

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Holy Spirit and Spirituality
Lesson 10. The Holy Spirit, the Word, and Prayer

It is good to read the Bible, pray, and witness, but doing these things as works is not the way to retain salvation. If it is true that God takes the initiative in our salvation, it is equally true that He *maintains* that initiative.

Once you begin the Christian life, the Lord does not back off like a car salesman when you have bought your car, leaving you to struggle thereafter on your own. The Good Shepherd still takes the initiative in looking for His lost sheep. He still keeps knocking at the door of the heart. And “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). Never are we to think that our divine Friend becomes indifferent toward us.

How did Jesus in His humanity maintain his closeness to His Father? He was human; He had only 24 hours a day as we have; He was busy as we are, and He needed sleep as we do. He gives us a surprising insight into His devotional life: *the Father maintained the initiative*. Speaking of His prayer and Bible-study life, Jesus says in the prophecy:

The Lord God hath given me
The tongue of the learned,
That I should know how to speak
A word in season to him that is weary:
He wakeneth morning by morning,
He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.
(Isaiah 50:4).

The Lord promises nourishing food to all who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6). You are never satisfied with what you learned yesterday, any more than you are satisfied with the food you ate yesterday.

We don’t eat our daily food because the Bible tells us to, or even because Ellen White tells us to; we eat because we are hungry. A starving but hungry refugee in Syria is better off than a millionaire who is so sick that he has no appetite.

The Bible reveals a loving heavenly Father and Saviour and Holy Spirit eager to maintain connection with us. He continually invites us to come to “breakfast,” but of course if we are not hungry, we won’t go.

How can I get this hunger and thirst? This is what the Lord gives to those who hear and believe the good news. They want more, just as when you taste something delicious,

you want more. They don't have to set their alarm clocks to wake up in time, or force themselves to read and pray as a "work."

We can make a devotional life into a works-program. Charles Wesley was right when he wrote his hymn, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," even though the Church of England's theologians of the day were outraged at the idea, the Lord is the divine Lover of your soul; He is seeking you, actually wooing you.

Oh, how often we have been "rebellious," and turned away from His knocking at our door in the mornings! Sometimes it is because we have deprived ourselves of proper rest and made ourselves deaf to His appeals.

To awaken in our souls that hunger and thirst is the purpose of the 1888 message of Christ's righteousness. The gospel is the bread of life; and once you taste it, you will ever after want to "eat" without being forced to do so. What joy to always to be hungry and thirsty for more. The world's amusements, sports, vain pursuits, addictive shopping, all lose their appeal when you "taste" the gospel for what it is. Many are now testifying that that hunger has been aroused in their souls by hearing or reading the 1888 message truths.

If you get sick with the flu, don't you take a day off from school or work in order to stay in bed and recuperate? Why not take a day off for fasting and prayer? Not seeking the Lord as though He were trying to hide from you, but taking the time to listen to Him as *He seeks you*.

That's what Isaiah means when he says, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while *He is near*" (Isa. 55:6). He is not hiding from you—He is "near."

It helps because it takes away your personal guilt, your fear, your own alienation and anger. It gives you "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1), not necessarily peace with your children (right now), but that first step is most important you have peace with God.

When you have that peace with God, a heavy weight is lifted from your heart. It is impossible for us as parents to be impatient with our children if our fear and guilt are gone. The message takes away that fear and guilt in a way that Adventists have not understood very well for several reasons: It presents God in a different light—He is not watching to find something wrong with you that could keep Him from answering your prayers; He is trying to find a way to answer them. "The goodness of God" is already leading us to repentance, including your children (Rom. 2:4).

Our job is to believe that His goodness is active and to get out of His way, so He can lead us (and our children) to repentance without our hindering Him. He is a Good Shepherd who has taken the initiative and still takes it, seeking His lost sheep. He is not waiting for us to find our way to Him. It's not our job to initiate a "relationship" with Him, for He has already initiated that relationship with us. Our job is to believe it. Then the weight of alienation on your heart is lifted!

Christ has already died your second death (Heb. 2:9), already borne the punishment for your rebellion and selfishness. Your sins have already been laid on Him (Isa. 53:6), He has already elected you to eternal life “in Christ.” It’s your guilt that weighs you down and forces you to be angry, impatient, negative. When your heart-burden is lifted, E. J. Waggoner says, “We often use the figure, ‘as free as a bird,’ and that exactly expresses the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free. Is it not a glorious thing? What a sense of freedom thrills the soul at the very thought of it!” [1]

The “condemnation in Adam” has already been lifted, for Christ has legally justified you by His sacrifice (Rom. 5:12-18). The result is that your joy is that of someone sentenced to death who has been acquitted, someone facing death who is raised to new life again—“alive from the dead” (Rom. 6:13). Your children will see and feel and touch for themselves this miracle of grace. Your hunger and thirst after righteousness are aroused and you find yourself in love with the Word of God, joyously obeying Him.

And it’s not only what happened 2000 years ago—the Holy Spirit is your constant Companion, to “abide with you forever” (John 14:16). Better than a husband. You do not earn His presence by being good, for He is also a gift of grace. He speaks to you, but you may have been too deaf to hear Him, but He speaks “a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk ye in it’” (Isa. 30:21). Listen, and you can obey!

—Paul E. Penno

Endnote:

[1] Ellet J. Waggoner, “As Free as a Bird,” *The Present Truth*, Jan. 10, 1894.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

https://youtu.be/HQ80_qdE4Bc

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