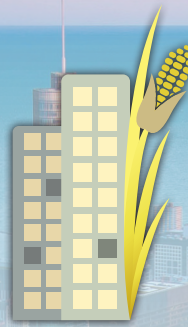




ILLINOIS Focus



Ron Aguilera, President

WHAT IS PRAYER?



What is prayer? This is a question I used to get from high school students when I was a teacher at Forest Lake Academy many years ago. When I became a pastor, I realized this question still lay unanswered in many adult minds. What is prayer? Simply, prayer is instant access to God. For many, this is hard to believe. How can we have such access to God when we can't even get consistent, or instant, access to anyone else on the planet? Have you noticed how hard it is to get a person on the line when you are calling a business? Even with today's technology, and as helpful as our smartphones are, we still have to deal with glitches when Wi-Fi fails, cell phone signals dropping, or the phone stops working for no apparent reason. But prayer never fails. No matter where we are, or what we're doing, we always have immediate and unfailing access to God.

I would also say prayer is communication with God, either in thought, or in spoken or written words. Just as our relationships with friends and family grow and deepen as we spend time with them, time interacting with God praying and listening deepens our relationship with Him. Not only does prayer give us direct access to God's listening ear, but prayer is also a way to express our love, confess our sins, bring our requests to Him, and is an opportunity to share our heart with Him.

Prayer is also a time for hearing from God. As we pray, the Holy Spirit guides us in decisions, comforts our sorrows, and pours His love on us. But we must seek Him, and we must listen. Many times, we pray (talk), but when we are done talking, we don't pause to listen for God's prompting. Remember, God loves and accepts us unconditionally, so we never have to fear reaching out to Him in prayer.

people who followed Jesus while He was living on earth, we can learn from His reliance on prayer. Jesus' followers saw how He needed time alone to talk with God, to rest, to receive direction from God, to find peace after conflict, and to be loved and encouraged as only God can love and encourage us.

One simple way to remember the basics of prayer is found in Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will

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ISSUE FOCUS

DISCIPLESHIP & PRAYER

I remember the first time someone asked me, "If God already knows everything, why do I need to pray?" Prayer is key to the depth and health of our relationship with God. In Luke 11:1, Jesus' followers said, "Lord, teach us to pray..." Jesus responded with a model for them (and for us) to follow. That model shows not only the basics of praying but also the necessity of praying.

Jesus wants us to pray because He wants us to know God intimately. He commanded and modeled prayer repeatedly as He traveled and taught His followers how to know and communicate with God. Just like the

be opened to you." Yes, God already knows everything about us, including our wants and needs. But prayer lets us participate in God's blessings and provision for us. As we ask for God's help, seek His guidance, and knock on the doors He provides, God's responses draw us closer and involve us in His powerful work.

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In the New Testament, a story is told that grips our attention. In this story, the disciples ask Jesus to assist them with an urgent need. They said, "Lord teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Today, many of us have that same need. We need to ask Jesus to teach us to pray.

As a starting point, I want to share with you what I have found to be a simple but effective way to pray. I call it, "Prayer is My Response." Prayer is simply my response to the character of God. As I get to know the God of Acts 17:27, I will naturally respond to Him and this response is defined as prayer.

Following my response in prayer, praise finds its proper place. Praise is my response to the person, presence, position, power, greatness, majesty and love of God. The Bible reminds us "great is the Lord and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable" (Psalm 145:3).

...MY RESPONSE TO THE CHARACTER OF GOD...

Prayer and Praise permit us to consider another key element in my response to prayer, thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is my response to the goodness and graciousness of God. Again, the Bible invites us to consider these words, "what shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me." To Thee I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving (Psalm 116:12, 17a).

Prayer, Praise, and Thanksgiving are vital but I must also be willing to confess my faults, failings, rebellion and sin. Confession is my response to the holiness of God. God's Word says, "be gracious to me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness, according to the greatness of Thy compassion, blot out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1). The Bible also says, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that ye may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Prayer is intercession, and Intercession is my response to the love of God for all people, especially those in the household of faith. We are encouraged also by the Psalmists who wrote, "so save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance, be their shepherd also, and carry them



Prayer is my RESPONSE

Pastor Ralph Shelton

forever" (Psalm 28:9). The letter to the Colossians also serves as a reminder to us where the apostle writes, "Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondsman of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

In closing, what would our prayers look and sound like if we did not make our petitions known to God. Petition is my response to the power and wisdom of God who is our heavenly Father. I ask specifically and He answers my specific petition. One of the Gospel writers encourages our hearts with these words, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who seek Him" (Matthew 7:11).

Prayer is powerful and effective and as we kneel in prayer or simply bow our heads, we must remember that our response to God in prayer also opens God's heart to hear our praise, thanksgiving, and confession even as we respond to God's love through daily intercession. May your response to God always lead you not only to pray for yourself but also to intercede for others.

A Prayer for Others:

THE DISCIPLES PRAYER


 Pete Braman,
 Ministerial Director

As Samuel is challenging Israel's longing for a King to guide them and reminds them that God alone is their King, he makes a gripping statement: "moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). Samuel embraced the idea that it was sinful not to pray for God's people, even when they wandered from God's plan. A disciple's life must be centered around praying for others.

In Paul's thirteen letters in the New Testament, his recorded prayers are pivotal in his instruction and encouragement to each church. He inspired the Ephesians that they "may have the hope" in their calling (Ephesians 1:18). He reminded the Philippians that God will continue the "good work" of transformation He began in them (Philippians 1:6). He prayed that the Colossians would be filled with knowledge of God's will (Colossians 1:9). The Colossians were a group of believers he had never met. To the Church at Rome, he prayed for many by name (Romans 16). Many of Paul's prayers were "follow-ups" to previous prayers. In essence, Paul is inquiring about how God is working in their lives and their church. Just as discipleship is a continued

journey, Paul's example encourages us to check on those we are praying for as a point of building deeper relationships. Seeing how God moves through the power of prayer is also vital to our own faith development.

A disciple's prayer should not only be encouraging, but evangelistic in nature. We are called to pray to the "Lord of the harvest" that He will "send forth laborers" (Matthew 9:38). Those who are closer to God should pray on behalf of those who are distant from God. Jesus even prayed for those who opposed Him. At the cross, He prayed for those who participated in His crucifixion by saying "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). That prayer touched the heart of a repentant thief who experienced salvation that day.

The prayer for the harvest was realized when a small group of disciples gathered in an upper room. A disciple's prayer is also needed in a corporate sense. The Acts 2 model reminds us of our need to pray together as the body. This same body prayed for the Holy Spirit to help them reach souls yet to embrace the gospel. I believe we should have our own prayer list of family, friends, co-workers, and others who need to know Jesus as their Savior.

Most of us have likely heard the term "prayer warrior." Paul challenges us to "fight the good fight" (1 Timothy 6:12), "be a soldier of Christ" (2 Timothy 2:4), and "put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11,13). These images portray the battle of good and evil we all live in each day. To become effective prayer warriors for others, we need to see Jesus as the Source of our victory. The armor described in Ephesians 6 is not our armor, but God's alone. The armor represents His salvation, His Righteousness, His truth, His gospel, His Word, and His faith.

Beyond the description of God's armor is the most vital battle strategy to "pray always....in supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18). It was the custom before a battle for soldiers to pray to their gods for protection and victory. As God's soldiers we are called to pray in support of one another as we unite with our victorious, risen Savior.



REDEEMING

the Pandemic

Pastor Andres Flores

Any crisis has the potential of disrupting the things that matter the most. When the pandemic started it certainly had the potential of disrupting people's relationship with God, with one another and with their mission as disciple-makers. However, we must remember that with every crisis God always provides opportunities. We could say that crises are opportunities in disguise. We experience a crisis turned into an opportunity at Epic Church and our discipleship ministry. This crisis brought a sense of isolation, anxiety, and spiritual thirst. Such was the case of our friend April who throughout the pandemic felt a deeper need of transformation, community, and knowledge of God. Ellen G. White's words resonate truer than ever:

"The Savior mingled with people as one who desired their good. He showed sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He invited them, 'Follow Me.'" (MHH 73.4)

April desired to find healing, friendship, and transformation but didn't know where to start during such a difficult time. The good news is that Sherry, April's sister, a leader at Epic Church Suburbs reached out to her asking her how she could support her during the pandemic. April opened her heart and expressed that

she needed guidance to re-ignite her relationship with Christ, be anointed for healing, and get back into a wellness plan. Sherry and Hector (Sherry's husband) invited me to anoint and pray for April. During the bible study that preceded the anointing ceremony, April felt impressed to start a journey of knowing Jesus intimately and eventually give her life to Christ through baptism. She expressed her interest to both Sherry and Hector, and both started a 14-month long process of bible study and discipleship that continues to this day.

Let's pause our story here for a moment to remember what discipleship is. Jesus said in Matthew 4:19 "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Discipleship is the life of those who 1) follow Jesus, 2) are transformed as they follow Jesus, and 3) are on the same disciple-making mission of Jesus. Discipleship is the life of the one who understand that following Jesus is worth leaving everything behind because they understand that Christ is the "Desired of Ages." They understand that because of Christ's sacrifice, our sins are forgiven, and because of his soon return, we have a hope that can't be deconstructed by pain and suffering. Crisis can't interrupt discipleship; they only amplify the transformative power of God. When God calls us to

follow Him, this calling transforms us, our churches, and our organizations.

Back to our story, Sherry and Hector started a transformative relationship with April. They prayed with her, showed her how the Gospel transforms our lives through each doctrine, and provided friendship and support during the difficult times throughout the pandemic. The great news is that back in May, April expressed her interest in being baptized at Epic Church!



This past July, April accepted Jesus as her personal Savior and became a member of our church by God's grace! Guess what? Sherry and Hector didn't stop the moment April was baptized. They continue to study the bible, relating to her, spending time together and supporting her. Why would they do that? Because discipleship is not an event; it is a way of life. April continues to attend Epic Church and, by God's grace, is influencing her family with the love and knowledge of Jesus. God specializes in redeeming our uncertainties and transforming our crises. He invites you today to give Him your biggest challenge; He will turn it into an opportunity. He never disappoints!

Discipleship is not an event; it is a way of life.

Pastor Nelson Salazar



EL DELEITE DE ORAR

¿Te has preguntado si la oración es para ti un deleite? Hay un corto versículo en la Biblia, pero con mucha esencia, que dice: “Orad sin cesar” (1 Tes. 5:17, RVR1960). Se nos da como un imperativo para nuestras vidas cotidianas y nos describe la necesidad de hablar con Dios de manera permanente, constante y continua. “Las Escrituras nos aconsejan “orad sin cesar”. Esto no significa que hemos de pasar todo el día de rodillas en oración formal. Sí significa que debemos vivir y servir a nuestro Señor en la atmósfera de la oración”. (Elena G. White, La Oración, p. 1). También comenta que: “Orad sin cesar”; esto es, mantened la mente elevada a Dios, la fuente de todo poder y eficiencia. (Elena G. White, Testimonios para los Ministros, p. 520).

“Orad sin cesar”, Dios la presenta como una de las grandes carencias espirituales del ser humano y una delicia para los ángeles. “¡Qué extraño que oremos tan poco! Dios está pronto y dispuesto a oír la oración sincera del más humilde de sus hijos y, sin embargo, hay de nuestra parte mucha cavilación para presentar nuestras necesidades delante de Dios. ¿Qué pueden pensar los ángeles del cielo de los pobres y desvalidos seres humanos, que están sujetos a la tentación, cuando Él gran Dios lleno de infinito amor se compadece de ellos y está pronto para darles más de lo que pueden pedir o pensar y que, sin embargo, oran tan poco y tienen tan poca fe? Los ángeles se deleitan en postrarse delante de Dios, se deleitan en estar cerca de Él. Es su mayor delicia estar en comunión

con Dios. (Elena G. White, El Camino a Cristo, 93, 94). Los ángeles se deleitan al hablar con Dios, ¿y nosotros?

Si observamos lo que sucede en el hogar, nos daríamos cuenta de que hay continuas quejas dentro de las relaciones familiares de las que poco se habla. Estamos en casa, pero distantes, solo se habla lo básico, y no hay tiempo para dialogar. Esa falta de diálogo afecta las conexiones y relaciones dentro de la familia. Para que haya una buena relación debe haber una buena conexión; y el diálogo es el punto donde inicia la conexión para desarrollar y establecer relaciones deleitosas. Es importante entender que podemos ser expertos en las teorías de la comunicación, pero pobres en la práctica. Buenos para hablar de conceptos, pero

hora de tener una vida de oración permanente fue la mencionada por Él señor Jesús: “Velad y orad, para que no entréis en tentación; el espíritu a la verdad está dispuesto, pero la carne es débil” (Mat. 26:41, RVR1960).

Jesús les había expresado la necesidad de orar sin cesar, pero ellos se durmieron. Esto pasó en la vida de los discípulos de Jesús y puede estar pasando con nosotros. Las múltiples ocupaciones y agites de la vida nos pueden estar desconectando de Dios a tal punto que nuestra relación con Él esté interrumpida, sin poder, sin motivación, sin deseos de servirle o de seguirle, sin que la oración sea una delicia.

La inspiradora historia de Daniel al orar tres veces al día (Dan. 6:10, RVR 1960) nos hace pensar en su deleite al orar sin cesar; y pese a las

HOY MÁS QUE NUNCA SE DEBE ORAR SIN CESAR

no para practicarlos. De la misma manera, ricos en conocimiento acerca de la oración, pero pobres a la hora de tener una vida de oración. Dios no desea la teoría de la oración, ni que seamos expertos en hablar de la oración. Por el contrario, Él desea la vivencia y la práctica continua de la oración; que se experimente como una delicia orar en todo momento. Una de las grandes dificultades a la

prohibiciones del momento, no dejó de hacerlo. Se deleitaba en hablar con Dios, en estar conectado para mantener una relación viva y significativa con su Señor. La oración constante era, sin duda, una delicia en la vida de este personaje.

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Prayer is a magnificent gift from our loving Father and an instant way into His presence, love, and help. I invite you to choose to spend time in prayer, talking and listening. He is waiting.

- Ron Aguilera, Illinois Conference President

CONTINUACIÓN DE LA PÁGINA 5

Cuando algo es una delicia para ti, las dificultades no impedirán que lo sigas haciendo. Hoy más que nunca se debe orar sin cesar. "Nuestro Padre celestial está esperando derramar sobre nosotros la plenitud de sus bendiciones. Es privilegio nuestro beber abundantemente de la fuente de amor infinito." (Elena G. White, El Camino a Cristo, p. 93)

Que la oración sea una delicia de ahora en adelante, para que puedas orar sin cesar.

- Pastor Nelson Salazar

MEET OUR NEW EMPLOYEES

PASTOR NESTOR SORIANO

Senior Pastor at Hinsdale Fil-Am Church



"It is surreal to be back home.

I was born and raised in the north side of Chicago. I'm a product of the North Shore church and school community. It has been 11 years since I have had an Illinois address. I count it a privilege to be back in the Chicagoland area to serve at the Hinsdale Fil-Am SDA Church. I am happily married to Katherine and we have two beautiful daughters: Eliana, age four, and Emily, age one. After much consideration and prayer, our family sensed God's leading and decided to move from Colorado to Illinois. We're also excited to be close to family and reconnect with old friends.

I earned a Bachelor's Degree in Religion in 2007 and Master of Divinity Degree in 2013 from Andrews University. I'm currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree in Christian Apologetics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary because I'm passionate about answering the question: 'How can the church effectively adapt the Gospel to reach nonbelievers in cities?' By God's grace, my hope is to make a contribution in urban/secular missions."

JERRY PINE

Illinois Conference School Psychologist



“I was born and raised just north of Kansas City, Missouri, so I’m a Midwesterner at heart. I like to say I live in California, but I’m from Missouri.

Currently, I am the School Psychologist for the Illinois Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which is a very unique position for me. Through Zoom and other technologies, I will be delivering counseling services to all Illinois Conference church schools and academies, as well as support services to the teachers and staff, all the while living in California.

Here, my wonderful wife of 33 years is the Chair of La Sierra University’s school counseling and psychology program.”

VICKIE MARTIN

Teacher at Downers Grove Elementary School

“I knew at an early age God wanted me to be a teacher. God has placed in my life so many wonderful educators, and so, so, many beautiful students. I have been truly blessed and I would not change any part of my career.

There are those that have been given the tools they need to succeed, and those that may need a little extra encouragement, help, and motivation to succeed; I count that as part of my mission. If that isn’t enough, I have had the rewarding joys of sharing Jesus with these students. I can share my real life experiences with them, understanding together that a life truly filled with Christ isn’t always perfect; that Satan uses his wiles against all of us, but we can walk together and join in the joy of God’s salvation.

I have five grown children– my world, of course. Given to me by my indescribable, wonderful, late husband. I miss him terribly, but he lives on through the men and woman he raised. Out of those beautiful children, we have ten grandchildren, and one newby on the way. Their ages range from two to 24– my life is full!

I am thankful for the opportunity to serve as a teacher in this conference!”



Prayer REQUEST

Would you like us to join you in prayer about a specific concern?
Share it on the Illinois Conference website

_____ we want to stand with you _____



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