

Breaking Free...

Applying Prayer Disciplines

SEVENTH DAY BAPTIST WORLD FEDERATION
WEEK OF PRAYER

JANUARY 5 - 11, 2025



Seventh Day Baptist Week of Prayer January 5-11, 2025

Sponsored by the

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During the first full week of January since 1967, Seventh Day Baptists around the world have come together in prayer, sharing theme-focused meditations chosen by the author of the Seventh Day Baptist Week of Prayer booklet. The theme for this year is, *“Breaking Free... Applying Prayer Disciplines”*

Purposes of the SDB World Federation include:

1. **To provide increased communication** among Seventh Day Baptist groups around the world.
2. **To promote projects of mutual interest** which will benefit from international cooperation.
3. **To stimulate fellowship** among Seventh Day Baptist Christians through periodic meetings of representatives between Conferences or groups and programs of mutual aid.
4. **To receive and evaluate statements** of need as may come to the Federation and to share such expression of need with its members, inviting their response as the Lord may lead.
5. **To provide leadership training** for Conference leaders, pastors and lay leaders appropriate to each individual conference, as determined through consultation.

Sessions:

The last General Sessions were held in Blantyre, Malawi, September 16-23, 2023 under the theme, “Become Perfectly One,” based on John 17:23. The next General Session is planned to be carried out in 2028 at a venue to be announced.

Prayer Requests by Country:

In order to help the people in our conferences pray intelligently about concerns in particular countries, a page with relevant information by country has been posted to the SDB World Federation website, and may be accessed by clicking on the following link:

<https://sdbwf.org/wop/2025>

Officers:

Officers for the World Federation include General Secretary Douglas Machado (generalsecretary@sdbwf.org); President Luciano Baretto Nogueira de Moura (president@sdbwf.org); Treasurer, Deborah Hargett (treasurer@sdbwf.org); Assistant General Secretary, Andrew Samuels; Recording Secretary, Marcia Nembhard; Regional Vice Presidents: Canaan Phiri (Africa), Abel Caesar (Caribbean), Marian Ferraren (Asia), Carlene Wynter (Europe), Amaury Moitinho (South America), and Nicholas Kersten (North America). Luis Lovelace serves as Editor of Publications.

From the Treasurer

The SDB World Federation is a volunteer organization desiring to further the kingdom of God and make disciples in all nations. Relying on contributions from conferences, churches, and individuals, donations to the SDB World Federation are used to provide increased communication among SDB groups around the world, promote projects of mutual interest benefitting from international cooperation, stimulate fellowship among Seventh Day Baptist Christians across the globe, and fund the operating costs of the federation, including travel expenses and conference costs of the World Federation Sessions that occur every five years.

As we begin 2025 and think about setting goals for the new year, let us pray for God to show us His will in the area of giving. In addition to supporting your local church, please consider giving to the SDBWF.

What does the Bible teach about giving?

1. Give regularly (*I Cor 16:2*)
2. Give cheerfully and joyfully (*II Cor. 9:7*)
3. Give generously (*Mark 12:43, Rom. 12:8, II Cor 8:1-4,20-21*)

Reports from other Seventh Day Baptist conferences around the world indicate many needs. The SDB World Federation aims

to foster active communication and collaborative projects between member conferences to address these needs.

The World Federation encourages all member conferences, churches, and individuals to participate in an annual Sabbath giving week to support the World Federation. This event is recommended to take place on the first Sabbath of January each year with the suggested theme this year of "United in Generosity," based on II Cor. 8:2-4. However, contributions and designations are needed throughout the year also. To contribute, please use one of the following options:

- **Send checks or money orders** payable to SDBWF and mail them to the following address: Treasurer, SDB World Federation, P.O. Box 581, Silver Creek, GA 30173-0581, USA.
- **Send donations via PayPal** at treasurer@sdbwf.org or through our website at sdbwf.org/donate.

Your support and contributions play a vital role in furthering this mission. Together, we can make a significant impact in advancing God's kingdom and spreading His message to all nations. Remember the words of our Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Debbie Hargett,
Treasurer, SDB World Federation

About the Author



This year's thoughts for devotions for the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation sponsored Week of Prayer have been written by **Pastor Kevin Carter**.

Born on 28th March, 1975, Pastor Carter grew up in the Bowensville SDB Church, located in Dressikie, St. Mary, on the island of Jamaica. He attended the Bowensville SDB

basic school and the Mount Angus All Age School and subsequently attended the St. Mary High School. He became a Christian at age 13 and is the eighth child for his parents, Authur and Cynthia Carter.

He became a pastor of the Jamaica Conference of Seventh Day Baptist churches after completing studies at the Jamaica Bible Institute. Thereafter, he was called by the Portmore SDB Church to serve as Pastor.

Pastor Carter is an employee of the Jamaica Customs Agency and is now a director. He studied at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, where he obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Sector Management (with Honors) and a Master of Science degree in Governance and Public Policy as the most

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outstanding final-year student. He has been serving in the public sector for over 30 years.

Pastor Carter married Jacqueline over 25 years ago and they have two boys, Jared and Kyle, who are active members in the church. Jacqueline is very active in the Church and the United Circuit of churches. Pastor Carter and his family have been Sabbath keepers all their lives. He loves the ministry and the work of the Lord. He has served in various capacities in his local church, the Conference, and at the United Circuit. He served nine (9) years in the Youth League, six (6) years as Chairman of the United Circuit and five

(5) years as president of the Conference's Men's Fraternity. He was also a member of the Conference Evangelism Committee for a number of years. In July 2023 he was elected as President of the Jamaica SDB Conference of Churches.

Pastor Carter also attended the SDB World Federation Session held in Blantyre, Malawi, September 16-23, 2023, and has expressed his delight in representing his Conference in the capacity as President. He loves the word of God and abides by the scripture verse: *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (Philippians. 4:13)

Introduction

The word of God, both in the Old and New Testaments, is replete with instances of prayer. Some are detailed and expressive, while others are simple and to the point. In all cases, all the evidence in scripture reveals that God generally responds favorably to genuine, sincere prayers. But, admittedly, even from my own experience—and I am sure others can say the same—praying can be a daunting undertaking, especially when situations are urgent and overwhelming. Audrey Hogg, in her book, *If My People Pray... A Global Call to Prayer*, quoted comments from Myles Munroe indicating that prayer can be the “source of great faith or frustration.” Consequently, how we treat prayer will determine its faith or frustration effect. Sometimes prayer is not the first response to a situation. A response to situations can sometimes involve giving thought to praying. The scripture gives clear guidelines and principles which reveal without a doubt that praying to God must always be a priority. This priority engenders spiritual discipline resulting in humility, an obedient heart and genuine reliance on God. The Lord, in 2 Chronicles 7:14, reminded Solomon, “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” This response from God, following Solomon's intense praying in the previous chapter, as he dedicated the new temple, was definitive. In his prayer he stated his reliance on God's mercy, forgiveness, and covenant promises; but God was precise,

concise and direct in His response and outlined His requirements and standards.

God clearly emphasized a discipline of praying as being significant. God is both principled and disciplined in character. When interacting with Him, we are required to maintain relatable discipline in praying. Discipline doesn't mean rigidity and inflexibility, but order and consistency. So, as we approach God in prayer, He assesses the discipline of fervency and expectancy, which determines how much we really need Him. God likes it when we speak to Him openly with a cooperative disposition. There is also the discipline of resilience and adaptability, the ability to endure and overcome without losing spiritual focus. Of equal importance is praying with patience and self-control, which are valuable components of the Spirit. As we pray, we must be selfless in the pursuit of God's will, avoiding self-centeredness and pride. As we avoid these subtle pitfalls, strictly focused prayer and having God at the forefront, are necessary disciplines. The uncompromising discipline of rejoicing, praying without ceasing and being thankful should always be maintained.

Praying can be daunting; but, when utilized with the right spiritual discipline, there are great rewards. This Week of Prayer explores some of these disciplines. Let's pray for a miraculous breakthrough. I am grateful for and humbled by this opportunity to author this year's prayer sessions. As we participate, let us Break Free by applying the disciplines.

Pray Fervently and Expectantly

James 5:13-18

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” – James 5:16

The most effective way to communicate with God is through prayer. Prayer is the privilege we have to talk to God and the assurance that He will listen and respond but under His condition and by His terms. Prayer is the primary way for the believer in Jesus Christ to communicate his emotions and desires and fellowship with God. Prayer is driven by faith in God the Father and in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 14:13-14: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.” Praying in Jesus’ name is to rely on His authority and trusting God the Father to act upon our prayers on the account of His Son. Praying in Jesus’ name relies on the power of His Holy Spirit to direct our request to God in a manner that suits God’s will and purpose. Romans 8:26-27 tells us that the “... Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how we should pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes on behalf of the saints according to God’s will.” (NET).

Praying fervently and expectantly can be easily misunderstood as loudness, lengthy speaking, or a “must-get-it” mentality. But, fervent prayer does not guarantee that if a Christian prays really, really hard, they will get whatever they want. Psalm 66:18 says that iniquity in the heart hinders God’s response to prayer. Wrong motives also hinder prayer. James 4:3 says “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives,” so that you may spend it on your pleasures.” (NAS). Our prayer passion must not be obscured by selfish intentions. So, while fervent prayer means “having or display-

ing a passionate intensity,” such intensity must not be fueled by selfish expectancy, but must be righteously motivated. James 5:16 says: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” The NIV puts it even clearer: “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.” Effectual refers to being successful in producing a desired or intended result. When combined with fervency, both produce a potent, result-oriented effect. But such potency must be driven by God’s standards for prayer. Do you want to break free? James provides the formula: Effectual fervent praying, confession of sin, and praying for each other. In James, the story of Elijah was referenced to confirm that fervent praying with expectancy works! Elijah held on through many difficulties with prayerful expectancy, and success was achieved. If Elijah succeeded, we can do the same. There was a time in my personal life when I learnt to be fervent and expectant in prayer. I was going through some significant struggles and could not pray in the usual manner. I bought a journal: Thirty Days of Prayer. I poured out my heart to God each day in the journal. God heard my prayers. I broke free. Pray fervently and expectantly.

REFLECTION:

Are you struggling with praying fervently and expectantly? Break free from the self and pray. Don’t be afraid to be open and speak honestly to God. Appreciate your time with God.

Today we will pray for Seventh Day Baptists in the countries of: Angola, Australia*, Bangladesh, Brazil*, Burundi*, Cameroon, and Canary Islands.

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

Pray Deliberately and Cooperatively

"Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard." – 2 Kings 19:20

God likes it when we are upfront, open and deliberate when praying to Him. Admittedly, we often do the contrary. This may stem from situations in our lives which we are unwilling to confront. We may surmise that God does not need to hear this one, and we enter into evasive mode. We can become uncooperative with God. This leads to big problems. But we have the assurance that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9). God wants us to be deliberate and cooperative. Deliberate means to get something done consciously and intentionally: being careful and unhurried. Cooperative speaks to being willing to help or do what people ask, working together. Kennedy Lane, in her weekly devotional, entitled, *Praying Intentionally*, says: "When we feel it is time to pray, we go on autopilot, whether it be before a meal or before we go to bed, we send prayers thanking God for our food or for our day, but do we really mean it?" Essentially, we might be talking to God, but not necessarily being open and cooperative with Him. Hezekiah, king of Judah, understood the discipline of being deliberate and cooperative. Ascending the throne as king at the tender age of 25, and, as a righteous king, he was confronted with blatant threats from the King of Assyria. But Hezekiah "clave to the Lord" (2 Kings 18:6). There was trouble in Judah as Satan turned the king of Assyria against him and against Judah.

But Hezekiah prayed deliberately to God. He cooperated with God and His prophet, Isaiah. He went into urgent but not hasty prayer mode, rented his clothes and abased himself in

God's presence. He sent an immediate cooperative prayer request to Isaiah, declared trouble, and cried out for help (v.3). God answered speedily: "Don't be afraid (v.6). Philippians 4:6 says: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." The threats continued with a letter. Hezekiah read the letter, went directly to God, and spread the letter before the Lord. He was **O.P.E.N.** He declared God **O**utstanding (v.15), **P**etitioned God (v.16), remained **E**xpectant (v.19a), and concluded that God was **N**on-negotiable (v. 19b). God responded: "I've heard your prayer" (v.20). Great things can happen when praying deliberately and cooperatively with God. Years ago I learnt the value of this discipline. As I made plans to start life as an adult, I was worried and openly confessed my fears. A senior deacon prayed for me and God delivered. Break free, pray deliberately and cooperate with God.

REFLECTION:

It can be difficult to be deliberate and cooperative with God. Are you finding it difficult to be open with God? You need to break free.

Let's pray for our brothers and sisters in the following countries: Canada*, Chile*, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cuba, Ecuador*, and Egypt.

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

Pray with Resilience and Adaptability

Acts 16:25-37

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.” – Acts 16:25

It's always amazing to reflect on this passage, often entitled the story of the Philippian jailer or, depending on the context, Paul's imprisonment in Philippi. This is an intriguing real-life experience of what it means to pray with resilience and adaptability. Resilience is the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties. It speaks to toughness and fortitude. In similar ways, the word adaptable is co-related and means the ability to adjust to new conditions. On many occasions, prayer is hindered due to an environment deemed unadaptable. We must be careful not to be inflexible and non-adjustable but be, instead, resilient and adaptable. Paul and Silas were quickly schooled into this discipline in their mission on European soil. After arriving and praying on the Sabbath, Paul subsequently baptized Lydia, seller of purple, and the mission appeared quite conducive to the gospel. But Satan imposed himself as they were praying and ministering. Paul discerned his presence and cast him out of the jail. The city went into an uproar. Paul and Silas were imprisoned. Their accommodation and environment were harshly changed. Freedom and reputations were at stake. They were beaten, thrust in the innermost part of the prison, and fastened with chains like common criminals.

But their praying was unchained. They immediately went into spiritual resilient mode and quickly adapted to new conditions. At midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them (v.25). They ignored their situation, aligned to the will of God, adapted, prayed and worshiped. Prayer and praise were dominant responses to their situation. God showed up in a mighty way.

The jailer was converted. One writer says: "There is no "magic formula" for getting what you want through prayer. God will not be manipulated by faith-formulas or vain confession. He is not moved by our greedy pursuit of things". The Lord will never adjust Himself to us and what we want. Instead, we must be adjusted to Him and ensure that He gets what He wants." We can always trust God that His motives are pure. Therefore, we should not be afraid to move with prompt resilience and adapt to God in whatever situation we find ourselves. Whatever our context and situation, seek clarity through prayer and be still. Be still and know the power of God. (Psalm 46:10)

I learnt the discipline of resilience and adaptability in prayer the hard way. Prior to being employed at Jamaica Customs, I felt imprisoned, depressed, and overwhelmed due to unemployment. Eventually, late one night, I adjusted my posture, placed my back against the wall and cried in prayer to God for a job. A week later I was employed. Part of my delay in moving forward was my unwillingness to step out of my comfort zone and adjust my way of thinking. Breaking free from an old mindset requires praying with a renewed thinking, having a spirit of resilience and adaptability.

REFLECTION:

Be willing to adapt in every situation using prayer. God may not take you out of the situation, but through it. You can break free.

Today, let us pray for our brethren from the following countries: England*, Ethiopia, Gambia, Germany, Ghana*, Guinea, Guyana*, and Haiti.

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

Pray with Patience and Self-control

"Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon."

– Daniel 2:17-18

We all can attest to the fact that, when faced with extreme difficulties, we often become very agitated and lose control. When assessed in the context of prayer, it's sometimes no different. We may pray without patience and self-control especially when confronted with extreme situations. Four unique men of God were tested in the discipline to pray with patience and self-control. Exiled in Babylon and separated from their homeland in Judah and Jerusalem, Daniel (Belteshazzar), Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego) confronted the enormous test in discipline. Their first test was dietary. They succeeded with fasting on pulse and drinking water. They succeeded and the king numbered them above the wise men as they excelled in wisdom and understanding.

The king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. He was troubled in his sleep and the dream escaped his memory. The self-proclaimed magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers could not help and he ordered their execution, including the four young men of God. Daniel spoke calmly with self-control and wisdom, to the captain and slayer, Arioch, and requested an audience with the king. This is evidence of patience and self-control. Patience is the ability to wait, or to continue doing something despite difficulties. Self-control is the ability to control oneself, in particular one's emotions and desires, especially in difficult situations. Daniel and his companions mastered

this discipline in the face of certain death. Daniel asked for more time and carefully outlined the situation to his companions and they prayed for the mercies of God. The answer came from God (v. 19, 24). Their lives were spared.

Praying with patience and self-control has great value. Proverbs 14:29 says: "Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly." Sometimes situations can feel overwhelming and can strangle every bit of patience and self-control, if not handled carefully. We must take ourselves out of the way and be convinced God has the power to work things out and reveal even the unknown. He will allow situations to test the discipline of patience and self-control in our lives and bring awareness and understanding.

Over the years, I have learnt the importance of praying with the discipline of patience and self-control. It is a never-ending training.

REFLECTION:

Are you struggling with patience and self-control? It's time to break free. God will give answer to prayers when we approach Him with the right attitude

Today let's pray for Seventh Day Baptists in the following countries: India*, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Jamaica*, Kenya*, Lebanon, and Liberia.

*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

Pray Selflessly and Purposely in God's Will

John 17:9-24

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" – John 17:20-21

This chapter of John's gospel records the most extensive prayer of Jesus as He prepared for His final moments on earth. This intercessory prayer is commonly called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. The prayer demonstrates the epitome of selflessness in Godly purpose. In this chapter, Jesus prayed for oneness among the disciples and their oneness in God and Christ. Oneness breaks the strongholds of selfishness. Throughout His prayer Jesus frequently referred to God the Father as Thou, Thine, Thy, and Thee. All this suggests His complete alignment in His Father's perfect will and their selfless harmony. Jesus was explicit: I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine. And all mine are Thine, and Thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. (vv 9-10). Jesus did all of this, knowing that not very long after, at Gethsemane in the Mount of Olives, His next sets of prayers would be intense and short, with the Father's will pronounced in anticipated agony. His sweat appeared as great drops of blood as He sorrowfully prayed: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt. O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." (Matthew 26:39, 42).

Praying selflessly and making God's will a priority are distant from our human nature until transformed by the Holy Spirit, giving way to a new and improved selfless nature. Selflessness is the attitude and way of life that prioritizes the needs, interests, and welfare of

others before one's own. Selflessness is susceptible to the harmful effects of sin and there is a natural resistance to God's will and when remaining unchecked and uncleansed, it results in corruption of prayers. Paul explained the dilemma: we do not understand what we do. "For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:15). This also manifests itself even in our prayer life: I do not know what to pray for. For what I want to pray for I resist to do but what I should not pray for I do it instead. But the Holy Spirit is there to help us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans (Romans 8:26).

I find myself tempted at times to pray self-serving prayers, desiring primarily personal successes and accomplishments. But the Spirit will not hesitate to thrust me into an altered mode of praying and stimulate a re-aligned approach resulting in selfless petitions. Our prayers must be purposefully aligned with God's will.

REFLECTION:

Let's break free from selfish habits and become purposely driven by God's will.

Today we'll pray for Seventh Day Baptists in the following countries: Malawi*, Mozambique, Netherlands*, New Zealand*, Nicaragua, and Nigeria*
*Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.

Pray with Focus and God at the Forefront

1 Samuel 30:1-8

"...but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God..."

And David enquired at the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them?..." –1 Samuel 30:6b and 8a

Sometimes we may ask the question: Why do we pray to God, yet so many bad things happen? Is it necessary to rely on God when confronted with certain difficulties? We may not want to admit it, but these questions may swirl in our thoughts on many occasions. Unfortunately, these are blatant concerns that can shift prayer focus and harmfully dethrone God from His rightful place.

David was poised to become king of Israel. The book of First Samuel outlines the start of his journey at a young age. Anointed by God, he contended with Goliath and won. He had a life filled with battles, and was pursued by his adversary Saul, but God frequently delivered. David was also a prayer warrior with natural praise. He was never afraid to pour out his complaint to God and appeal for His mercy. In one Psalm he declared: Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice. (Psalm 55:17). One of the most frightening moments in David's life is recorded in 1 Samuel 30. The final moments were approaching for king Saul. His death was certain, as God ordained the Philistines to fight against Saul and Israel. David was out of Saul's reach. He desired for the Philistines to join the battle, but the princes of the Philistines rejected David.

Now dejected and filled with disappointment, David and his men headed to Ziklag but found their city in ruin, burnt with fire, their wives and children captured and taken away alive by the Amalekites. David and his men

were distraught, weeping as chaos erupted. Thoughts of stoning David escalated in the atmosphere. David was greatly distressed. But, amidst the chaos, David demonstrated an outstanding act of Godly discipline. He maintained spiritual focus, and "encouraged himself in the Lord his God." David sent for the anointed linen ephod, prayed and asked for direction. David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" God responded and instructed David. "David obeyed. All went well. He recovered all, including his two wives. Nothing was lacking.

This confirms that when we remain focused in prayer and make God the forefront of our decisions, breakthrough, success, restoration and victory are inevitable. So often we are crippled, immobile, and constrained by fears, worry, hurt, anger and criticism which impede disciplined prayer focus. Instead of recovering all we "lose it all." But focused, God-centered prayer brings immense breakthroughs.

REFLECTION:

Let's break free and be prayerfully focused, keeping God at the forefront of every situation. You will never be disappointed!

Today we will pray for Seventh Day Baptists in the countries of: Pakistan, the Philippines*, Poland*, Portugal, Rwanda*, Sierra Leone, and South Africa*.

**Conferences which are members of the Seventh Day Baptist World Federation.*

Pray Rejoicing, Without Ceasing, and With Thankfulness

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Pray without ceasing – 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV)

One may argue that it's not possible in all situations to rejoice, be thankful and pray without ceasing. While contemplating the instruction to pray without ceasing, we must understand that it does not mean lengthy, futile praying. As Jesus warned in Matthew 6:7-8: "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Paul was much aware of the meaning of praying without ceasing, coupled with his awareness of joy and thankfulness. One saying goes: "The best people to give advice are the ones who have been through the most." Experience does teach wisdom and provides wise counsel.

Paul the Apostle and author of First Thessalonians, was a man experienced in prayer, joy in tribulation, and thankful in spite of what was prevailing. The Thessalonian church was very young in its development and was started on Paul's second missionary journey after his prison ordeal in Philippi. The persecutors haunted his trail. He and his companions left Thessalonica in a hurry. Paul maintained contact and communicated his posture to pray for the Thessalonians and demonstrated the discipline of prayer. He joyfully declared that thanks was always being offered to God on behalf of the church and that they mention the Thessalonian church always in their prayers (1:2).

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Paul gave some careful and precise instructions to the brethren. In summary, he instructed: rejoice, be constant in prayer, and give thanks in everything. Essentially, rejoice

means to feel or show great joy or delight. Praying without ceasing is to be in constant prayer, putting everything in God's hands, and includes quick inner prayers. The believers in Acts 12:5 prayed without ceasing and Peter was delivered from death. Giving thanks in everything is not a suggestion to be casual regarding circumstances and being naïve. It's a way of holding on firmly to God's unwavering hands in which all our cares can be placed. It allows calmness in spirit. It keeps anger and bitterness at bay and prioritizes God's presence and will at all times.

We can break free through rejoicing, constant praying, and being thankful. This is more than just completing a prayer agenda. It demands a genuine spirit of rejoicing and unconditional thankfulness towards God. Sometimes when we are praying we become distant from that genuine joy and heartfelt rejoicing necessary, despite the myriad of contending issues weighed on the heart and the emotions. But, the Lord searches and tries the reins of the heart. During His surgical analysis, may we not be diagnosed with a severe spiritual heart condition weakened by spiritual nutritional deficiencies.

REFLECTION:

We can break free by frequently examining ourselves to see if we possess these disciplines of rejoicing, constant praying, and thankfulness.

Let us pray for Seventh Day Baptists in: South Korea, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda*, Ukraine, United States of America*, and Zambia*.

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