

ZUZAI HIZOKE

KEEPING *connection*

Rediscovering the
Power of Prayer

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Contents

[Dedication](#)

[Rediscovering Prayer](#)

[The Importance of Prayer](#)

[The Definition of Prayer](#)

[The Language of Prayer](#)

[The Order of Prayer](#)

[The Beauty of Prayer](#)

[The Ingredients of Prayer](#)

[Forms of Prayer](#)

[Points of Prayer](#)

[The Power of Prayer](#)

[Answers to Prayer](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

Rediscovering Prayer

In the humble but active life and ministry of Christ on earth, there is one thing that stands out: His unbroken, unwavering prayer life. So much so that, having observed Him praying, the disciples asked Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). They asked for the right thing. They could have asked for a lecture on church administration, the art of preaching or a whole list of other things. But the disciples knew what they were asking for—the power of prayer!

By asking Him to teach them to pray, the disciples asked for the key to successful ministry. Prayer will keep the work Jesus established going until His return. With and through prayer, His disciples could do everything their Master did—and more. It is only through prayer that His disciples in all ages access the same power His original 12 did.

Through prayer we keep connected to Him, the Founder of Christianity and the Source of all power that will give us true success. Jesus said, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me . . . for without Me, you can do nothing” (John 15:4, 5). Only by keeping connection with Jesus will the church succeed in its endeavours and reach its ultimate triumph.

Prayer has always had power. When, on top of the hill in Rephidim, Moses, Aaron and Hur upheld the rod before God, it was an act of prayer. As long as the rod in Moses’ hand pointed toward heaven, there was an unseen connection through faith in God and, “Israel prevailed; and when [Moses] let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” Realising this, Aaron and Hur intervened: “Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and

the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people” (Exodus 17:11–13).

As spiritual Israel, we are sure to reap the same blessings they received if only we keep that connection, through faith, in prayer to our great God. The church as a whole must recognise the significance of prayer. Hear what Ellen White has to say:

The greatest victories to the church of Christ or to the individual Christian are not those that are gained by talent or education, by wealth or favour of men. They are those victories that are gained in the audience chamber with God, when earnest, agonising faith lays hold upon the mighty arm of power.¹

What we want most is . . . heart power, prayed to God in faith for His converting power. . . .It is not brain power or purse power, but heart power, that the people need now.²

While our knowledge and wealth, our skills and abilities, and our modern technology are helpful, prayer is essential. We still need this spiritual connection with God more than anything else. Otherwise we will languish and struggle amid our wealth and technology, while wondering if the Holy Spirit of God has migrated elsewhere—particularly when we hear stories of the church and its work on fire in other places.

The church can never expect to be victorious unless all members of the church, including clergy and laity, pull together in faith—and in upholding the work and each other in prayer. By this I mean fervent prayer to our great God. He alone will give true success to the work. He does not need to prove Himself. He has already done that, beyond reasonable doubt, in both the Old and the New Testaments, and in the experience of the early Christian church. And His promises stand as beacons of hope for every generation—past, present and future. Spiritual work demands spiritual power and prayer is the key.

The story of Moses, with Aaron and Hur on the mountain, helps illustrate our need and responsibilities in several ways. Our source of strength is in God and none other. Those who need to be on the mountain must be there to keep the power ever-flowing. In the church, if the leaders slumber, the army of the living God is powerless beneath. More

importantly, remember that your pastor is only human and as such his hands sometimes get weary, like Moses' hands. We need the Aarons and the Hurs to support the pastoral team. In a sense, Aaron represents the elders and leadership team while Hur represents the church membership. We must all pull together, continually keeping connection with God and each other for the good of our church.

When it comes to keeping connection with God, Jesus set a powerful example. In the gospel accounts—from Matthew to John—we are told that it was customary for Him to find time with the Father amid His busyness. So often it was “after hours” or before dawn. Luke says; “He came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives” to pray (Luke 22: 39, RSV). The scene is the Last Supper, but the important thing to note is that He was following a custom—or a habit.

Luke records Jesus' custom at this time in the previous chapter. “Everyday he was teaching in the *temple*, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called *Olivet*. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the *temple* to hear him” (Luke 21:37, 38, RSV, emphasis added). Notice that Jesus is at the temple, then He retires to the Mount of Olives and returns to the temple the next day.

From the gospel stories, we know that Jesus was busy every day ministering—be it in the temple, the cities or the villages. Yet every day He also found time to come away from His busyness to commune with the Father. What an example! These times of connection with the Father kept the relationship intact. No wonder He found the strength to keep to the game plan and successfully complete His mission. He could say, with satisfaction: “I glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4, KJV).

As He was to ascend back to the Father, the Master extended to us the opportunity to minister: “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). We must never say we are too busy or too tired for prayer, because this is the only way forward. Following in His footsteps, we too can be successful and in the hope of hearing these words on that homecoming day, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23).

Being the Son of God, it's possible that Jesus didn't need to pray always—but He did. He is an example for us to emulate. Yet so many times we tend to justify our lack of time for prayer because we are “too busy.”

Sometimes it is even busy-ness in the Lord's work. But how can we be so busy with the Lord's work that we forget to commune with the Lord of the work? If Jesus, who was always in demand, could find the time to withdraw and make time—quality time—to commune with the Father and keep the connection strong, how much more do we fallen and feeble humans need that connection?

Too often we can be content with what we already have, which may lead us to the folly of thinking that because we already have what we need, we don't need to pray much. But having what we need—being rich in material things—is no confirmation of spiritual health. Being rich in material things but poor in spiritual realities can lead to a false sense of security. Prayer is not something those with wealth can do less and those less privileged do more often. That's dangerous!

A prayer life goes far beyond being dependent on God for whatever we may lack. Actually, a prayer life focusing on the things we want God to give us is a limited prayer life. Prayer is about our relationship with our God and the joy of being connected with each other. In any relationship, we need to communicate. This is what prayer accomplishes. We talk to God in prayer and He talks to us in a variety of ways, but especially through His Word, the Bible.

Jesus sensed the necessity to keep the connection daily. He kept in touch with His Father through an unbroken prayer life. This is much more than Him setting an example for us to follow, He was keeping their relationship strong. We all need a relationship with God and it is important to keep that relationship intact. And it doesn't matter what your social standing, your ethnic background or where you live, it comes from keeping that connection through prayer.

If Jesus, our Great Example, the Son of God, being who He was—the richest (He created everything) and the busiest (always in demand) to ever live on our planet—can find the time to put aside His busyness to commune with the Father, I am sure we have no excuses, whatever our background or commitments. Jesus treasured the relationship with His Father and practiced regular communication through prayer. Frankly, prayer is very much practice and not theory. It is to be lived, not merely preached or talked about for it is the lifeline of every Christian. Consequently, a praying Christian is a living Christian. Hence, prayer and

prayer time is to be valued. To pray is to value the One we talk to in prayer.

Prayer links heaven and earth. It links God and His children. It makes and keeps that connection between heaven and earth real. As such, prayer is a precious commodity in the spiritual arena.

Jesus once warned, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). Prayer is the key to living a victorious life in Christ. Failure to keep a prayer connection can lead to opening of the floodgates of temptations, which may lead to sin and even death as a result.

The only recorded request we have from the disciples was for Jesus to teach them to pray. Since then, many books have been written on the subject, and there have been many prayer seminars conducted. I am sure this will continue as we gain new insights into this wonderful subject and especially in the light of James’s insightful comment, “You ask [God], and do not receive, because you ask amiss” (James 4:3). Could there be a right and wrong ways of praying? Certainly, according to James. And particularly when it comes to our motives. This book is written to help discover a better way of connecting with God. However, I admit that we still have much to learn and unlearn in this area of the Christian life.

With the assistance of God’s Spirit, it is my prayer that we will be able to discover much from this small contribution. Through sincere prayer, we are brought into connection with the mind of the Infinite. We might have no strong evidence when we pray that the face of our Redeemer is bending over us in compassion and love, but this is so. We may not feel His visible touch, but His hand is upon us in love and pitying tenderness.³ We are encouraged to turn often to God in and through prayer. Through prayer, we can have our holy connection with God renewed daily.⁴ Keeping connection through prayer helps keep us true and faithful until He comes to take us home.

So first things first: Keep up with your prayer life and *Keeping Connection* will, I believe, help you achieve just that.

I pray that God will bless you as you explore this book.

In Jesus’ name. Amen!

1. Ellen White (1890), *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1958, page 203.
2. Ellen White, Letter 20, 1890.
3. Ellen White (1892), *Steps to Christ*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, page 95.
4. Roy Gane, *Altar Call*, Diadem, 1999, page 156.

Chapter 1

The Importance of Prayer

I am not a robber nor do I intend to become one. But when these intruders enter your home, office, shop or bank to rob it, often the first thing they do is cut off the communications. They cut the phone line—and take your mobile phone. They do this so that you are unable to call for the police or any other help. This gives them time to do the damage they are there for, and when you are finally able to call the police, it is too late, they are gone and you have lost what they came for.

These culprits—we call them *rascals* in Papua New Guinea—are no fools. They know that with a telephone, police will be called and they will be dealt with. Therefore, for their best convenience and your worst, they take away your ability to communicate and call for help.

As it is in the physical world, so it is in the spiritual. It is the wildest wish of the worst rascal of all—the devil—to cut off our connection with God. Through and by prayer, we commune with God, maintaining our forever relationship with Him, thanking Him, putting to Him our never-ending requests including our everyday situations and struggles with life. Prayer is so important and the devil knows this. That is why his first and foremost task is to cut off that form of communication with heaven. He knows how helpless and hopeless we are without prayer. His desire is for us to have weak or non-existent prayer lives.

How is it with your prayer life? Is it on the decline? Is it suffering? At its lowest ever? Have you lost interest in prayer? Are you giving up? Could this be because the devil is attempting to get you off heaven's phone line? If so, he is robbing you of something precious.

The Apostle Paul, a champion of prayer, admonishes us: "Pray without

ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NIV). What he is saying is this: “Pray every time, everywhere, for anything and everything. Don’t ever let a moment pass by without a prayer.”

Paul was a man of prayer. Because of this, there was power in his life’s journey—not only as a missionary, but also more so as a Christian. He knew the benefits of prayer. He knew prayer brings untold blessings in its train. No wonder, wherever he went and to whomever he would pen words of comfort and counsel, he encouraged them to pray always, at all times. He went further, assuring them that he is praying for them. His wish for his church members was to “imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Another powerful servant of the Lord, Ellen White, speaking on the necessity of prayer says, “Prayer is the breath of the soul.”¹ To appreciate the point she makes, we know that to live this physical life, we need to eat and to drink water—and it is essential that we breathe in order to live. These three are the basic necessities of human life. But we can survive without food and water for some days, if needed. Often times, as Christians, we may fast—go without food and limit our fluid intake for a period of time. I’ve done it and know we do not die doing so. In fact, the Bible encourages fasting.

Many a time in Papua New Guinea (PNG) we read in the newspapers of Kiribati fishermen being found on the shores of New Ireland in PNG, while New Irelanders are often washed ashore on the sandy shores of the tiny isles of Kiribati. In 2000, while I was studying at Pacific Adventist University (PAU), strong currents swept two Kiribati fishermen onto the shores of New Ireland. They could neither speak English nor understand PNG Pidgin English. The government authorities needed another Kiribati national to help interpret. They contacted PAU and my good friend and neighbour Daniel Langley—originally from Kiribati—assisted them. He discovered that these two fishermen had drifted on the open sea for three weeks without food and water—and survived. This story and others like it prove that humanity can survive without food and water for some time.

But it is different with air. No-one can go without oxygen for a day, a morning or even an hour. As I write this, the world record for a man holding his breath—he was underwater—is 22 minutes. He underwent strenuous preparation and practice to be able to achieve this incredible

feat. Most of us would struggle to hold our breath for more than a minute or two.

With breathing, we can never do as we do with food and water, take a deep breath in the morning, store it up and wait until early afternoon when we breathe in the next lot. No way! To do so would be signing our own death warrant.

To get a feel of what it would be like, try it out! Stop breathing for just 10 minutes. That's less than half the world record. If you are not near a clock to time yourself, just stop breathing until you get to the end of this chapter—that will probably take even less time. That is not much time, really. I know you can do it! I am a pastor, you can trust me. No, this really will not work, so please do not try it. You need to be breathing every moment in order to live well.

Just as air is a moment-by-moment necessity to our physical wellbeing so is prayer to our spiritual life. As air keeps the physical life going, so prayer keeps the spiritual life going. It is as simple as that: no air, no life; no prayer, no life! This is the point Ellen White stresses in her short, but powerful statement: "Prayer is the breath of the soul." And it blends well with Paul's command to "Pray without ceasing."

A matter of survival

We humans need prayer for our spiritual survival. Otherwise, we are starving ourselves and will eventually face spiritual death. When we are not praying enough, we can feel as if we are stagnant and hollow within. We are encouraged to pray without ceasing because prayer truly is the breath of the soul.

We are familiar with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to save a life. When a life is at stake, we must act quickly to supply oxygen. Ellen White emphasised the urgency of praying in this way: "No man is safe for a day *or a second, a minute, or an hour* without prayer."² She is saying that our spiritual survival is dependent on breathing prayer all the time. The regularity of our communion with God for our spiritual life makes sense when we pause to think of the necessity of breathing and eating for our physical life. We must constantly breathe in the life-giving air.³

This does not mean that we do away with Bible study and other spiritual activities. We need them all. Prayer does not take the place of a vibrant, regular Bible-study life, just as air is not replacements for food and water. In life, we cannot only breathe and avoid food and water. Food and water are no substitute for the air we breathe; nor is air for food and water. They each have their own functions. We need them all.

For balance in our spiritual life, we dare not live only on prayer. There are other necessities too. We need to feed on the Word of God daily. It is not enough to take our fill of the Word during the Sabbath hours and think we will survive the whole week without it, until the next Sabbath. Just as the Children of Israel received their manna every morning—on a daily basis—so are we to pick up our daily bread every morning through the study of the Word.

Feeding on the Word is actually feeding on Jesus Christ who is the manna that came down to us from above (see John 6:32–58). Consequently, He tells us that the scriptures “testify of Me” (John 5:39). And in teaching about prayer, He instructed His disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). So there is bread to pick up each day—bread for our physical lives and bread for our spiritual lives.

Imagine I have two dogs, Tiger and Spiro. I feed Tiger on a daily basis and Spiro once every week. Tell me if there would be any differences between the two dogs? Of course! Tiger, being fed every day, would be a much healthier dog. Poor Spiro, fed only once a week—well, I am sure you can imagine what his health would be like. Philip Samaan was right on target when he said, “Yesterday’s meal, no matter how ample and satisfying it was, is not sufficient for today.”⁴

Christians who expect miracles to happen on the Sabbath so they don’t have to feed themselves during the week can expect no better spiritual health than you would expect of Spiro’s physical health. We each will know where we stand in this matter. We will know if we are only putting on a show for the sake of appearance. And God knows. God knows and He can help us with this if we open up to Him.

So, when to study the Word? Early morning works well for many. In a sense, we are copying the Children of Israel when we open the Word in the mornings. They gathered the manna in the mornings (see Exodus 16:21).

We too are on an Exodus journey and having the manna—the Bread of Life—is just as important.

With prayer, however, we must not make it only a morning or evening exercise. It must be constant and consistent—a moment-by-moment exercise. That is what it means to pray without ceasing. As already noted, food and water are consumed, then there is an interval before another meal. By contrast, breathing must happen all the time. But they must all be regular:

One breath is sufficient only for that moment, and one meal is sufficient only for that day. The same thing applies to breathing in the spirit of God and feeding on His life. It must be often, regular and systematic. Today's spiritual experience is sufficient for today but tomorrow demands a new spiritual experience.⁵

How can I pray every moment? We do not necessarily need to close our eyes or be on bended knees in every situation. But we can pray when we are eating, walking, working, talking, listening or in any other engagements. Whatever our circumstances, we can still offer a silent prayer to God. For myself, even while preaching, I often do a quick silent prayer to God when I do not feel the power: "Please, Lord, empower the message." I do not need to verbalise the words for all to hear.

Ellen White says, "The Christian cannot always be in the position of prayer but his [or her] thoughts and desires can always be upward."⁶ We can have our minds lifted heavenward at all times. When something is bothering us, when we are lonely, discouraged or when we are facing a difficult problem, all we need do is lift our hearts toward heaven and meditate on heavenly things. This is what it means to be living a little of heaven on earth. It is really rewarding when, rather than dwelling on the negatives around us, we switch onto heavenly things to lighten our life. And it all happens in the mind. And it is a choice we can make—a choice to meditate on heavenly things.

Prayer makes this connection with God possible. This connection can go a long way to making our homes, our churches, our marriages and our lives a little heaven on earth.

We do not know how much we are missing out on unless we attempt it. Today is the day to begin. Prayer seminars or reading books about prayer

are helpful and give guidance, but the best way to an active prayer life is to begin praying and living a life of prayer today.

For reflection and prayer . . .

Pause for a moment and consider your life in the light of what you have just read.

How is your prayer life?

Do you think there is evidence of the devil trying to cut you off from this important “telephone link” with heaven? If so, how and when can you improve on it?

If prayer really is the “breath of the soul” as oxygen is to the physical life, how is your spiritual breathing?

Despite all that you go through, is your mind always lifted up toward heaven? After all, that is where your help comes from.

Pray that God will be with you as you read this book and seek to practice its ideas and suggestions in your own prayer life. Thank Him for the privilege of prayer and for His promise to hear us when we call to Him.

1. Ellen White (1915), *Gospel Workers*, Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1948, pages 254–5.
2. Ellen White (1911), *The Great Controversy*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950, page 530, paraphrased.
3. Philip Samaan, *Christ’s Way to Spiritual Growth*, Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1995, page 122.
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.*
6. Ellen White, *Our High Calling*, Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1961, page 161.

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