

Youth Week of Prayer



March
20-27
2021


March 20
Global Youth Day


March 27
Homecoming Sabbath




| Adventist Youth Ministries

REACHING
OUT

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Title: I will Go

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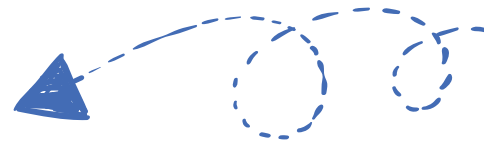


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The writer is originally from the Dominican Republic. He holds a master's degree in Leadership and Theology, as well as a doctorate from Andrews University. He has worked as a pastor, evangelist, and currently serves as director of the Hispanic ministries in New York City. He is the writer of the book *Living Without Fear*,

missionary book of 2021; as well as the book *Preaching the Word*, which teaches how to prepare and preach sermons. He is happily married to Mariel Ferreira and is the father of two children: Ernesto and Elizabeth Ferreira.



E D I T O R I A L

The main purpose of this week of prayer is to encourage you to be faithful to the Lord and the teachings of the Word, which call you to be present in the lives of others by blessing them.

I did ask myself about “why should I go?” And the Lord impressed me with some answers to the reasons why I should go:

Why should I go, Lord?

Because I’m blessed since you came to me first.

Why should I love, Lord?

Because I’m loved since you loved me first.

Why should I give, Lord?

Because it was you who gave it all to me first at the cross.

Why should I be faithful, Lord?


Because you showed me faithfulness first.

Why should I forgive, Lord?

Because I was forgiven for all my sins and trespasses by you first.

Why should I give it all, Lord?

Because I received all that I have from you first.



We are always going to be in debt with the God of Heaven. The one thing we can do is to give everything to Him and then say “I will go”.

I am encouraged to do the same with you, and that is to encourage you to be obedient to the Lord, living out the gospel and being a spiritual blessing to others in GOING through your community and making disciples. MATTHEW 28:18-20.



Andrés J. Peralta

Associate Youth Director
General Conference




EDITORIAL



Read this first

1. Start Your Planning Now. Start your planning, develop your target, get your team together, and make sure your pastor is a part of that team.

2. Global Youth Day Information. Get information on the Global Youth Day project. This day will be the launch of the Youth Week of Prayer. Please visit our website, youth.adventist.org, or contact your local youth director to find out how you can participate.





3. Commit Your Prayer Warriors. Get a team of adults together who will commit to praying for you and your ministry on a regular basis. Make sure this is a group with whom you can confidentially share both your personal and ministry prayer needs.

4. Choose a Theme Song. Involve your youth choir. If your church does not have a youth choir, this is the perfect time to get one started. Pick out songs that you all like and which fit the topic of each evening or choose a song for the entire week.

5. Form a Week of Prayer Development/Review Team. Depending on the size of your church, this group can be four to eight persons who will go through all eight readings with you. Include on your team only interested and committed young adults and youth ministry leaders (Pathfinder, Sabbath School, etc., your pastor/s); this is important because it gives ownership to the entire group, rather than just you and your assistant. Ask the group to commit to meeting for at least three weeks—at least one week for four lessons, and an extra week to wrap things up. Be sure to identify the goal and direction you want to go, preferably at the first meeting, and choose a young person to speak for each day.

6. Integrate Global Youth Day (GYD) into Your Week of Prayer Plans. Ideally, GYD should be a time to teach youth how to sacrificially give of themselves by providing opportunities in the church and the community. If you are a small youth group and do not have the resources to arrange a community-based GYD event, you can use this opportunity to break down denominational barriers in the area by partnering with and pooling resources and ideas with other youth groups from other churches in your area.



Tips for Online Meetings



KEEP IT SIMPLE

It's always best to keep your setup simple to lower the possibilities of technical errors.

HAVE BACKUP EQUIPMENT READY TO GO.


Even with a simple setup, there is still a chance your equipment may fail. It's always best to play it safe and keep backups of your needed equipment if possible. Make sure everything is charged or connected.

LIGHTING, LIGHTING, LIGHTING!

Check your lighting ahead of time to make sure it's ideal and avoid backlighting your subject. If you're filming outside, be mindful of the sun. Glare from the sun can prevent your video from being seen

ENHANCE SOUND QUALITY AND MINIMIZE BACKGROUND NOISE.

A lapel mic or even the typical headphone-mic combo can achieve this. If it's windy, find some sort



of cover to block the wind. Don't forget to find a quiet room for your livestream set up. **BE CAREFUL WITH HOT MICS!** Always make sure your microphone is on when you need it and off when you're not the speaker.

ENSURE INTERNET STRENGTH

Test your internet speed leading up to your event to ensure you have consistent internet or your live stream may not be viewable by your audience.

PREPARATION IS KEY

Review the program with your team and set up rehearsals. This will help lessen any last-minute mistakes. Too much is happening too quickly in a live environment; you can think more clearly about what needs to be done days in advance.

MONITOR YOUR STREAM ON AN EXTRA DISPLAY



Monitoring is important so you can ensure a reliable and professional live stream. An extra display provides valuable perspective by letting you see your live show through the eyes of your viewers.

LOOK AT THE CAMERA – NOT THE MONITOR!

Resist the urge to stare at the monitor! Try your best to keep your eyes looking at the camera. This will also help your viewers feel engaged.

Respond to comments live (if possible).

Interacting with your viewers in this way helps boost engagement with your audience and keeps them coming back for more.





Tips for preaching online

- ▶ **Preach Shorter**
 - ▶ Preach up close and personal
- ▶ **Eye Contact Matters**
 - ▶ Be Yourself
- ▶ **Up Your Energy!**
 - ▶ Preach the Word
- ▶ **Use Illustrations**
 - ▶ Greet your audience
- ▶ **Interact with your audience**
 - ▶ Be relevant
- ▶ **Encourage your congregation to share your sermons and appreciate the trust they place in you by sharing it.**
 - ▶ Remember to PRAY!



How to use this **Book** with a **small** or **large group**



1. Journal Space. This book is designed to be filled with your thoughts. Use the space provided to record your reactions to the something you may hear in the sermon and the questions at the end of each day. It can also be used to write a prayer request or praise to





God. Encourage participants to use it anyway they want. It's their journal! Tell them there are no rules, just guidelines. The important thing is to listen to the Lord and open their heart in response to His leading. Leaders, if you take the time to read the daily readings prayerfully and with the anticipation that God will reveal new things to you, you will be surprised at what will flow through your pen or pencil onto the pages of these journals.

2. Start a Prayer Journal. Nothing is greater for your personal spiritual growth than time spent in prayer. Your youth group will grow as you grow. Prayer journaling will help you encounter God in new and exciting ways. You will be able to “track” your walk with God as you go back, and review answered prayers and see how He has led you step by step each day. New, fresh ideas will come to mind as you spend time in His presence journaling your prayers. You can find many ideas online on starting and keeping a prayer journal. Just go to www.google.com and type in the words “starting a prayer journal.”

3. Daily Questions. Included with each sermon are questions designed to get you thinking. Form small groups and discuss these questions. Take a moment to really think about the point the question is trying to get across. Listen to the Holy Spirit as He teaches you through Scripture. Encourage participants to record their thoughts in their journal.

4. Global Youth Day is set to launch the official week of the Youth Week of Prayer meetings. The theme for 2021 is REACHING OUT. Ahead of time, please contact your pastor or conference youth leader to see what projects your church will be involved in on this day, March 20. If you are planning a full day event, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has an amazing activity, *In Their Shoes*, that can be done during your afternoon AY program.

In Their Shoes is an interactive poverty experience that takes teens on a 24-hour journey into the lives of teens from other countries around the world. Through the eyes of this new identity, they will begin to understand the challenges that millions of people in developing countries face every day. You'll discover what ADRA is doing to help and what the Bible has to say about living a life of Christian service.



1

Lord, I will go! *Renew Me*



(Isaiah 6:8)

INTRODUCTION

The writer Stephen R. Covey, in his well-known book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, relates an experience that he lived in the New York subway. Covey tells that on that day the people were sitting calmly, some were reading the newspaper, others were lost in their thoughts or simply resting with their eyes closed. In short, the atmosphere was peaceful and tranquil.

Suddenly, a man and his children entered the train. The children were so boisterous and disobedient that the environment changed immediately.

The father of the children remained with his eyes closed, ignoring the scene completely. The children jumped from here to there and screamed at



their whim, throwing objects, even snatching the newspapers from people. The situation was very annoying, but the father didn't do anything.

Covey could not believe that what he was seeing. How could this man allow his children to behave this way! So, he stood up from his seat and addressed the father of the youngsters, saying: "Sir, your children are irritating many people. Can't you control them?"

It was at that moment when that man raised his eyes and said in a soft tone: "Oh, you are right. I guess I will have to do something, we went to the hospital... their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think, I guess that they don't know how to react either."

After that revelation, Covey wrote: "Suddenly I saw things in a different way, and since I saw it in a different way, I *thought* in a different way, I *felt* a different way, I *behaved* in a different way. My irritation faded."¹

Interesting story! It shows that when our vision about something changes, our thoughts, our feelings and, above all, our behavior change as well. In our message today I would like to invite you to renew your vision of God. I assure you that if you do it, your life will change completely!


DEVELOPMENT

The Bible presents the story of a man who was changed completely when he renewed his vision of God. I am referring to the prophet Isaiah. According to the story, this prophet had a special vision about God. However, before analyzing the vision that changed the life of Isaiah, allow me to speak to you a little bit about his book.

The book of Isaiah is one of the most interesting books of all the Bible. Some say that is a miniature Bible! The book has sixty-six chapters, just like the Bible has sixty-six books. It has two great divisions, just like there are two divisions in the Bible, with thirty-nine chapters in the first division (like the Old Testament) and twenty-seven chapters in the second (like the New Testament).²

¹ Stephen R. Covey. *Los 7 hábitos de la gente altamente efectiva* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Paidós, 2003), p. 19.

² Henrietta C. Mears. *Lo que nos dice la Biblia* (Miami, FL: Editorial Vida, 1979), p. 202.



But, do you know what is the most interesting thing about the book of Isaiah? It's the book that speaks the most about Jesus! That is why Isaiah is called the messianic prophet. Isaiah tells us everything about Jesus:

- His birth (Isaiah 7:14)
- His family (Isaiah 11:1)
- His anointing (Isaiah 11:2)
- His character (Isaiah 11:3)
- The simplicity of his life (Isaiah 7:15)
- His meekness (Isaiah 42:1-4)
- His death (Isaiah 53)
- His resurrection (Isaiah 25:8)
- His glorious reign (Isaiah 11:32)

When you read the book of Isaiah you will find the people of Jesus in each one of his pages. But do you know something? When Isaiah wrote his book, things weren't well inside of God's people. There were all types of problems!

The people had moved away from God and consequently they were suffering badly.

The prophet Isaiah felt very sad about the condition God's people. Therefore, one day he decided to go to the temple to speak to God and make the decision of presenting each one of the problems his people were going through. There, in the temple, Isaiah had a vision of God, that completely changed his thoughts, his feelings and, above all, his behavior. What did God reveal in the temple? Please, let's read together Isaiah, chapter 6, verses 1 to 4:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.³



God revealed Himself to Isaiah! The prophet could contemplate God sitting on his throne, surrounded by angels filled with a radiant glory and who sang without rest, saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; all the earth is filled with your glory.”

What happened in the life of Isaiah when he had this wonderful vision of God? Let me leave the prophet himself to say what he experienced:

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

When the prophet Isaiah had a vision of God, *the first thing that he experienced was the greatness of his sin*. If you read chapter 5, verses from 8 to 30, you will find that the prophet Isaiah preaches against the sin of his people. But when he had the vision of God, he doesn’t point to other people’s sins, instead he looked at his own sins. He looked at his filthy lips and his life full of sin!


The second thing that Isaiah experienced after having the vision of God was *the depth of the divine forgiveness*. Isaiah was not left in the desperation of sin, instead he was granted divine forgiveness. His lips were touched, and the angel told him: “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

Lastly, when Isaiah saw God he *responded with courage to the divine call*. Isaiah heard the voice of God that said: Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? Then, without an excuse, his response to God was: “Here am I. Send me!”

The vision that Isaiah had of God changed him completely: it transformed his thoughts, his feelings, and, above all, his behavior. The life of Isaiah never was the same again! His life came to center itself completely in God and his service.

He served the Lord for many years and was willing to give his life as a sacrifice for the cause of God.





Being an elder, a young prophet asked him: “Master, why do you continue working relentlessly for the Lord?”

Isaiah responded: “Because one day I saw the Lord and my life changed completely!”

The story of the prophet and his encounter with God teaches us that when we have a vision of God in our lives, we will never be the same person again. Our thoughts will change, our feelings will change, but, above all, our behavior will change. We will never be static! Faced with the call of the Lord we will always be available to respond: “Here am I. Send me!”

For a long time, I asked myself: Why some believers are so active in the cause of the Lord while others seem indifferent? I discovered the response to that question through a simple allegory. According to the astronomers, the planets that move more rapidly are those that are closer to the sun. Mercury goes around the sun in only 80 earthy days. However, Jupiter, in order to completely lap around the sun, lasts no more or less than 12 years. What is the difference? Mercury is the planet that is the closest to the sun, as a result, it moves more rapidly.⁴

Yes, dear friends and brethren, like Isaiah when we have a vision of God and we get closer to his glory, we will experience an urgency and our movement will be more rapidly. The secret is in living more closely to his presence and renew our vision about him!

CONCLUSION

When you renew your vision of God, your thoughts will change, your feelings will change and, above all, your behavior will change.

What occurred to Isaiah happened to young Carlos. For a long time, Carlos had been a nominal member of the church, in which he attended for mere compromise; just as he relates, even so, he felt hopeless, comfortless. One day, under a big snowstorm, he attended a service in a certain church; but the preacher could not go due to the climate. With no preacher, a shoemaker stood



up to preach before the few people that were present and read this text: “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:22). The shoemaker, who had no experience in the art of preaching, repeated the passage and said: “Look! It isn’t necessary to lift a foot, nor a finger. It isn’t necessary that you study in college or contribute money to know how to seek. Look at me, says the Lord, and not at yourselves. There is no consolation in you.”

Then, with his eyes set on Carlos, he told him: “Carlos, it looks like you are sad. You will be unhappy if you don’t obey.” Then he shouted with more force: “Look to Jesus!” That day, Carlos said that he decided to look at Jesus and his life changed completely. Who did he become afterwards? He became a preacher known in history as Carlos Spurgeon, the prince of preachers. When Isaiah renewed his vision of God his life changed. When Carlos Spurgeon renewed his vision of God his life changed. When you renew your vision of God your thoughts will change, your feelings will change, your behavior will change. You will no longer be only a nominal member in church, but a servant of God that will be willing to say: “Here am I. Send me.”

Today I invite you to renew your vision of God. I guarantee that the day you do it, just like Isaiah you will say, “Lord, I will go.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the book of Isaiah called the “miniature Bible”?
2. When the people were going through difficult times, what decision did Isaiah make?
3. Which were the three things that Isaiah experienced when he had a renewed vision of God?
4. What will happen in our lives when we renew our vision of God?



2

Lord, I will go!
Fill Me

(John 4:13-14)

INTRODUCTION

That news deeply affected the world! According to the main communication means, the supermodel of Russian origin, Ruslana Kurshunova, had died after falling from the eighth floor of her apartment in the city of Manhattan. No one could imagine such a thing. This young lady had everything at her feet: fame, money, influence and a great future ahead of her.

Suddenly, the investigations started. Her family members refused to believe the version given by the authorities. However, after long investigations, they concluded that the model had taken her life. A close friend, after being



interrogated, said that in those days Kurshunova seemed very anguished. Sadly, the anguish took her to a sad end.

Unfortunately, just like that young lady, many others experience situations of anguish. The Bible presents the story of a woman that was in anguish, but she found in Jesus forgiveness and purpose for her life.

DEVELOPMENT

The Gospel of John presents the story of woman who had a special encounter with Jesus. We don't know her name, but since she originated from the city of Samaria, she is known as the "Samaritan woman."


Before getting into the story, it's important to understand that the life of Jesus was registered in the first four books of the New Testament, known as the "Gospels." The word "gospel" means "good news", therefore, we can conclude that it contains the good news of salvation through the person of Jesus Christ.

As you all know, the fourth gospel is the Gospel of John. Maybe you are asking: Who is John? According to the Scriptures, John was a young man who along with his father was dedicated to the trade of fishing (Matthew 4:21). By nature, he was impulsive and of an explosive character to the point that he was known as the "son of thunder" (Mark 3:17), but one day his life changed forever.

The one who was known as the "son of thunder" came to be the disciple of love. He wrote five books of the New Testament (the Gospel of John, three letters and the book of Revelation). We can say that John was a living example of the power of God to transform and use the youth in the ministry!

And it was precisely John who, in chapter four of his gospel, relates the fascinating story of the Samaritan woman. The story starts with Jesus heading to Galilee, but before getting to his destiny he decided to make a stop, because "He needed to go through Samaria." (John 4:4).

I think that most of you know the conflict that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. Why this antagonism? The Samaritans were part Jew and part Gentile, therefore, the Jews considered them as exiles to the point that they despised them. Given this situation, the Samaritans decided to have their own



religious system that competed with the religious system of the Jews. Between these two nations, a racial, religious and cultural wall was raised.

But Jesus came to knock down this dividing wall (Ephesians 2:14). As a result, without regard to the existing conflicts between Jews and Samaritans, He decided to pass by the city of Samaria.

According to the story, Jesus, along with his followers, arrived at Samaria at noon; and while the disciples went to the city to buy something to eat, Jesus sat to rest along the well of Sicar, a small village of Samaria. It's in this moment, at the hour of high heat, that a woman of the city came to the well to get water for the day's consumption.

Suddenly, Jesus initiates a conversation, making a request: "Will you give me a drink?" (John 4:7)

The woman responded: "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (John 4:9)

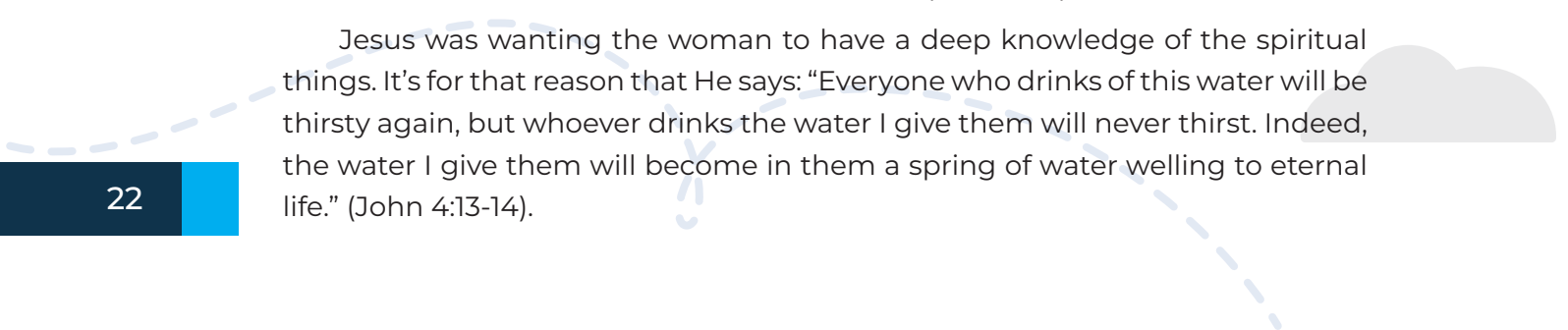
The Master didn't enter into a debate, instead in a direct way He said: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water." (John 4:10)

It's interesting to note that when the woman saw Jesus, she identified Him *as a simple outsider*. We note that she said: "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" (John 4:11)

The Samaritan woman saw in Jesus a common and ordinary itinerant!

But as she continued to talk with Jesus her perspective changes and she begins to see him as a great leader. The Samaritan woman said to Jesus: "Are you *greater than our father Jacob*, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" (John 4:12)

Jesus was wanting the woman to have a deep knowledge of the spiritual things. It's for that reason that He says: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling to eternal life." (John 4:13-14).





Faced with the offer, the woman exclaimed: “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” (John 4:15)

However, before continuing, the Lord makes a revelation: “Go, call your husband and come back.”

The woman responded and said: “I have no husband.”

Jesus said to her “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” (John 4:16-18)

Before such revelation the Samaritan woman concludes: “This man is more than an outsider, He is more than a leader; this man is a prophet.”

“Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.” (John 4:19)


It was a moment prepared for Jesus to give the greatest of all the revelations. When the woman realized that she was in front of a simple mortal, is when she declares: “I know that the Messiah is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.” (John 4:25)

And it’s right at this moment when she hears the voice of the master say: “I, the one speaking to you—I am He.” (John 4:26)

Friends, Jesus Christ revealed Himself to this poor and anguished woman as the Messiah! As we hear these words, immediately, the story tells us that the woman “...leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” (John 4:28-29)

The Samaritan woman understood that Jesus was more than a *mortal*, more than a *great leader*, more than a *great prophet*. She understood that Jesus was the *promised Messiah*. And not only did she understand Him, but also, she accepted Him in her heart!

Friends, this story is emotional, and it teaches us abundant and rich lessons. But there are various points that I would like to highlight from it. *Firstly*, only those that recognize who Jesus is can experience the transformation of their lives. The Samaritan woman had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, and



thanks to this encounter, her life was changed. All those who have a personal encounter with Christ will experience a change! The Samaritan woman was distressed, sad, empty and hopeless. But when she encountered the Master, joy, happiness and hope filled her experience. Allow me to tell you that the same will happen in your life. Someone said that where Jesus passes something happens.

Secondly, from this story I would like to specify that when someone encounters Jesus, they can't remain silent. What did the Samaritan woman do when Jesus revealed Himself as the Messiah? She went out to tell others. Ellen White, in the book *The Desire of Ages*, page 195, wrote:

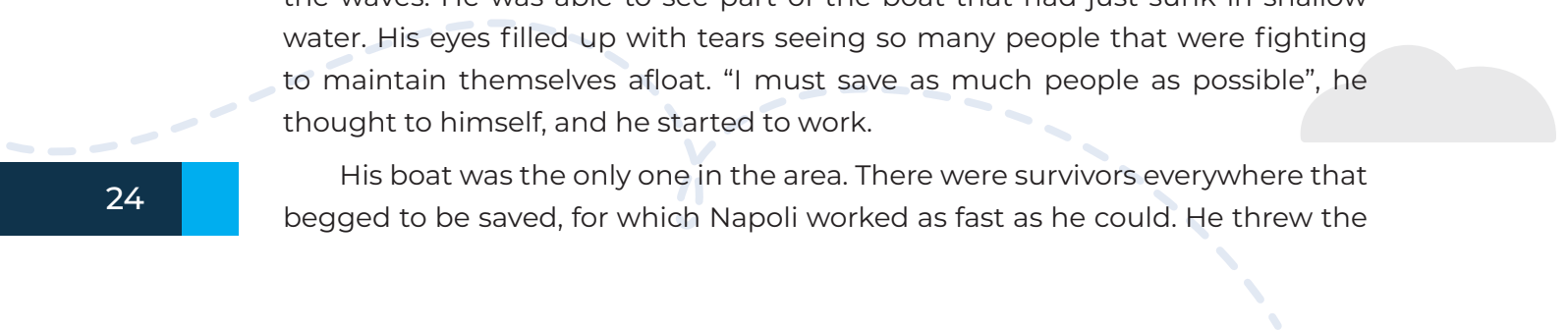
As soon as she had found the Saviour the Samaritan woman brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.

When you have an encounter with Jesus and drink of the water of life you have a living desire to tell others of the great wonders of God. The Lord Jesus said: If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink. He that believes in Me, as the Scriptures have said, out of his belly will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37-38)

It has been told that Juan Naponi was fishing salmons in a place that was about 27 miles from the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco, California. Early in the afternoon he had filled his boat, he initiated the trip back to his home.

A little more than one mile from the bay that opens behind the bridge, the fisher Naponi saw, alarmed, hundreds of human heads going up and down in the waves. He was able to see part of the boat that had just sunk in shallow water. His eyes filled up with tears seeing so many people that were fighting to maintain themselves afloat. "I must save as much people as possible", he thought to himself, and he started to work.

His boat was the only one in the area. There were survivors everywhere that begged to be saved, for which Napoli worked as fast as he could. He threw the





salmons that he had fished into the ocean – which were valued at about three thousand dollars- to make room for more people. After six hours of work he had rescued 54 people. Since there were still people in the water, the fisherman threw a rope, on which 16 people grabbed on, which he towed to the bridge.

When the Samaritan woman meet with Jesus, she said the same that Juan Napoli: “I must save as many people as I can.”

CONCLUSION

Friends, I would like to conclude saying that the day that you **experience a real encounter with Jesus you can't remain silent**. Also, we will say the same: “I must save as many people as I can.” Around us there are thousands of anguished and hopeless people; they need to hear that Jesus heals and saves. But someone has to say it! We can't stay silent. Today I invite you to drink of the water of life so that you can become a channel of blessing to the world. Rise up right now and say: Lord, give me of the water of life! Make me a river of blessing for those who perish without hope! Help me say that you are the hope for those that are in anguish!

I assure you that the day that you drink of the water of life, as with the Samaritan woman you too will say: “Lord, I will go.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Before knowing Jesus, how was the character of John? What happened subsequently in his life?
2. What situation existed between the Jews and the Samaritans?
3. Why do you believe that it was necessary for Jesus to pass by Samaria?
4. What happened with those that drink of the water of life?

A person with long reddish hair, wearing a plaid shirt and a large red backpack, is seen from behind, standing on a grassy mountain peak with arms outstretched. The background shows a vast, hazy landscape under a bright sky. A large red number '3' is overlaid in the top left corner.

3

Lord, I will go! *Free Me*

(Mark 5:19)

INTRODUCTION

One of the most recognized Christian leaders of the recent times was Charles Colson. He became distinguished as a great writer, but, besides that, as someone preoccupied for those who suffered in prison. However, in the past, Charles Colson, was known as the “genius of evil”. For years he served the presidency in the United States and he was involved in political scandals and abuse of power. After being found guilty of various charges against him, Charles Colson was sentenced to prison and remained incarcerated for seven months, but in prison he was touched by the Lord and experienced the forgiveness of his sins. From then on, he became a new person. When the news



of the conversion of Colson to Christianity leaked to the press, in 1973, the *Boston Globe* expressed “If Mr. Colson can repent from his sins, there is hope for all.”

Colson was freed, not only from the physical prison, but also of his spiritual prison. Today, I would like us to meditate on the power of Jesus to give liberty. For that I invite you to accompany me with your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 5, and let’s study what appears in verses 1 to 20.


DEVELOPMENT

The Gospel of Mark is the second of the four gospels. Even though this gospel appears as the second after Matthew, scholars say that it was the first gospel written. As an interesting piece of information, I would like to highlight that the name of this gospel should not be the Gospel according to Mark, but instead the Gospel according to Peter. You may ask “why?” Simple, because it was Peter who dictated the gospel to Mark. So, the gospel of Mark is nothing more and nothing less than the experiences told by Peter of his walk with Jesus Christ.

Before continuing, it’s important that you know who Mark was. According to the book of Acts, Mark was the son of a woman called Maria, owner of the house where Peter was after being freed from prison by the angel (Acts 12:12). The main name of Mark was John, and it’s because of this that in church he is known as John Mark (Acts 12:25). Mark was the companion of Paul and Barnabas in his first missionary trip, but upon seeing the dangers and the problems that a missionary’s life had, he returned. However, Barnabas gave him a second opportunity, becoming then a great leader, preacher and writer used by God (Acts 15:39).

The story of Mark shows us the value of a second opportunity. It could be that some youth that you know, as Mark, are discouraged in the faith. What do they need? A Barnabas that would help them and tell them that in Jesus they can find a new opportunity!

Mark wrote many stories about Jesus and the power that he has to liberate. But of all the stories that are registered in his gospel, the most moving and



dramatic one is the encounter that Jesus had with the Gadarene who was possessed.

Let's read together this fascinating story registered in chapter 5 of the Gospel according to Mark:

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. (Mark 5:1-6)

The day before that encounter, Jesus was with His disciples in the eye of the storm (Mark 4:35-41). But amid that storm that threatened to sink the boat, the Master's voice was heard saying: "Quiet, be still!" (Mark 4:39). Upon Jesus' command, the storm ceased and then came tranquility!

The following morning, Jesus and His disciples disembarked on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, near the city called Gadara. When they arrived there, someone gave them an unusual welcome. From the toms came a man dragging thick chains. His body was bleeding, product of the wound that he inflicted upon himself. His long and tangled hair, combined with his red eyes, gave the impression that that man, more than a human, looked like a wild beast. Looking at this scene, I know you might ask: Why this man acted this way? Why did he live in the tombs and tortured himself? The Bible tells us that this man was being dominated "with an impure spirit" (Mark 5:2).

Sadly, this man was not acting under his own will, instead he was dominated by spiritual forces of evil. In other words, he was under the dominion of demons (Mark 5:12).

Friends, at the present time, people consider the stories of the Bible as mere fiction. For many the existence of Satan and demons is no more than a lie but allow me to tell you that the Bible tells us that Satan exists and that he has a battle with the children of God. In the letter of Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 12, it affirms: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers,



against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Likewise, in 1 Peter, chapter 5, verse 8, we are warned: “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Satan exists and his purposes are not good. Do you know what the enemy wants to do with the life of the people? Look at what Jesus said to us regarding the plans of the enemy: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.” (John 10:10)

The enemy seeks to destroy our lives. He doesn’t want anything good for people. He only seeks to fill our lives with darkness, pain and sadness. Moreover, we should know that although Satan’s power is great, the power of our God is even greater.

The story tells us that when the possessed Gadarene came to where Jesus was, he fell on his feet. In that scene Jesus and Satan are face to face again. The enemy seeks to maintain his victim enslaved and Jesus seeks to give liberty. The story continues saying:


“When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. ⁷He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name don’t torture me!” For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”

Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

¹¹ A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.” (Mark 5:6-13)

Blessed be the name of the Lord! That man that for many years had been a victim of the power of darkness was liberated by Jesus. His emotional chains were broken! His mind was restored! What a powerful liberator is our God!



What happened afterwards? The story tells us that when that man was liberated by Jesus, he prayed that He would allow him to be with Him (Mark 5:18). But Jesus did not allow it, instead He told him “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” (Mark 5:19)

In the fulfillment of the commandment of Jesus, this man, that previously was a victim of the power of Satan, departed and “began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.” (Mark 5:20). Now that he was a free man, he began telling others of the wonders that Jesus had done in his life!

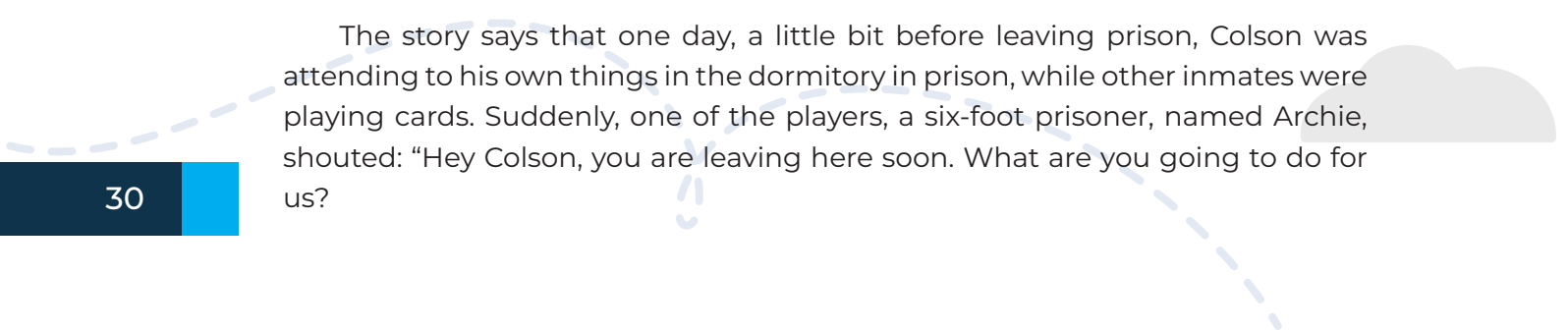
Dear friends, this story shows us the power of Jesus to liberate. There aren't any chains that Jesus cannot break. There aren't any prisons that Jesus cannot open. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has the power of liberating us from the power of darkness. Do you doubt it? Look at what the Bible says in Colossians 1:12-14: “and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Did you understand? God, through Jesus Christ, has liberated us from the power of darkness. The power of God is great. He can liberate you from anything that enslaves you. Today you can go out from the place saying: “I am free in Jesus.”

CONCLUSION

What happened with Charles Colson after leaving prison? The same thing that occurred with the possessed Gadarene: he departed and told others of the wonders of God in his life.

The story says that one day, a little bit before leaving prison, Colson was attending to his own things in the dormitory in prison, while other inmates were playing cards. Suddenly, one of the players, a six-foot prisoner, named Archie, shouted: “Hey Colson, you are leaving here soon. What are you going to do for us?”





Suddenly, the whole room stayed silent. All ears strained to hear the answer: “I will help in some way”, responded Colson, “I will never forget you guys.”

“Bull!” shouted Archie, while he threw the cards on the table. “Everyone says that. I’ve seen many like you that come and go. All say the same things while they are inside. Then when they leave, they forget quickly. There is no one who worries about us. No one!”

But today, almost 35 years after this conversation, thousands and thousands of Christian volunteers from churches, in 113 countries around the world, worry enough to visit the prison, help the inmates, help their families, and share the Good News of Christ with the prisoners.

This, thanks to Colson, who in 1976 founded *Prison Fellowship’s Endowment Fund*, which, jointly with the churches, has become the most extensive brotherhood to help prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.

The possessed Gadarene was liberated and immediately he started to tell of the wonders that God had done in his life. Charles Colson was liberated and immediately he initiated a ministry to help those who suffered in the prisons of all the world. In the same way, when we experience the liberty that the gospel grants us, we can’t remain silent, instead we will depart to say how great are the things that God has done in our lives.

My prayer is that today you experience the liberty that only Jesus can give you. I assure you that you won’t be able to remain silent, instead, just like the man that was freed from the demons, you will also say: “Lord, I will go.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Who was Mark and what does his story teach us?
2. Why did the man from Gadara lived chained in the tombs?
3. What did the previously demon possessed man ask when Jesus freed him?
4. What happens in the life of the people who experience liberty in Jesus?



4

Lord, I will go! Heal Me

(Mark 1:40-42)

INTRODUCTION

If you journey through history, you will note that the world has been affected by great epidemics. Among the most known is smallpox, which, in a period of one hundred years, it brought more than 26 million people to the grave. Speaking of epidemics, we can't forget about the bubonic plague, also known as the black plague, which brought death to some 27 million human beings. Without going too far back, in 1918 in a British soldiers' camp emerges the mortal epidemic Spanish flu, which in only eight months takes the life of more than 25 million people.



It could be that these epidemics, due to the passing of time, are no longer currently known to people. However, at the end of 2019 we heard of the outbreak of a new type of flu, that emerged from the Chinese city of Wuhan, in a few weeks, all the city was quarantined. As the days and the weeks passed by, the feared virus was advancing: China, Korea, Japan, Italy, Spain... In short, the whole world. Such epidemic was named COVID-19. According to reports, more than 84 million people had been infected and more that 1.8 million people had died around the world.

Although all these epidemics had caused turmoil, there is an epidemic more mortal than smallpox, than the black plague, and including even COVID-19. In today's message, we will talk about that illness.

DEVELOPMENT

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story of a certain leper that approached Jesus in search of healing. The evangelist Mark relates the story in the following manner:

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. (Mark 1:40-42)

The leprosy –just as the biblical scholars say—was a painful, disgusting illness that turned the person who contracted it unclean and for which there was no cure.

In the time of Jesus, leprosy was the worst illness (it was known as the "scourge" or the "finger of God") and it was greatly feared; not only for the fact that it was incurable, but also for the marks that remained on the people who suffered from it.

- The leper was considered totally disabled; physically and spiritually. He had to stay six feet away from people, including members of his family.
- The lepers were like the living dead. They had to use a black cloak to be recognized as someone among the dead.

- They were expelled from society. They could not live inside the walls of any city; their dwelling had to be outside of them.
- They were considered excluded from divine favor. Leprosy was considered a punishment that God sent to certain people due to their sins.

Dear friend, can you imagine the anguish and the pain of a leper? Being totally separated from family, friends and society. Imagine the emotional and mental pain that must have taken a toll on those affected by leprosy, living with an illness that was supposed to be a punishment from God, sent to the worst sinners.

But allow me to specify the following: even though the leprosy was a terrible illness, this was not the worst of all the illnesses. There is a sickness that is much more dangerous, of which the leprosy is only a symbol. The Christian writer Ellen White, in her book *The Desire of Ages*, page 266, speaks to us about sin as the most mortal of all the maladies:

The work of Christ in cleansing the leper from his terrible disease is an illustration of His work in cleansing the *soul from sin*. Its deadly poison permeated his whole body. The disciples sought to prevent their Master from touching him; for he who touched a leper became himself unclean. But in laying His hand upon the leper, Jesus received no defilement. His touch imparted life-giving power. The leprosy was cleansed. *Thus, it is with the leprosy of sin, —deep-rooted, deadly, and impossible to be cleansed by human power.*

The leprosy is a perfect symbol of sin, that is the most mortal and destructive of all the maladies. The preacher Greg Laurie makes a magnificent comparison between leprosy and sin. According to the preacher:

- *Leprosy initiates in an imperceptible manner.* Sin also begins in the same way. Eve never imagined that a simple conversation with the serpent would open the doors of evil for this planet. David didn't think that a glance at the woman of a soldier would bring as a result so many troubles to the family.
- *Leprosy is inherited.* It could be an evil transmitted from generation to generation. As human beings, we are all born as sinners. We inherit sin from our first parents. Therefore, we are not sinners because we sin, but that we sin because we are sinners.



- *Leprosy expands in a rapid manner.* In the same way, sin grows and expands in a rapid manner in all the soul.
- *Lastly, leprosy is highly infectious.* Sin, as well as leprosy, infects everything. The consequences of sin not only are suffered by the one who commits the sin, but also those around him.

What most stands out from the encounter between Jesus and the leper is not the desperate condition in which this man was in, nor the turmoil that the illness had done to his body; instead, the wonderful miracle of which he was the object. “Jesus,” declared Mark, “was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.” (Mark 1:41-42)


For her part, Ellen White says that

Immediately a change passed over the leper. His flesh became healthy, the nerves sensitive, the muscles firm. The rough, scaly surface peculiar to leprosy disappeared, and a soft glow, like that upon the skin of a healthy child, took its place.¹

Jesus gave back to this man his physical health, as well as his spiritual health. Allow me to tell you something that I discovered when I was studying for this sermon. In the healing of the other illnesses carried out by Jesus, the writers of the gospels used almost always the Greek verb *iaomai*, that means “to heal”, but in the miracle of the leper’s healing a distinct Greek verb is used. Do you know which one? It’s the Greek verb *katharizo*, that can be translated as “to clean” or “to purify.” This verb is used in the New Testament to refer to not only to physical purity and cleansing, but to “religious and moral, in the sense of pure, free of stain and guilt.” In summary, when Jesus healed the leper, He gave him all the privileges of a healthy man; he was restored not only socially, but also religiously.

Young people, if anything is clear in this miracle it’s that the Word of God is the antidote against the leprosy of sin. Some believe that what brought healing to the leper was the “touch” of Jesus, but the evangelists make it clear that what gave healing to the leper was the word of Jesus. Through touch, Jesus—just as

¹ Ellen G. White. *The Desire of Ages*. p. 263



it's presented in the Bible text—expressed the grace that He felt towards the leper, but it was His word that resulted in the miracle of healing.

My dear friends, the Word of God has the power to bring healing to our lives. The word of God:

Generates life, creates faith, produces changes, scares the devil, realizes miracles, heals wounds, edifies the character, transforms circumstances, imparts happiness, surpasses adversity, defeats temptation, inspires hope, liberates power, cleans our minds, brings things into existence and guarantees our future.²

What happened with the leper after he was healed? He began to say what Jesus had done in his life:

Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. (Mark 1:45)

Praise be the name of God! He who was healed from leprosy become a missionary. Wherever he went, he repeated one time and again that Jesus had healed him. His happiness was such that he could not remain silent.

CONCLUSION

When we experience the healing power of Jesus, we cannot remain silent. Sin is the most lethal epidemic, but the word of God is the antidote against sin. ***When someone is healed from the spiritual leprosy, he will let others know about the wonders of the Lord.***

But there is something more. You and I are also called to demonstrate grace and love to those who are spiritual lepers. A while ago, I heard the story of Jose Damian, a young missionary from Belgium that was born in 1840. One day he heard that there were hundreds of lepers in a beautiful Hawaiian island. “All were hungry, wore rags and were abandoned by society,” the church leaders told him. “We should send someone to bring them the hope of Christ.”

Jose Damian offered himself as a volunteer missionary. When he arrived at the island of Molokai, and saw the situation of the lepers, with their face, hands



and feet disfigured, he could not bear the sight and looked the other way. He went to live in a little shack by himself; where he prepared his own food, washed clothes and carried out the rest of the chores. It disgusted him to see that, let's say, monstrous condition of the lepers and, additionally, he didn't want to get infected. That's why he prohibited them from getting close to his shack, he would go to the chapel, preached and returned to it.

One day Jose realized that his words did not provide any effect and that it wasn't enough to just preach. He understood that the love of Christ should demonstrate itself with actions and not only with words. Then, he decided to mix himself with the lepers, he helped them construct their own shacks, to dig wells so that they would have water in abundance; he provided clothes and food and washed and bandaged their wounds. Truly, Jose became one of them, but as a result Jose Damian died a leper. However, before this death, he had the joy to see that all the people in that place had accepted Jesus.

When we experience the healing miracle of the Word of God, we will also say as the ex-leper: "Lord, I will go."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How was leprosy viewed in the time of Jesus?
2. What should be done with those who were infected with leprosy?
3. What does leprosy symbolize?
4. What would those who experienced the healing power of the Word of God do?





5

Lord, I will go!
Forgive Me

(John 8:47)

INTRODUCTION

A while ago I read the story of a Spanish father who decided to reconcile with his son, who had left for Madrid. Full of remorse, the father placed this ad in the paper: "Paco, meet me at the Montana Hotel Tuesday noon. All forgiven. Dad." As Paco is a frequent name in Spain, when the father arrived at the hotel, he found eight hundred young people named Paco, all of them waiting for their father.

That's right, folks, people desperately need forgiveness. A great preacher and writer wrote a few words that express very well God's longing for each of his children to experience forgiveness:



If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest foolishness had been fun, God would have sent us a comedian. But our greatest need was forgiveness, “so God sent us a Savior!”¹

DEVELOPMENT

The book of John, chapter 8, recounts a dramatic incident that occurred one day when Jesus was teaching in the steps of the temple in Jerusalem. Suddenly, a woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery was violently thrown at Jesus’ feet. The religious leaders of the temple in Jerusalem were the ones who threw the prostitute at the feet of Jesus. These leaders demanded that Jesus pronounce judgment on the woman’s fate, as dictated by the law of Moses. “In the law, Moses” the scribes and Pharisees said, “commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (John 8:5).


Ellen White, commenting on this story, wrote that:

Their pretended reverence veiled a deep-laid plot for His ruin. They had seized upon this opportunity to secure His condemnation, thinking that whatever decision He might make, they would find occasion to accuse Him. Should He acquit the woman, He might be charged with despising the law of Moses. Should He declare her worthy of death, He could be accused to the Romans as one who was assuming authority that belonged only to them.²

Everyone present looked forward to what Jesus would say. But, to their dismay, Jesus simply crouched down and began writing in the sand with his finger. No one knows for sure what he was writing. The scribes and Pharisees were irritated that Jesus offered no answer to their question. When they pressed him again, Jesus stood up and said, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7). The Master wrote again in the sand;

¹ Charles R. Swindoll. *More than 1001 illustrations and quotes from Swindoll* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Group, 2007), p. 345.

² Ellen White. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 460.



the message he wrote had a strong impact on the accusers of the convicted woman; one by one they walked away.

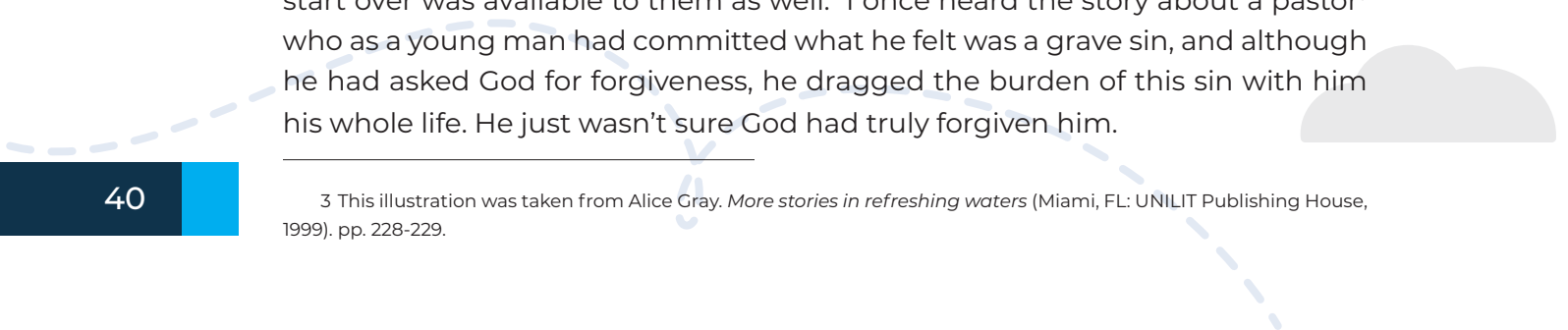
When Jesus finally stood up and looked around, the accusers were gone. Then he turned to the woman, and said, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” In front of the crowd, the woman answered, full of shame, “No one, sir.” Jesus looked at her then, and said, “Neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin”(John 8:10-11).

This wonderful story has a message of hope for each of us. Clearly, we notice how Jesus forgave and restored the life of that woman who had been caught in the “act of adultery.” Through the words “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more,” Jesus gives the woman a second chance, an opportunity for forgiveness, to start a new life in purity and holiness.

On the other hand, the act of Jesus writing “on the ground with his finger” (John 8:6) also contains a lesson of grace and mercy for each of us. It is very interesting to note, that on two previous occasions God is presented writing with “His finger” on stone tablets (Exodus 31:18) and on the surface of a wall (Daniel 5:5). On stone tablets God wrote His law, which is eternal; and on the surface of a wall God wrote the death sentence against a wicked king named Belshazzar.

We can then conclude that God writes in stone what He wants to remain forever. That which is eternal and irrevocable. Then we ask ourselves, what does God write on the ground? We can say that on the ground God writes what He wants erased; because whatever is written on earth, wind, and rain, time is responsible for erasing it forever.

Jesus’ act of “writing on the ground with His finger” showed the accusers of that ashamed woman, that forgiveness, restoration, and a second chance to start over was available to them as well. I once heard the story about a pastor³ who as a young man had committed what he felt was a grave sin, and although he had asked God for forgiveness, he dragged the burden of this sin with him his whole life. He just wasn’t sure God had truly forgiven him.



³ This illustration was taken from Alice Gray. *More stories in refreshing waters* (Miami, FL: UNILIT Publishing House, 1999). pp. 228-229.



One day he was told about an elderly woman who had visions. He heard that during these visions she had frequent conversations with the Lord. After a while, the pastor finally mustered enough courage to visit that woman.

She invited him in and offered him a cup of tea. Towards the end of the visit, he rested the cup on the table and looked the old lady in the eye.

“Is it true that sometimes you have visions?” He asked.

“Yes,” she replied.

“Is it also true that during these visions, you often speak to the Lord?”

“Yes,” she said again.

“Well..., the next time you have visions and talk to the Lord, could you ask him something for me?”

The woman looked at the pastor a little curious. She had never been asked that before:

“Yes, it would make me very happy,” she replied. “What do you want me to ask him?”

“Well,” the pastor began, “could you ask him what sin your pastor committed when he was young?”

The woman, very curious now, agreed.

A few weeks passed and the pastor visited the woman again. After another cup of tea, cautiously and shyly, he asked:

“Did you have visions again?”

“Yes, I did,” the woman replied.

“Did you speak to the Lord?”

“Yes.”

“Did you ask him what sin I had committed when I was young?”

“Yes,” the woman replied, “I did.”

The pastor, nervous and afraid, hesitated for an instant and then asked:



“Well, what did the Lord tell you?”

The woman looked at her pastor’s face and gently retorted:

“The Lord told me he did not remember.”

God forgives completely. The prophet Micah, writing about divine forgiveness, asked himself:

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

Let me tell you that the same Jesus who extended his mercy to that troubled pastor and to that ashamed woman, today reaches out to you and says, “Neither do I condemn you; go away, and sin no more.” Divine forgiveness is available to you in these very moments. Today the Lord invites you with these words: “Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

CONCLUSION

What happened to the woman in our story? Did she go back to her life of sin? Well, let me share with you what Ellen G. White tells us about her:

This penitent woman became one of the firmest friends of Jesus. She repaid his forgiveness and compassion, with a self-sacrificing love and worship. Afterward, when she stood sorrow-stricken at the foot of the cross and saw the dying agony on the face of her Lord, and heard his bitter cry, her soul was pierced afresh; for she knew that this sacrifice was on account of sin; and her responsibility as one whose deep guilt had helped to bring about this anguish of the Son of God, seemed very heavy indeed. She felt that those pangs which pierced the Saviour’s frame were for her; the blood that flowed from his wounds was to blot out her record of sin; the groans which escaped from his dying lips were caused by her transgression. Her heart ached with a sorrow past all expression, and she felt that a life of self-abnegating atonement would poorly compensate for the gift of life, purchased for her at such an infinite price.⁴





We can see that after being forgiven, this woman experienced a complete change in her life. Her gratitude towards Jesus was such, that she chose to be His follower, and one of her most loyal at that. But one thing we should not overlook is that she followed Jesus to the cross. When most people abandoned Jesus, she courageously bore witness to her faith!

This woman that one day found forgiveness, ended up being a faithful follower of the Lord! She didn't stay where He found her. She chose to live a life devoted to God! She chose to give it all up, to leave it all behind and walk in the way of righteousness and purity.

When we experience forgiveness, we will be willing to give everything up for the Lord, but above all we cannot be silent. Like this woman, you too will leave it all to follow Jesus and say, "Lord, I will go."



6

Lord, I will go! *Guide Me*

(Jonah 1:1-2)

INTRODUCTION

Did you know that the book of Jonah is one of the most exciting books in the entire Bible? The book of Jonah has caught the attention of children, young people and adults. This book, which belongs to the group of minor prophets, has inspired hymns, dramas, paintings, films, and plays.

This being said, although the book contains several of the most famous accounts of all the Holy Scriptures, it has been the subject of a variety criticism. For example, many question Jonah's story, saying, "It is impossible for a human



being to live seventy-two hours in the womb of a large fish. Scientifically it's impossible!"

The disbelievers ridicule Jonah's story, because it is impossible for them to even believe it. For believers, however, that is not the case. Why, you may ask? Because we believe in the God of miracles. We believe in the God who divided the Red Sea in two, so that his people would pass as if it were dry land! Yes, we believe in the God of miracles. And you know what? That is the God who shows us the book of Jonah; and it is the God I desire to introduce you to: an Almighty God, sovereign, merciful, and full of grace, who has always been and will always be willing to give an opportunity to all who turn to Him in repentance.

DEVELOPMENT

The book of Jonah begins with a command given by God to the prophet. "The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." (Jonah 1:1-2).

Let me begin by asking: Where was Jonah sent? The prophet was sent to the city of Nineveh. Have you heard of this city before? According to the book of Genesis, chapter 10, verses 8 through 11, Nineveh belonged to the group of Assyrian cities, founded by a mysterious character named Nimrod, whom the scriptures describe as a "mighty hunter before the Lord" (Genesis 10:9). The Assyrians were devotees of pagan deities. They worshipped the sun, moon and stars. So, Nineveh, like the other cities, was dedicated to **idolatry**.

On the other hand, Nineveh is described as a "**city of blood**" (Nahum 3:1). It is deeply striking that among the characteristics that the Bible emphasizes of Nineveh is the violent character of its inhabitants. How violent were the Ninevites? In a document written by one of the kings of Nineveh he describes his degree of cruelty and violence:

I built a wall in front of its city and **skinned** all the bosses who had risen against me and **covered the pillar with their skin**. Some of them **I locked inside the pillar**, others I **hung on the pillar with stakes**, and others I tied with stakes around the pillar. And **I cut**

off the limbs of the royal officers that had rebelled against me. **I burned many captives among them, with fire** and many of them I took hostage. **Many of them had their noses, ears and fingers cut off; and many had their eyes taken out.** I made a pile of the living and out some on their heads, and I tied their heads to tree trunks all around town. And I burned their young men, older men and women with fire.”¹

So were the kings of Nineveh: bloodthirsty, cruel, violent. And as if all this were not enough, the city was dedicated **to immorality and vice**. Note that in Jonah 1:2, God says that Nineveh’s wickedness had risen before his presence. It is interesting, but this same expression God used it to describe the moral condition in which the inhabitants of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were located (Genesis 18:21; 19:13).

We can conclude that Nineveh was a city dedicated **to idolatry, violence, and vice**, whose inhabitants, according to Jonah 4:11, had no moral discernment. However, to this city that lived in open rebellion, God sent a messenger to preach the message of salvation. This idolatrous, violent, and immoral city was given a second chance from God.

That’s right, dear listener, our God is a God who gives multiple opportunities. In the book of the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 33, verse 11, one of God’s most moving words appears: “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?”

God extends a second opportunity to all those who, like the inhabitants of Nineveh, live in sin and wickedness. God gives a second chance to all those who have lost their moral course. God extends this second opportunity because His desire is that **“all** people [...] be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

Now, let’s back to the book of Jonah and allow me to ask you a question: What did Jonah do when he was mandated to go to Nineveh? Did he fulfill the order given by the Lord? I would like to be able to answer this affirmative and resounding yes, but sadly the Bible says that Jonah, the prophet, **refused**

¹ Quoted by Jo Ann Davidson. *Jonah: The book seen from the inside* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Association Casa Editora Sudamericana, 2003), p. 44.



his responsibility. Please read Jonah 1:3 with me, and let us look at the action followed by the prophet:


But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

Where did Jonah run to? He headed for Tarshish. According to scholars, Nineveh is located 800 kilometers east of Jonah's home. But Tarshish is more than 3,000 miles to the west. Can you believe it? The prophet of God was fleeing his responsibility. He was going the other way! God sent him east and Jonah is heading west!

But Jonah not only shuns his responsibility, but also becomes **indifferent to the situation.** The story tells us that when Jonah was on his way to Tarshish, a great storm struck the vessel in such a way that it almost broke apart (Jonah 1:4). The storm was so strong that the sailors, full of fear, threw all the cargo into the sea and began to cry out to their gods (Jonah 1:5). What was Jonah doing in the middle of this situation? Funny enough, Jonah was **"sleeping soundly"** (Jonah 1:5). Do you understand his actions? How could he be sleeping during a storm? Jonah had not only run away from his responsibility, but now he was also indifferent to what was happening around him. Isn't that sad?

It is then, when the indifferent prophet is cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish (Jonah 1:15-17). We must emphasize that this great fish that swallowed the prophet was prepared by God Himself. But, for what purpose did God prepare this fish? Did the prophet die in the belly of the great fish? No! The great fish was the means used by God to direct Jonah to the purpose for which he had been called. Miraculously the fish vomited Jonah, where? Well, none other than on the beaches of Nineveh (Jonah 2:10). And that's where God speaks to Jonah again. Notice what the Bible says in chapter 3, verse 1 and 2.

The scriptures point out that God spoke to Jonah a second time. I believe that God wants you and I to understand that He also gives a second chance to the believer who rebelliously and indifferently refuses his responsibility. God



gives you a second chance, dear brother and sister who has been indifferent to the crisis in which we find ourselves. God gives you a second chance, dear young person, who time and again has shunned God's calling. Yes, God gives you a second chance that; You, who like Jonah, have not fulfilled the purpose of His calling.

CONCLUSION

It is encouraging to know that God is a God of multiple opportunities. It is comforting to understand that God grants a second chance not only to those who live in sin, but also to believers who have indifferently ran away from their responsibility. A long time ago I read the story of a young football player, who played for the University of California. During a championship game, this young man regained a ball, but got confused and ran in the wrong direction. A teammate intercepted him before he made points against his own team. At half-time, all the players went to the locker room and sat down, wondering what the coach would tell them. This young man was sitting alone, with a towel over his head, crying.²

When the team was ready to return to the field for the second half, the coach astonished the team when he announced that the same players who had started the first half would start the second. Everyone left the locker room except this young player. He didn't want to move. The coach turned his gaze when he called him a second time and saw that tears were streaming down his cheeks. The player said, "Coach, I can't do it, I jeopardized you. I've led the University of California to disgrace. I can't face the crowd in the stadium again."

The coach put his hand on the player's back and said, "Get up and come out again. The game is only in halftime."

Friends, when I think of this story, I say to myself: What a great coach! But when I read Jonah's story and the story of thousands like him, I say, "What a great God, who gives us over and over, another opportunity! Friends, if as the Ninevites you too have lived far from God, today the Lord extends a second

² Quoted by Alice Gray. *More stories in refreshing waters* (Miami, FL: Editorial Unilit, 1997), p. 30.



chance to you. Brothers and sisters, if as Jonah you have ran away from your responsibility, God also grants you a second chance.

When you experience God's mercy in your life, like Jonah, you will say, "Lord, I will go."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What was the character of the inhabitants of Nineveh like?
2. How did Jonah respond to the divine calling?
3. What did God do to take Jonah to Nineveh?
4. How many opportunities is God willing to grant?





7

Lord, I will go!
Strengthen Me

(Joshua 1:9)

INTRODUCTION

Sl of us, on some occasion or another, have been victims of fear. And fear, believe it or not, can prevent us from attaining the ideal to which we were destined. Because of fear, some people have changed jobs; or they have moved elsewhere in the country, locked themselves in their homes, or entered an asylum. It's unbelievable, but fear prevents the seller from offering their merchandise; the young man in love, from asking for the hand of a young woman; the one who is looking for a position, from talking to the manager; to the executive, from making a fundamental decision; and the one who seeks the truth, from giving his life to God.



Dear friends, fear does not discriminate people and disregards age. It hits the weak and the powerful. It haunts the young and the old, the rich and the poor. Even those who seem to have it all; celebrities, heroes and leaders confess to having a wide variety of fears.

Who could imagine, for example, that Caesar Augustus, the great Roman emperor, was afraid of the darkness? Or that Napoleon Bonaparte, the great military strategist and genius, was afraid of cats. That Richard Nixon was afraid of hospitals, and that George Washington was terrified of being buried alive. But moreover, who might think that Johnny Depp, the actor who has starred in some of the highest-grossing films of recent years, has confessed to fearing clowns. That Michael Jordan, the basketball superstar, possesses the rare fear of going underwater; and that Oprah Winfrey, one of the most recognized women in the world, is afraid of decision-making.

DEVELOPMENT

It is incredibly striking that the Bible, the book par excellence, deeply addresses the theme of fear. According to scholars, the term “*do not be afraid*” appears about 365 times throughout all the scriptures, thus being the most frequently repeated commandment. On the other hand, the word “*fear*” appears more than 200 times, while “*fear*” and “*terror*” more than 100 times each. And so that you don’t think the heroes of the Bible were fearless, the scriptures says that more than 200 individuals were afraid.

The Old Testament presents the story of a man named Joshua, who was a recognized leader in Israel. This man, as described by a respected Christian author, was a warrior “courageous, resolute and persevering, prompt, incorruptible, unmindful of selfish interests in his care for those committed to his charge, and, above all, inspired by a living faith in God.”¹

But, despite all his heroism and courage, Joshua struggled with fear. The scriptures tell us the Lord once said to him:

¹ Ellen White. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 481



Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. (Joshua 1:2-4)

Great challenges stood before Joshua. The first of these was to replace Moses. Replacing someone is never an easy task but replacing a leader of the likes of Moses complicates things a little more. Moses, as the Bible shows and confirmed by history, is ranked among the greatest men the world has ever known. As a statist, warrior, leader, emancipator, writer, poet or prophet, he had no peer. But it is important to add that the Bible also tells us that “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.” (Exodus 33:11). This was the kind of leader Joshua was called to replace. Indisputably, the task was not easy at all.

The second challenge Joshua faced was “crossing the Jordan.” The Jordan river is the most important river in Palestine. It divides the country into two countries: Western Palestine, the most important and rich part; and the Transjordan. Normally, crossing the Jordan was not a challenge, however, by the time Joshua received this command things were different. It was spring and by this season the river overflowed, being almost impossible to cross it. We must remember that Joshua was leading a multitude of about two million people. Humanly speaking, crossing the Jordan seemed like an impossible mission.

Finally, Joshua had to “*conquer the earth.*” To own the land, Joshua had to lead Israel’s armies against unknown peoples who outnumbered them in people and weaponry. Aside from that, the cities of Canaan were walled fortresses, towering and impossible to collapse. As a result, Joshua was going up against great and challenging circumstances: replacing one of the most exceptional leaders in history, organizing the crossing of the people through the overflowing waters of the Jordan River, and facing formidable towns, armies, and cities. I ask you: How do you think Joshua felt?

Joshua was afraid. The same fear that a single mother who has to raise her children alone feels. He felt the same fear an immigrant experiences when





arriving in an unknown country. He felt the same fear faced by a student who does not have the means to pay for their college studies. He felt the deep fear of failure. But just as fear touched the door of his heart, the Word of God came to him saying:

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:6-9)


As he faced tremendous challenges, God told Joshua *“don’t be afraid.”* He also gave him three special guarantees that would enable him to overcome the fear of failure. The first guarantee God gave him was the assurance of His promises. The land Joshua was to conquer had been delivered many years ago. God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, Joshua should not fear his challenges, for divine promises guaranteed his triumph.

The second guarantee God gave him was the certainty of His presence. The Lord said unto him, “ Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go “ (Joshua 1:9). When God’s presence accompanies us, fear has no reason to be. No matter how many challenges were presented along the way, Joshua was guaranteed that God would be by his side giving him the victory.

Finally, God gave him the power of His Word. Joshua was told:

Keep this book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:8)

For Joshua to be able to overcome his fears, he had to accept, believe, meditate, obey, and live the Word of God. Only the Word of God would give him enough strength to defeat fear.



Thanks to the power of God's Word, Joshua received the strength to face his fears and fulfill the mission the Lord had entrusted to him. My friend, only the Word of God will give us the strength to face the challenges ahead with courage and strength. A famous writer, speaking of the power of God's Word, said:

The Bible is the largest source of encouragement that is currently available. When we read it, we are transformed, because it is a living book. When we are afraid of failure or feel that we are a failure, the Word of God should be our absolute priority. The words we find there will fill our hearts and minds with strength and courage. The more we focus on God and His Word, the less room there will be for fear."²

But, for the power of God's Word to become a reality in our lives, we need to take three actions:

- *First: Accept its authority.* We must remember that the Bible is the supreme authority of truth. The prophet Isaiah expressed it well as he wrote, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20).
- *Second, internalize your teachings.* It is not enough just to accept the authority of the scriptures, it is necessary to assimilate their teachings. We must spend time reading God's Word and pondering its great truths. King David was aware of this when he wrote: "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2).
- *Third: Apply your principles.* It is completely useless to accept the authority of the scriptures or internalize their teachings, if we are not willing to apply their principles. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22).

² David Jeremiah. *What are you afraid of?* (Carol Stream: IL, Tyndale House Foundation, 2014), p. 118.





CONCLUSION

A while back I saw an interesting interview with a famous baseball player. This man recounted that for years he had lived a completely empty life. To compensate for his situation, he took refuge in alcohol and parties. But one day, he said, he was impacted by the power of God's Word and his life changed completely. What struck me most about the interview was when he was asked: What is the greatest achievement of your career? The interviewer was surprised to hear the former player say, "Getting to know Christ and make him known to others."

My friends, when the power of God's Word impacts our lives, we will be strengthened and say that the greatest thing we can achieve is to make Jesus Christ known to others. When you receive the power of God's Word in your life, like Joshua, you too will say, "Lord, I will go."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What were the challenges Joshua faced?
2. What were the three guarantees of victory God gave Joshua?
3. What did Joshua have to do in relation to the Word of God?
4. What are the three actions in relation to the Word of God that we must do?

8



Lord, I will go! *Empower Me*

(Acts 1:8)

INTRODUCTION

There is a story of two missionaries who on one occasion contemplated the Niagara Falls in admiration. Amid their astonishment, one of them said, "I'm sure this is the greatest unused source of power in the world." In the face of such a statement, the other missionary replied, "It is not so, dear brother. The greatest source of power that goes unused is the Person of the Holy Spirit."

My friends, I fully agree with this statement. The person of the Holy Ghost imparts a special spiritual power to the lives of God's children. In the book of Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1, verse 8, the Bible tells us, "But you will receive



power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

DEVELOPMENT

As we study the Word of God, we realize that the power of the Holy Spirit enables God’s children and transforms them from ordinary to extraordinary people. For example, we can mention the case of Saul, the first king of Israel. History says Saul was an ordinary person of the people. Even the day of his anointing as king, he was so frightened that he hid (1 Samuel 10:22). Faced with the great responsibility before him, Saul felt incapable. Despite this, the prophet Samuel anointed him as king. Do you know what happened next? Notice what 1 Samuel 11:6 tells us: “When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him.” King Saul was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and went from fear to courage. When the power of the Holy Spirit came upon him, he was willing to face the challenges ahead.

Let me give you another example: Do you remember that young man named Samson? According to the Bible, he has been the strongest man, physically speaking, who has ever existed. Samson’s feats are extraordinary:

- He tore apart a lion with his own hands (Judges 14:6).
- He faced great armies alone (Judges 15:14).
- He dismantled the gates of a city and carried them on his shoulders (Judges 16:3).

Many, looking at Samson’s extraordinary exploits, have wanted to explain that they were the product of his natural strength. Others have concluded that the extent of his hair had a kind of magical power. But the Bible does not support any of these explanations. Rather, the scriptures make it clear that Samson’s power resided in the Holy Spirit. Each time the Bible presents a great work done by Samson, it relates it to the Spirit of God. Let’s notice the following verses:

- The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. (Judges 14:6)

- As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. (Judges 15:14).

Did you notice that? It was not Samson's physical power that enabled him to accomplish the great feats! He was able to do all these things because the power of the Spirit of God came upon him!

Equally, we can mention the Apostle Peter. When our Lord Jesus called him, Peter was a fisherman (Luke 5:1-11). For three and a half years Peter was walking with the Lord. But just in the end, when Jesus was arrested and taken to the Jewish courts to be sentenced, Peter, instead of courageously placing himself on the Master's side, denied him three times (John 18:25-27). Why did Peter deny the Lord? Simple: out of fear. He was afraid of the power of Jewish priests and leaders. He was unwilling to defend the cause at the time of greatest need.

However, Peter repented, and Jesus forgave and restored him (John 21:15-17). Then we can see a Peter who courageously rose to preach without the slightest vestige of fear (Acts 2:14-40). We also see him facing Jewish priests and leaders (Acts 4:5-8). Even when he was threatened with death, he courageously said, "We must obey God rather than human beings" (Acts 5:29). He who one day denied Jesus for fear of death now rises without any fear!

How could this extraordinary change be made? Peter was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, Peter and the other Apostles received the Holy Spirit and were empowered to fulfill the mission (Acts 2:4). As a result, the Apostle Peter was able to rise without fear and proclaim the message of the cross.

Friends, the Holy Spirit empowers God's children. Who could say that Christ's disciples, most of them ordinary, would touch people from all over the world? Someone said:

During the apostolic era the triumphs of the Cross continued. The opposition dissipated. Pagan temples were emptied and converts multiplied



by thousands. Without money, Christians overcame the confederation of riches around them; without proper schooling they confused the connoisseur rabbis; without political or social powers they proved to be stronger than the Sanhedrin; devoid of a priesthood they defied the priests and their temple; and without a soldier they were more powerful than the legions of Rome. Thus, they came to plant the cross on the Roman eagle.¹


That's right, my friends. When the Holy Spirit empowers people, and especially the church, great things happen. If we do not see great works today, it is because the person of the Spirit of God has been left out of the equation. Do you know who will do the greatest works for the Lord? Let me share this powerful quote from the book *The Desire of Ages*, page, 250:

He who loves Christ the most will do the greatest amount of good. There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, by putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God.

When the Spirit of God takes over every part of our lives, we will work with the same power that the Apostles of Christ worked. This is why our greatest need today is to ask that the power of the Holy Spirit come upon each member of our church—upon every young person, child, and adult. When the Holy Spirit fills our lives, we will see the wonders of God.

The story tells that Evan Roberts, a 26-year-old man, had been praying for thirteen years that his life would be fully controlled by the Holy Spirit. He begged God to give him a whole heart, a heart totally dedicated to the kingdom of God. Evan often prayed late at night and interceded for the youth and adults in his church. He prayed so that God would visit the city of Wales with the power of revival. Welsh revival began at a youth meeting at Evan Roberts' church. Evan encouraged his friends to seek the Holy Spirit to fill their own lives. The Holy Spirit touched their hearts, and 16 young people accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The sparks of revival that began in this humble village church would ignite the flames of revival across the country. It is estimated that over

¹ Leroy E. Froom. *The Coming of the Comforter* (Miami, FL: Asociación Publicadora Interamericana, 2010), p. 121.



the course of nine months some 100,000 people accepted Jesus in the small country of Wales, crimes ceased, people were transformed by the grace of God.

This great spiritual revival began with a humble young man who asked that the power of the Holy Spirit fill his life. An entire nation was changed by a young man, Evan Roberts, and a group of friends who cried earnestly for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Something similar will happen when each of us decides to seriously ask for the fulness of the Holy Spirit. When this happens, the words of Acts 1:8 will be fulfilled again: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”


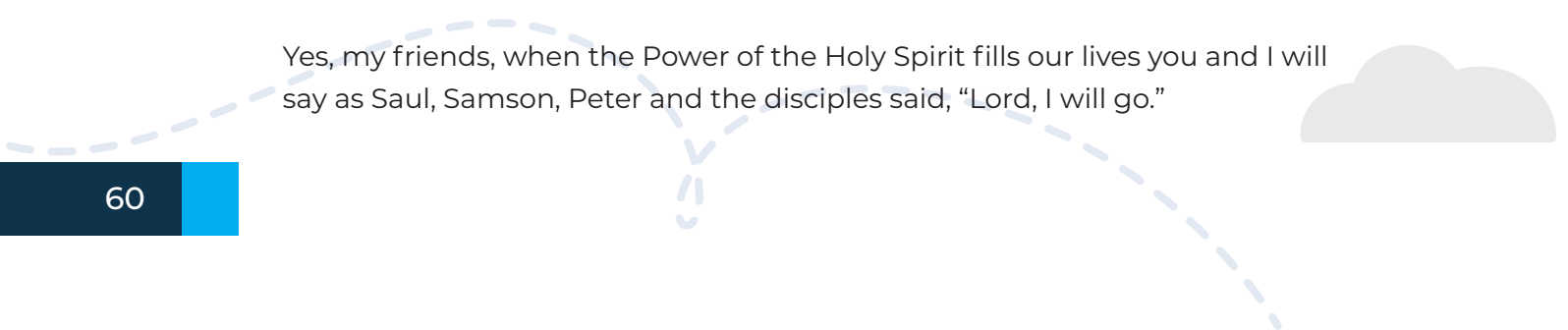
CONCLUSION

The power of the Holy Spirit transforms ordinary people into effective instruments to fulfill the mission. Today I want to invite you to cry out together for the power of the Holy Spirit. Our prayer must be the same as the following Hymn:

*Hover o'er me, Holy Spirit,
Bathe my trembling heart and brow.
Fill me with Thy hallowed presence;
Come, O come and fill me now.*

*Fill me now, fill me now,
Jesus, come and fill me now;
Fill me with Thy hallowed presence;
Come, O come and fill me now.*

Yes, my friends, when the Power of the Holy Spirit fills our lives you and I will say as Saul, Samson, Peter and the disciples said, “Lord, I will go.”





REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What happened in Saul's life when the Holy Ghost came into his life?
2. What was the source of Samson's power?
3. When did the Holy Spirit fill the lives of Peter and the disciples? What happened next?
4. What should our prayer be?

I WILL GO





I WILL
GO