Sabbath with Adventists of different nationalities who spend the whole day together. For some of them it takes two hours by train to come to church. Once they reach the church, they are happy to spend the whole Sabbath day together in worship and fellowship.

It came as a pleasant surprise to receive an invitation from a non-Adventist Japanese pastor, Jun Sato, Ph.D., to preach at his Tokyo Ushigome Community Church on Sunday morning, January 26, 2006. Pastor Sato received his theological training first in Japan and then in the United States where he earned a doctorate in theology. About three months ago he called our home from Japan, to order some of my books. My wife informed him of my forthcoming visit to Japan. I airmailed him the books requested, thinking that he was an Adventist pastor.

When Pastor Sato learned that I would be speaking at the Central Tokyo SDA Church, he emailed me an invitation to speak on Sunday morning, January 26, 2003, at his Ushigome congregation in Tokyo. Surprisingly, Pastor Sato attended my first presentation on Wednesday evening, January 22, at the Tokyo Central SDA Church. That evening I shared my PowerPoint testimony entitled "My Search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University." After the meeting Pastor Sato offered to take me back at the hotel. He told me that he had been deeply touched by my testimony. Then he asked me: "What should a Sundaykeeping minister like me do about the Sabbath?"

I told Pastor Sato that the Lord will impressed him about what to do about the Sabbath. On Sunday morning he came to pick me up at the hotel. We reached his church while the first service was still in progress. His father, who is the founder of the church, was preaching. Through the translation I learned that he was talking about Ellen White's contribution to the temperance cause.

It soon became evident that Pastor Sato and his father have a great appreciation for the message and mission of the Adventist church. They surprised me by giving me a Japanese copy of my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE*. I had no idea that the book had been translated and published in Japanese in 1995 by the Protestant Publishing Company.

A good number of Adventists came on Sunday morning to hear my lecture on "The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages" at the Ushigome Community Church. We had a blessed time together. It was a marvelous witnessing opportunity for our church. I commended Pastor Sato for teaching his congregation total abstinence as a biblical imperative—a teaching that is unpopular in Japan where wine and beer are consumed as if they were soft drinks. Pastor Sato ordered not only all my 16 books but also my DVD recordings of my Sabbath lectures which he plans to share with his congregation.

I came home from South Korea and Japan, tired from 10 days of intense lecturing, but grateful to God for the opportunities he granted me to minister to our fellow believers and Christian friends of other faiths. I will fondly remember the warm reception and response received and, if it is God's will, I look forward to go back again for another lecture tour.

HELP FOR THE CURRENT SABBATH SCHOOL

Several subscribers to our newsletter have asked me if I would prepare a Bible study that could help to clarify the subject of “God’s Eternal Covenant” that we are studying in our Sabbath School this quarter. Some members wish to understand more fully how the Sabbath School Lessons relate to so-called “New Covenant Theology” that has caused thousand of Adventists, including over 50 pastors and Bible teachers, to leave the church during the past seven years.

Our Sabbath School Quarterly makes no mention of the problems caused by the “New Covenant Theology,” choosing instead to help our members understand the unity between the Old and New Covenants, the latter being a renewal of the former. Apparently the authors of the lessons decided to avoid controversy by simply affirming our understanding of the unity that exists between the two covenants. The problem with this strategy is that it does not always help our people understand the issues we are facing today.

The New Covenant Theology creates an arbitrary distinction between the Old Covenant which is supposed to be based on a package of laws, and the New Covenant which allegedly rest on principles of love. Such a distinction is arbitrary, because from a biblical perspective law is love. If you are interested in an in-depth analysis of the Old and New Covenants, you may wish to read especially chapters 2 and 3 of my book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*. To a large extend the book represents a response to the New Covenant Theology promoted especially by former Adventist Bible teachers and pastors.

Having just returned from Japan—a secular country with one of the lowest crime rates in the world—I cannot help but wonder: Why is Japan one of the safest countries in the world with practically no murders or stealing? Our Adventist pastor told me that if you forget your brief case, camera, or computer, in a busy subway train, you can be 99% sure to find it later at the Lost and Found department. This is what happened to him few days earlier, when he left his brief case in the train. In America I forgot my \$2000.00 lap top computer in the glove compartment of United Airlines, and one hour later it was gone, never to be found again.

How could Japan be such an honest country when there is NO religion in the government, schools, TV, radio, newspapers. Christianity is practically unknown, accounting for less than 1% of the population. How could such a secular country be so honest when a Christian country like America has one of the highest crime rate in the world?

Could it be that the New Covenant Theology espoused by most evangelical Christians today, is partly responsible for it? By teaching that New Covenant Christians are no longer bound to observe the package of moral laws of the Old Testament, because they live by the Gospel's principles of love, many Christians interpret the freedom of the Gospel as freedom to follow their sinful inclinations. The outcome is that so-called Christian countries enjoy the dubious distinction of having among the highest crime rates in the world.

God willing, in the next newsletter I will attempt to point out some of the major flaws of the New Covenant theology that is having a devastating the Worldwide Church of God and is now finding its way into our Adventist church. I hope that this Bible study will help us to appreciate more fully the relevance of our current Sabbath School Lesson.

NEW BOOK ON *POPULAR HERESIES*

After months of delays caused by pressing demands on my time, finally the research and writings of my new book on *POPULAR HERESIES*, has taken off. Most likely the book will have either 10 chapters for the 10 commandments or 12 chapters for the 12 Apostles or 12 Tribes of Israel. (Please laugh!)

The aim of the book is to examine historically and biblically such popular heresies as Biblical Errancy/Inerrancy, Evolution, Immortality of the Soul, Sunday Sacredness, Immortality of the Soul, Eternal Torment, Rapture, Papal Infallibility, Intercession of the Saints, Once Saved Always Saved, Infant Baptism, Transubstantiation, Moderation in Drinking, Salvation by Faith Alone.

The method I plan to follow is first to briefly trace historically each of these heresies, and then to examine them biblically. In each instance I will endeavor to show the difference between what most Christians believe and what our Adventist church believes. This book should prove to be an effective witnessing tool to help Christian friends understand why some of their popular beliefs are biblically wrong while the Adventist beliefs are biblically sound. Each chapter will be submitted for evaluation to the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.

Currently I am working on the first chapter entitled "Biblical Errancy and Inerrancy." This chapter shows how the authority of the Bible is undermined today, on the one hand by liberal critics who maintain that the Bible is a strictly human, error-ridden book, and on the other hand, by the majority of evangelicals who strongly believe in the inerrancy of the Bible.

The liberal critics reduce the Bible to a human book devoid of supernatural revelations and miraculous manifestations. By contrast, conservative evangelicals elevate the Bible to such a divine level that they overlook the human dimension of Scripture. They affirm that the Bible is verbally inspired and consequently absolutely without error in its original manuscripts.

Ultimately both the errancy and inerrancy positions are heretical beliefs that undermine the authority of the Bible, by making it either too-human or too-divine. By contrast, our Adventist church holds to a balance view of the authority of Scripture. Through her teachings and example, Ellen White has helped our church to understand the process of revelation and inspiration. Her own use of sources and the editing process of her writing, clearly indicate that in most instances the Lord does not dictate to the prophets what they are to write down. Adventists recognize that the *source* is divine, the *writers* are human, and the *writings* contain divine thoughts in human language.

An Appeal for Editorial Help. My plan is to post several chapters as an ENDTIME ISSUE NEWSLETTER. Your constructive criticism about the language and content, will be greatly appreciated. Some subscribers with editorial experience, may wish to help me to make the manuscript sound more English and less Italian. Other subscribers with theological training may wish to alert me about possible conceptual problems. Both types of help will be greatly appreciated.

To facilitate the editing process, I plan to email each complete chapter as a Microsoft Word attachment, to those willing to offer their services to me. We will agree on how to enter the corrections. In a few instances where the editing proves to be very valuable, I will offer some financial compensation. Feel free to contact me if you have the time, the interest, and the skill to edit my manuscript.

A NOTE OF THANKS

Thank you for sharing this newsletter with your friends. As a result of your efforts over 20,000 people are now receiving this newsletter in many parts of the world. Let your friends know that they can receive this newsletter directly FREE OF CHARGE simply by emailing their request to <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net>

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THIS NEWSLETTER

At the end of this newsletter you will find the following important announcements:

- 1) The date and location of my weekend seminars for February 2003
- 2) A special offer on my books, audio cassettes, videos, DVDs, and CD-Roms
- 3) Information on how your church can purchase some of the best LCD VIDEO PROJECTORS, at a substantially reduced price through an Adventist dealer in Dallas, Texas.

THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE - Part 2
Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University

How should we spend the Quiet Time we set aside for communion with the Lord? Two essential elements are the devotional reading of the Bible or of a devotional book and the opening of our hearts to God in prayer.

1. THE DEVOTIONAL READING OF THE BIBLE

It is important to distinguish between the educational and the devotional reading of the Bible. Educationally we study the Bible to learn its content and its teachings, to become acquainted with its history, geography, the people, the events. Our aim is to gain intellectual clarity, to inform our understanding, and to grasp a certain topic. This is what we may call the head knowledge of the Scripture.

The head-study of the Bible benefits also the heart-study, because the two function as an organic unity. We experience knowledge in two senses: first as rational information about God and His revealed will, and second as emotional and spiritual unity with God (John 17:3).

Devotionally we meditate upon the Bible to become better acquainted with our eternal God and Savior revealed in the Bible. We meditate upon a passage of Scripture for much the same reason we listen to a sermon, namely, to let the Word of God speak to the spiritual needs of our soul. This is what we may call the heart knowledge of Christ. "The purpose of the Bible," writes Hans K. LaRondelle, "is not to convey merely moral values, but above all to bring us into contact with its divine Author. The Bible is first of all a disclosure of God Himself and of His love for us. . . . Christ comes to us in the garment of Scripture. To know the Scripture means to know Christ. And to know Christ means to move to the heartbeat of Scripture"¹

Read with Reverence and Expectancy. How are we to read the Bible in order to draw near to God and hear His voice? Let me share few suggestions that I found helpful in my devotional reading. First we need to approach our devotional reading of the Bible with reverence and expectancy.

Bibles have become so readily available in numerous modern translations and at most reasonable prices, that most families have several copies lying around the house. The fact that we can easily "grab" a Bible anytime and from almost any place in the house, it can easily lead us to treat the Bible as an ordinary book. It is important for us to remember that though the Bible is printed in ordinary paper and is available in cheap editions, it is still an extraordinary book that contains God's special message for us. Thus we need to treat the Bible respectfully and approach its reading reverently.

My parents taught me to respect the Bible by never placing books or objects on the top of it. It troubles me when I see a preacher banging his fist on the Bible to make a point during the sermon. We must show respect toward the Bible by treating it politely and by approaching its reading reverentially, because the Bible is the Word of God. The Lord is active through its pages: He reveals to us His character and challenges, encourages, comforts and guides us.

In our devotional reading we can expect wonderful things from Scripture, because we serve a God who is greater than all our human thoughts and concepts of Him. All devout Bible students have experienced the thrill of reading and reflecting on a passage, when a new concept "strikes" them, a concept that seems to "speak" to the very needs of their soul. This is one way in which God speaks to us through His Word.

We need to approach the devotional reading of the Bible with listening ears, eager to hear what God has to say to the needs of our soul. Our attitude should be like that of Samuel in the temple at Shiloh, when he responded to the voice of God, saying: "Speak, for thy servant hears" (1 Sam 3:10). Our attitude should also be like that of David when he prayed: "Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps 119:18).

David had the Scripture before him, but he recognized that there was a problem, not in the Scriptures but in himself, in his own eyes. He was spiritually blind, unable to appreciate the meaning and relevance of God's Word. Thus he prays earnestly for the illumination of the Holy Spirit so that his eyes might see wondrous things out of God's Word.

Read Slowly and Thoughtfully. There is no special virtue in speed-reading through the Bible. Reading the Bible is like mining. One has to dig deep to find hidden treasures. This takes time. We should read the Bible no faster than we can grasp what we read. If we find an attractive word or concept, we can stop to ponder on their meaning and relevance for our lives. This may require looking up other passages where the same word or concept appears, consulting a Bible dictionary or commentary. If we still feel confused or uncertain, then we need pause and pray again for Holy Spirit to reveal to us the meaning of what we are reading.

The length of the passage to be read is determined by how much time we have available. It is better to meditate deeply on few verses than skim superficially over several chapters. Our concern should be to let God speak to the needs of our soul through His Word. If the passage we are reading has a verse that speaks to our spiritual needs, then we can pause to reread that verse several times and meditate upon it. By so doing we allow its message to sink into our consciousness. At the same time we can pray that God through His Spirit may help us to internalize and apply the message of the text to our daily life.

To appreciate the meaning and relevance of a passage it is important to ask all kinds of questions. What principle does the text or story contain? What does it teach me about God, myself, other people? How does it relate to my life today? These reflections and meditation upon a Biblical passage, are not a prayer in themselves since true prayer is a dialogue with God, but they are an important preparation for prayer. In fact, they often provide us with the content for prayer.

Read Progressively through a Selected Book. The Bible is made up not of disconnected texts but of sixty six books, each of which is a complete unit. By reading progressively through a book we can appreciate the message of the whole book as well as of its parts.

For our devotional reading it is advisable to begin with the New Testament, starting with the Gospels. An understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus provides the basis for understanding the rest of the New Testament. The reading of the Old Testament becomes more meaningful in the light of its fulfillment in the New.

We should not hesitate to skip chapters of the Bible which are least suitable for devotional reading. It is difficult to find thoughts for meditation in reading the numbering of the tribes of Israel in Numbers or in reading the geologies of the tribes of Israel in 1 Chronicles. This is not to deny the value of this information in helping us understand the unfolding of redemptive history. But for devotional reading it is better to omit those chapters of the Bible which are not conducive to meditation and prayer.

Seek to Apply what you Read. After we have exercised our minds by studying the meaning and message of the text, we need to exercise our hearts by seeking to apply the message to our daily lives. This we can do by asking ourselves: What is the Lord saying to me through this passage? How does it relate to my own life? What changes I need to make as a result of this reading?

The importance of learning by doing is recognized in education. This principle is also true in our spiritual life. We understand the truths of the Word of God when we live them out in our lives. Jesus said: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17, KJV). It is by being willing to practice the truths that God reveals to us in His Word, that we are able to understand their real meaning. Thus the ultimate goal of our devotional reading is to pray for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to live out in our lives the truths of the Word of God.

As a good sermon tells us what we are and what the Lord wants us to be, so devotional reading instructs our consciences and heightens our desires to live in accordance to God's will. By meditating upon the Word of God a channel is somehow opened between the heart, mind and will. The truth we receive through our minds, enters our hearts and is implemented through our will. First we apprehend spiritual truths, then we long for them and finally we pray and work for their realization in our lives.

Devotional reading, or as often called, meditation upon the Word, prepares us for prayer by making us aware of our spiritual needs and by predisposing us to seek the presence and power of God.

2. THE CONTENT AND PATTERN OF PRAYER

The Content of Prayer. God has spoken to us through the reading of His Word, and we respond to Him through prayer. Our devotional reading may have suggested to us several subjects for prayer. For example, if we have read about the ministry of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:1-11, we may have been impressed by the sense of mission of John the Baptist who believed to be the prophetic voice sent to prepare the way of Christ; by his humility and simplicity of dress and diet; by his forthright preaching, exposing the hypocrisy of church leaders; by his call to repentance and confession of sins.

As a result of this reading we may feel moved by the Holy Spirit to thank God for the inspiring example of John the Baptist; to pray that the Lord may give us the same sense of mission; to ask for the strength to adopt a more simple lifestyle; to seek for the forgiveness and cleansing of our sins. In other words, we are asking God to give us the wisdom and strength that we need to do what he has revealed to us in His Word.

The Events of Coming Day. The content of our prayer may also be suggested by the events of the coming day. If the Bible is our prayer-book, our daily life is our private book to which we add a page with each passing day. At the time of our morning prayer it is well for us to pray for the events we anticipate during the day. Obviously there are always pleasant and unpleasant surprises each day. Thus we need to pray also for wisdom and strength to meet the unforeseen challenges of the day.

Most of us know ahead of time our daily schedule. We may have to meet with certain people, to attend some meetings, to go to some places and to do certain assignments. It is well for us to present our daily schedule before God in prayer, asking Him for wisdom and strength to meet the challenges of the day.

Jesus offers us an example of praying for important events ahead of time. He prayed the night before the calling of His twelve Apostles (Luke 6:12). He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane before the crisis of the Cross (Luke 22:39-46). Jesus met successfully the crisis of the Cross because he prepared Himself for it through prayer. Prayer can make a real difference to our daily life. If we present to God in prayer all the tasks to be done, decisions to be made, people likely to meet on that day, we can move through the day knowing that we are not alone; the Holy Spirit is by our side ready to help us every step of the way.

The Pattern of Prayer. Should prayer be planned or be spontaneous or both? Some believe that prayer should never be planned but be always spontaneous. To them, to plan a prayer means to quench the moving of the Spirit. At the other extreme are those who rely exclusively on fixed prayer both for private and public worship.

When our family fled from Rome, Italy during World War II, we went to stay with devout Catholic relatives who lives 200 miles North of the city. I vividly recall listening to my relatives reciting their Latin prayers in the evening. They did not know what they were praying about because their prayers were in Latin, a language unknown to them. Their concern was to recite as many Pater Noster and Ave Maria as possible, because they sincerely believed that the more prayers they recited the more God would bless them.

The belief that mere repetition of fixed prayers has automatic efficacy is more akin to pagan magic than to Biblical faith. Jesus warns us against mechanical and meaningless recitation of prayers. He said: "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt 6:7-8).

The Scripture suggest that our private and public prayers should reveal order and spontaneity at the same time. In planning our prayers we must leave ample room for the influence of the Holy Spirit. The model prayer Jesus gave to His disciples, suggests some principles that should guide us in planning our prayers.

The Model Prayer. We call Christ's model prayer the "Lord's Prayer," but in reality it should be called the "Disciples' Prayer," because Christ gave it as a pattern to His disciples. The prayer consists of an opening address, three petitions about God, three petitions about our needs, and a closing doxology, as shown by the following diagram:

Address to God:

Our Father who art in heaven

Petitions about God:

1. Hallowed be thy name.
2. Thy kingdom come,
3. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

Petitions about our Needs:

1. Give us this day our daily bread,
2. And forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors;
3. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver from evil.

Doxology

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Several things are worth noting in this model prayer. The prayer opens by addressing God as "Our Father who art in heaven." This immediately establishes our relationship. "Father" reveals the intimacy of our relationship. We are God's children and not his servants. "Heaven" reminds us of His deity. He is above us and not equal to us.

Prayer as Praise. The following three petitions are concerned with God: His name, His kingdom and His will. We pray about His name to show respect for His character and divine nature. We pray about His kingdom to ask that His divine sovereignty may be established on human hearts. We pray about His will to ask that human beings may obey Him in the same way as heavenly beings do. What Jesus teaches us through the first three petitions is that we must place God first in our prayers. We should open our prayers by praising and adoring God for his glorious name and kingdom. It is only when we place God first that we can rightly present to Him our personal needs.

The Bible often exhorts us to praise God for what He has done. "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps 103:1-3). "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him, bless his name" (Ps 100:4).

It is a tremendous blessing to learn to come to God with praise and thanksgiving, even when we are facing trying circumstances. By praising God we acknowledge His ability to deal with our problems. Our prayers should open and close with praise and thankfulness. This is the pattern of the model prayer.

Prayer as Petition. The last three petitions of the model prayer deal with our basic human needs: food, forgiveness and moral strength. We ask for daily food without which we cannot live. We ask for the forgiveness of our sins in proportion to our willingness to forgive others. We ask not to be exposed to temptation, but since it is inevitable, we ask God for moral strength to overcome it. The order suggests that Christ teaches us to bring our basic material and spiritual needs to God in prayer.

Some people feel that we should pray only for our spiritual needs, and not bother God our material needs. Christ's model prayer suggests otherwise. God is concerned about both our material and spiritual needs and wants us to present both of them in prayer to Him. We should not hesitate to pray about all our needs. "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6). If we are in real need for a car to go to work or for money to pay our tuition or unexpected medical expenses, let us not hesitate to pray about them. Unless our needs are clearly contrary to the revealed will of God, we can present them to Him in prayer, knowing that He will answer according to His perfect wisdom, power, and love.

The use of the plural pronoun (Our Father..., give us ..., forgive us ..., deliver us . . .) suggests that we are to present to God in prayer not only our basic needs but also those of the whole community of faith to which we belong. The prayer closes with a doxology acknowledging the power and glory of God. The latter gives us the assurance that God is well able to answer our prayers.

The pattern of the model prayer suggests the right order for prayer: God, ourselves and others. God must come first in our prayers. We adore Him for His holiness and sovereignty and we submit to His will as revealed the Scripture. Our material and spiritual needs come second. God wants us to pray for the basic daily needs of our bodies, but He does not want us to ignore the spiritual needs of our souls.

I suspect that as we grow in our Christian life we spend less time in prayer asking God for material things and more time pleading for the spiritual needs of our souls: forgiveness, victory over temptations, patience, courage to witness, concern for others.

Intercessory Prayer. An important part of our prayers is interceding for others. "Pray for one another," James admonishes us, because "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effect" (James 5:16). The saying "he prays best who loves best" applies especially to intercessory prayer. It was love that compelled Moses to intercede for his idolatrous people: "But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (Ex 32:32, N.I.V.). Moses' love for his people was so great that he was willing to perish with them, rather than live without them. Such a love drove him to intercede for them.

Jesus offers us the perfect example of intercessory prayer. He loved his disciples “to the end” (John 13:1) and he showed His love for them by offering for them that moving intercessory prayer, which is the most complete recorded prayer of Jesus (John 17). The very last prayer that Christ uttered on the Cross was an intercession on behalf of His executioners: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Aaron was commanded to wear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the breastpiece whenever he went into the holy place “to bring them to continual remembrance before the Lord” (Ex 28:29). In the same way we should bring into the presence of God the names of those who are near and dear to us, especially those who are hurting physically, emotionally and spiritually. To ensure that we do not forget anyone who needs our prayers, it might be helpful to make a list of their names. From time to time we can update the list by adding new names and deleting those who no longer have a special need.

Balance in Prayer. The model prayer teaches us that our prayers must be balanced. We hear a lot about the importance of a balanced diet but very little about the importance of balanced prayers. Yet balanced prayers are essential to a healthy spiritual life. To be balanced our prayers should include both praise to God and petition for our material and spiritual needs. If one is omitted, our prayer becomes unbalanced.

Some assume that prayer is only petition: an opportunity to ask God all what they need. Such prayers are self-centered. Others go to the other extreme. They avoid petition in favor of praise and duration. Their concern is to achieve mystical union with God so they praise God for His own sake alone.

Some spend much of their time in prayer dwelling upon their past sins, wondering if God has really forgiven them. They would do better to accept God’s forgiveness and praise His for His forgiving grace. Others are spiritually unhealthy for the opposite reason: they rarely examine their hearts and confess their sins to God in prayer. The model prayer teaches us to be balanced in our prayers, avoiding extremes. This will ensure a healthy relationship with God.

3. CONDITIONS FOR ANSWERED PRAYER

Have you ever been notified by your bank that a check you wrote bounced because of insufficient funds? To make matters worse were you also notified of the penalty that was debited on your account? That is an expensive way to learn that we must meet certain conditions before the bank can cash a check. In the same way God has laid down certain conditions that must be fulfilled before our prayers can be answered.

Pray with the Mind of Jesus. To be effective our prayer must first of all be offered in Christ’s name. “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13). This does not mean that if we tag the name of Christ at the end of each prayer, the answer is guaranteed. “The name” in the Bible stands for the nature and character of the person. Thus to pray in Christ’s name, means to pray in accordance with His character and revealed will for our lives. As Ellen White explains, “To pray in the name of Jesus is something more than a mere mention of that name at the beginning and ending of a prayer. It is to pray in the mind and spirit of Jesus, while we believe His promises, rely upon His grace, and work His works.”²

Before meeting Christ the disciples prayed in the name of God, but after accepting Jesus as their Messiah they prayed in His name. To be able to pray with the mind of Christ, we need to know and follow His revealed character and purpose. Jesus said: “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7).

Christ's "words" abide in us when we accept and live out Christ's teachings in our daily life. This means that to pray with the mind of Christ we must live in accordance to His revealed will and purpose for our lives.

Pray with Faith. A second condition for prevailing prayer is praying with faith. We are to approach God with confidence, knowing that in His wisdom, power and love He will give us what is best for us. "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). James emphasizes the same condition, saying: "Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:6-8).

Faith is an important condition of effective prayer because it shows that our prayer springs out of love and not merely out of need, want or fear. We pray to God not because we are desperate, but because we love and trust Him. Our prayer should be driven not by need but by love and faith. When we pray with faith we are confident that God will answer our prayer even when we do not receive what we asked. "Our heavenly Father in love answers our prayers by giving us that which will be for our highest good--that we ourselves would desire if with wisdom divinely enlightened we could see all things as they really are."³

Pray with Perseverance. A third condition of effective prayer is praying with perseverance. The prayer of faith is a persevering prayer. A striking illustration of this prayer is found in Christ's parable of the widow who bothered a judge until he finally vindicated her. "For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming. . . . And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily'" (Luke 18:4-8).

For some this kind of prayer is an affront to human dignity. Yet God cannot answer our prayers until we give up our prideful dignity and self-will. In the Scripture we find numerous examples of persevering prayer. David prayed and fasted all night for the healing of his son (2 Sam 12:15-23). Daniel sought the Lord on behalf of his people "by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" (Dan (9:3). Ezra interceded for the people with fasting and weeping (Ezra 10:1-15).

Perseverance in prayer is the hallmark of real communication with God. If we lose the habit of persevering in prayer and the hope of prevailing with God, then our prayers become a mere friendly talk with God, which, though valuable, lacks the intensity of real prayer.

Pray with your Whole Being. A fourth condition of effective prayer, closely related to perseverance, is praying with our whole being. Most of us have experienced the embarrassment of offering grace twice before a meal, because we were absent-minded the first time. Effective prayer must engage our total being. Jesus expressed what our total response to God should be by saying: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

The words heart, soul, mind and strength are not meant to refer to different components of our personality, but rather to the totality of our being. In Biblical thought human nature is wholistic, not dualistic or pluralistic. In today's words Jesus is saying: You shall love the Lord your God lock, stock and barrel. Every part of our being must be involved in serving and worshipping God. And this is true of our devotional life.

Praying with our whole being means to be mentally, emotionally and physically involved. Mentally we must think about the meaning of what we are saying. We must avoid meaningless clichés. We must say what we mean and mean what we say. We must give some thought to the content of our prayer before praying, by considering what are we going to pray about.

Emotionally we pray with our feelings. Some people will go crazy over a game, and be dead when praying to God. True love is not cold but warm. Nobody would be excited by being the object of an emotionless and controlled love. Emotionless love is good stoicism but not good Christianity. Effective prayer has emotional warmth and fervor. These give color and depth to our relationship with God.

Physically we pray with our bodies, by assuming a reverential posture. The Bible does not prescribe one particular position for prayer. Bowing down and kneeling are the most common postures, because they best express our submission and reverence to God. "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!" (Ps 95:6). Jesus "knelt down" upon the earth when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:41) and He "lifted up his eyes to heaven" when He prayer the intercessory prayer on behalf of his disciples (John 17:1). The early Christians prayed "lifting up holy hands" (1 Tim 2:8). Most Christians find it helpful to fold their hands for prayer. To kneel, to stand, to close our eyes, to fold our hands--these are some of the ways in which we pray to God through our body.

Make Wrongs Right Before Praying. A fifth condition of effective pray is making wrongs right before praying. God will not hear the prayers of those who are unjust and unfaithful toward others. Malachi tells us that the Jews were lamenting the fact God had no regard for their sacrifices and offerings in spite of their "weeping and groaning" (Mal 2:13). The reason given by the prophet is startling: "Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and wife by covenant" (Mal 2:14).

To pray to God while being unfaithful to our marital partner is totally useless because God will not listen to hypocritical prayers. Our faithfulness and loyalty to God is best revealed by how faithful and loyal we are toward our immediate family members. It is important for us to remember that our vertical relationship with God is conditioned by our horizontal relationship with fellow-beings.

Jesus emphasized the need to make wrongs right before God can answer our prayers. "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt 5:23-24). It is impossible to pray after a quarrel with someone. On the other hand, it is easy to pray when we have encouraged, helped or made peace with someone.

Conclusion. In this Bible study we have seen that the devotional life of prayer and meditation upon the Word of God, is essential to maintain a dynamic and vibrant Christian lifestyle. But our devotional life to be fruitful must combine prayer with service, worship with work.

There are Christians who spend much time in prayer and meditation and little time in showing their devotion to Christ through practical service to fellow-beings. On the other hand, there are other Christians who spend much time in serving others and little time to worship God through prayer and meditation. To pray without serving is as ineffective as to serve without praying. In the Christian life prayer must result in service and service must draw its inspiration from prayer. The contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*) must inspire the active life (*vita activa*) and the active life must be inspired by the contemplative life.

Our devotional life should inspire our whole Christian lifestyle: our outward appearance, our marital relationships, our forms of entertainments, our dietary practices, our sexual habits, the stewardship of our time and resources, our attitude toward society, the state and the environment. We show our devotion to the Lord not only through our private devotional exercises, but also through our conduct: the way we dress, we eat, we drink, we work, we play, we relate to our family members and to society. The goal of our devotional life is not only the consecration of special times and places for the worship of God, but also the consecration of all the aspects of our daily life. To some of these we shall now turn our attention in the subsequent chapters.

ENDNOTES

1. Hans K. LaRondelle, "The Devotional Use of the Bible," *Ministry* (February:1981), p. 14.
2. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, (Boise, Idaho: 1990), p. 100
3. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of February 2003. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars.

FEBRUARY 7-8: OGDEN SDA CHURCH, UTAH

Location: 22nd Street and Taylor Avenue, Ogden, UT 84401

For information call Pastor Kevin James at (801) 621-6669 or (801) 388-3131

FEBRUARY 14-15: SDA CHURCH IN ROME, ITALY

Location: Via delle Gondole 35, Ostia-Roma

For information call Pastor Pino Castro at (39) 06 5674055

FEBRUARY 21-22: FOREST GROVE SDA CHURCH, OREGON

Location: 4021 19th Avenue, Forest Grove, OR 97116

For information call Pastor Eloy Wade at (503)582-8734 or Pastor Samuel Nunez at (503) 640-2529

FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 1: MT. OLIVET SDA CHURCH, NEW JERSEY

Location: 800 Chelton Avenue, Camden, New Jersey 08104

For information call Pastor Frank Legette at (856) 374-8557 or ((609) 968-3148

MARCH 7-8: JUNIPER AVENUE SDA CHURCH, CALIFORNIA

Location: 7347 Juniper Avenue, Fontana, CA 92336

For information call Pastor Martin Howard at (909) 864-2151

MARCH 14-15: LEXINGTON SDA CHURCH, KENTUCKY

Location: 968 Lane Allen Road, Lexington, KY 40504

For information call David Parker at (502) 223-8020

SPECIAL OFFER ON THE NEWLY RECORDED SABBATH SEMINAR

To make it possible for Adventist churches in different parts of the world to benefit from my popular SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR, few months ago the TEXAS MEDIA CENTER made a fresh recording of the seminar I presented at the First Fort Worth SDA Church in Texas. We spent several days preparing this new recording where I use about 100 PowerPoint slides for each presentation. The response has been very gratifying. Church leaders in different parts of the world are expressing appreciation for the blessings of these timely Sabbath messages. Your personal effort to share them with your congregation is much appreciated.

The new SABBATH SEMINAR consists of a total of 8 one-hour lectures covering the following topics: the gripping story of my search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University in Rome; the discoveries I made in Vatican libraries on how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity; practical principles on how to keep the Sabbath to experience Christ's rest and peace in our lives; an update report on the most recent Sabbath/Sunday developments; and a sacred concert with two outstanding tenors entitled THE SABBATH IN SONGS. The concert was recorded in a television studio in South Bend, Indiana.

This new SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR is now available in THREE FORMATS:

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- 4 VIDEO tapes,
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3) SABBATH SEMINAR IN DVD DISKS at the special offer of only \$60.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$120.00. The DVD disks are compatible with all TV systems overseas. No conversion is necessary. The 3 DVD disks come in a nice triple Jewel case with an artistically designed color jacket.

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IS YOUR CHURCH LOOKING FOR A GOOD VIDEO PROJECTOR AT A SPECIAL PRICE?

If your church is looking for a good LCD video projection at a reasonable price, I would be glad to put you in contact with an Adventist dealer in Texas, who is able to offer your church several models of HITACHI video projectors at about half the price suggested by the factory.

I bought the HITACHI CP-S 370 with 2200 lumens myself, after I discovered that it outperformed my new IN-FOCUS 2200 lumens projector, which I had purchased few months earlier. I made this discovery in Gentry, Arkansas, where I was invited to speak. Tim Rosenberg, the church pastor, showed me the HITACHI projector that their church had just bought. In fact they bought four of them, for the youth, elementary school, and academy. We set up both projectors with the same lumens side by side and to my surprise I found that the HITACHI provided a much brighter and sharper picture. Pastor Tim Rosenberg placed me in contact with the Adventist dealer in Texas who buys these projectors directly from HITACHI for our churches.

If your church is planning to buy a video projector, I would be glad to place you in contact with our Texan brother. Just email to me your name and phone number and I will pass it on to him. He will contact you directly and you can made all the necessary arrangements with him.

During this past year I have tried a dozen of video projectors in the various churches I visited. None of them performed as well as the HITACHI CP-S 370, though in some instances they had 3000 or more lumens. It is gratifying for me to know that now I can travel around the world with a light video projector (less than 6 pounds) that performs exceptionally well even in large auditoriums.

Contact Information

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.
Retired Professor of Theology and Church History
Andrews University
4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

Phone (616) 471-2915 Fax (616) 471-4013
E-mail: sbacchiocchi@qtm.net or sbacchiocchi@csi.com
Web site: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>