

40 DAYS OF *prayer*



THE ALLIANCE

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INTRO

Dear Alliance Family,

Welcome to 40 Days of Prayer! This prayer guide features daily devotionals and prayer prompts that are designed to lead you into the presence of God to cry out to Him in prayer and listen for His still, small voice. It's not enough to hear about prayer, read about it, or even just learn about it. During these 40 days at the beginning of 2021, we need to *engage* in prayer—to perhaps do so with a frequency, fervency, and focus that is not normal for us. Lord, teach us to pray!

Look around at all that is happening in our nation and world. 2020 was a year like no other. It's time to pray! Could it be that this 40 Days of Prayer could change us, change our prayer lives, change The Alliance, and even help transform our nation and world? Let's step into this prayer experience with the anticipation that we will encounter the living God. Let's pray with a spirit of expectancy that the Spirit of God will do great things in, among, and through us to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Keep the faith!



Terry D. Smith
Vice President for Church Ministries



THE ALLIANCE

40 DAYS OF *prayer*

WEEK 1

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Our focus during this first week is on the Person of God and His attributes. Our Triune God is perfect in holiness and in all of His other attributes. As we see Him for who He is, see Him in the fullness of His glory, may we be drawn to a posture of worship before Him. He is perfectly worthy!

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THE ETERNALNESS OF GOD

MITCH KIM

The promises of God are guaranteed by His own eternal name. When Moses doubts God's promise to bring Israel out of Egypt, God guarantees His word by saying, "I will be with you" (Exod. 3:12a). He then signs that promissory note with His name, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:14). He is an eternal God—not an "I WAS" of the past nor an "I WILL BE" of the future but the great "I AM"—always present in our every area of need. No wonder "I AM" becomes the personal name of God in the Old Testament, the LORD.

Obstacles to God's promises are opportunities to draw on His guarantees and learn new facets of His name. When Israel faced bitter water and cried out to the LORD, He sweetened the water and revealed Himself as ". . . the Lord, who heals you" (Exod. 15:26b). When they are overwhelmed in battle and lifted up in prayer, they overcome and realize, "The LORD is my Banner" (Exod. 17:15). When the Israelites sin with the golden calf and plead for mercy, they are forgiven and discover "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6). Every challenge they faced became a fresh encounter with new facets of the LORD's name.

Therefore, we do not fear our challenges. Instead we cry out to the LORD, the eternal God, who is big enough for our problems. Because God is eternal, the riches of His resources never run dry for our troubles. We do not only look forward to seeing His deliverance but also to learning more fully new facets of His name. What new facets of the LORD's name will He reveal through your challenges today?



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Praise God by speaking His names.
2. Thank God that problems are opportunities to encounter new facets of His presence.
3. Commit your problems to Him today so you may see His deliverance and experience more of His presence.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

JESSIE RITCHEY

Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed (Rev. 15:4).

While growing up, I was surrounded by adults who often coupled God's holiness with an emphasis on His otherness. Stories relating to His wrath and destruction seemed to further underscore a distance from humanity. In a young child's mind, this boiled down to an oversimplified and inaccurate formula: holy = far off.

Therefore, it was a delight to mature into the understanding that while God's holiness is irrevocably linked to His eternal power and glory, it permeates all He is and does. This is not a characteristic that exists solely to be displayed and admired from a distance. Rather, His holiness is linked and compellingly displayed in a sustained posture of leaning toward His creation in pursuit of relationship with us. He is not a holy God who stands far off but one who:

- Comes down in the cool of the evening to walk in the garden and talk;
- Speaks to Moses from a burning bush and completely redirects his life;
- Leads, accompanies, and protects the Israelites in the form of fire and cloud;
- Sends detailed artistic instructions for the tabernacle and comes to dwell with His people;
- Takes on the limitations of a human body to assure us He is indeed acquainted with our grief;
- Provides His Holy Spirit to lead us into the pursuit of deeper relationship with Him;
- Empowers us to pattern our lives after His holiness; and
- Chooses us as conduits of His holiness as we connect with those around us.

God's holiness can flow through every area of our lives as it motivates, propels, discerns, convicts, reaches, and impacts.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Show me what aspects of my life are far off from Your holiness.
2. How would You have me serve as a conduit of Your holiness and to whom?
3. Remind me of Your holy and faithful posture of leaning toward me.

THE LOVE OF GOD

THOMAS GEORGE

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 Jn. 4:7–8).

The word “love” seems so common. People want it, proclaim it easily, and lose it just as quickly. It seems to be everywhere and nowhere, and its definition varies widely. Scripture, however, is very specific in its use of the word. God is particular in using the word “agape” when talking about Himself. Agape is a defining characteristic of God—what He does comes out of who He is.

Below are three characteristics of agape love.

Agape is unchanging: It is commitment-based love. God does have feelings for us, but agape love is not based on a feeling. It is much stronger and more robust, a higher order love with no expiration date. He does not get bored or change His mind. He does not fall out of love with His creation or His people.

Agape is not transactional: God was not waiting for us to perform to His standards to love us. His love is not based on your earning potential or goodness. God declares you valuable and good.

Agape is active: His love is not just talk. He sent His Son to die for us. He is not distant; He is in our messes. He is forming, shaping, rescuing, restoring, growing. He is patient, long suffering, committed, self-sacrificing, and altruistic, even when we are stubborn and resistant. God is creating agape love inside of you for Him and for others.

The “I Am” is Agape.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. How does this kind of love affect my life?
2. How can I love others this way?

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

MATT COHEN

Few topics have produced more theological debate than the doctrine of God's sovereignty. But long before it was a subject of debate, it fueled the fire of worship among Christians. In the original Greek, Ephesians 1:3–14 is a long sentence with one big idea: **Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!**

But why? Why should we glorify God with our lips and our lives? Let's look for a moment at all the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has done, by His sovereign grace, for all who are in Christ. God "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (verse 3b). God "chose us in him before the creation of the world" (verse 4). In love, God "predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (verse 5). Because of the riches of God's grace, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (verse 7). God "made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ . . . to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head" (verses 9–10). God "predestined [us] according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (verse 11). God sealed us with "the promised Holy Spirit . . . guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (verses 13–14). And God did it all to the praise of His glory.

God's sovereignty is the fuel that lights the fire of His people's praises. God has saved us by sovereign grace. Let us praise Him!



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Begin your prayer time by praising God for the spiritual blessings God has lavished upon you in Christ (Ephesians 1:3–14). Consider rewriting this passage as a prayer of adoration and thanksgiving.
2. Confess any ways that you've lived in "functional unbelief" about God's sovereignty and goodness. For example, "Father, I confess I've been giving in to fear because I haven't trusted You to work all things according to the counsel of Your will."
3. Ask the Father to give you strength to comprehend "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Eph. 3:18). Pray this for yourself, your family, church, community, and our world.

THE OMNISCIENCE/OMNIPOTENCE/OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD CRAIG SMITH

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps. 139:23–24).

Psalm 139 celebrates God's attributes—His *omniscience*, *omnipotence*, and *omnipresence*. Affirming these realities, the psalmist models for us how to pray in alignment with them.

Based on God's omniscience, he opens himself to God's all-knowing scrutiny. Such an intimate review of any of us can reveal deep, hidden secrets that are already fully known to Him. The psalmist subjects himself to such scrutiny with a heartfelt willingness to repent as needed, knowing God's omnipotence makes Him the only One who can fully forgive and deliver us from sin. He is powerful enough not only for our needs but also the needs of all others for whom we pray.

Because God is everywhere, the psalmist can trust Him to lead him in paths that He ordains for him because He is already there. God's omnipresence closes the distance gap between us and those we are interceding for, even if a world apart. Oceans may separate us from our international missionary force or from family living miles away. Regardless, God is right there with us as we pray—and with those we are praying for! This allows for intimate, productive praying that reaps results.



PRAYER POINTS:

- 1.** As we pray, let's begin with full surrender to God's scrutiny of our lives. Opening ourselves up to an all-knowing God does not provide Him with new information! Such transparency welcomes Him to cleanse, fill, and empower us for holy living.
- 2.** God is capable of doing exceedingly above all we can ask or think. Knowing this should embolden us to pray with divinely inspired confidence. Affirming God's omnipotence in prayer moves His hand in the lives of those we intercede for, as much as it does in our own.
- 3.** May God's omnipresence encourage our hearts and move us toward deeper intimacy with Him and those we are interceding for, regardless of distance. His omnipresence will offer those we pray for the strength to endure until the answer comes.

THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF GOD

JEN ASHBY

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (Js. 1:17).

At the end of the high ropes course at a camp I was attending, the final task was to leap from a platform about 30' high and grab a swinging trapeze bar with both hands. When I jumped, I made contact with the bar but didn't get a grip. I felt the safety harness jerk and was suddenly upside down, feet in the air, slowly swaying and twisting. To say I was disoriented would be an understatement, and I had no idea how to right myself or this situation. The young camp staffer on the platform called down to me, "Ma'am, put your feet down." I did so and was instantly flipped upright before being lowered to the ground. Soon my feet were on solid ground again.

Change is constantly coming our way. Earlier in this passage, James says that just as the blossom withers, worldly riches fade (verse 11). He mentions the heavenly lights, sun, and moon, whose shadows are constantly shifting (verse 17). Sometimes change, especially if unexpected or unwanted, feels like a jerk on the safety harness, leaving us upside down, feet in the air, and disoriented. This passage is a call to "put your feet down" on the One who does not change. He is the Father, Creator of the heavenly lights, and He does not change. He is immutable. Nothing jerks Him upside down, and when we are, we can "put our feet down" and find ourselves standing on solid ground again. We do this by continually placing our faith in the truth of who God is, confident in His consistent, unchanging character and promises.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Acknowledge to God any ways that change or other circumstances have left you feeling disoriented.
2. Ask God to show you if you've been looking for stability or security in anything other than Him.
3. "Put your feet down" by praising and thanking God for being the solid ground that does not change.

THE MERCY AND GRACE OF GOD

GARY FRIESEN

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities (Ps. 103:8–10).

God delights in extending mercy and grace to His deeply loved children.

More than 20 years ago, I received a call from a friend in another state who was a chaplain in a juvenile prison. He was calling about a 22-year-old prisoner who, at the age of 16, had murdered a gang member who had threatened his life. While in prison, he had responded to the gospel and been discipled by my friend. Because the young man was sentenced as a juvenile, the law now required that he be released. Gang members threatened to kill him if he remained in the area. So, my friend called to arrange for the young man to stay with friends near my home.

Several days later I picked him up from the airport and brought him home. Over dinner that night he told the remarkable story of his conversion and shared how God had miraculously arranged for him to take an internship, working with youth at a church in a nearby city. This young man's experience of God's grace was tangible. He knew that he deserved a lifetime in prison, not a new life, a new job, and freedom.

And this is true for each of us. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Like this young man freed from a prison sentence he fully deserved, we all live in the undeserved freedom of God's grace and mercy provided through Christ.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Thank God for specific ways He has extended His grace to you.
2. Ask God to reveal to you where you can share with others the grace God has extended to you.
3. Pray for those close to you who desperately need to daily experience His mercy and grace through our Lord Jesus.

40 DAYS OF *prayer*

WEEK 2

REPENTANCE—TURNING FROM OUR UNHOLINESS

This week, we will allow the spotlight to turn inward. As we pray, we will open our lives to a deep search and cleansing by the Holy Spirit. While repenting of our own sinful attitudes and behaviors, we will also pray prayers of repentance for our nation, which has turned away from God and His truth and has not valued the precious gift of life.

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THE HOLY SPIRIT'S CONVICTION

LANTZIA C. THAO

We live in a sinful world and have fallen short of God's standard. As Christians, this reality affects us as it did the prophet Isaiah when he saw God and exclaimed, "Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (6:5a). It is the work and conviction of the Holy Spirit that brings us to such a realization. In 1 Thessalonians 1:4–7 Paul shed light on this truth, describing how the gospel first came to the believers "with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction" (5a). Although they were suffering severely, the Holy Spirit helped them to welcome the gospel with joy. As a result, they "became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (7).

As the Body of Christ, we are now in great need of the Holy Spirit's conviction in our lives, our churches, our districts, and the C&MA. He is our helper in convicting our community, our country, and our world regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment (see John 16:8). Therefore, let us spend time conversing with God, seeking His direction and conviction of our sins, or unholiness, in the following areas.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Ask God to show you what He wants you to do regarding yourself and your church.
2. Ask Him to show our district superintendents what to do regarding our districts.
3. Ask God to show our C&MA president and his staff what to do regarding our denomination.

PERSONAL EXAMINATION

JEN SCHEPENS

Personal examination is a powerful tool to see where our lives don't align with God's holiness. It can highlight areas in which we can welcome the Spirit's deep, transforming work. Psalm 139 highlights three truths to deepen our personal examination in prayer.

Read Psalm 139:1–6. *You are known.* No matter where you are in your faith journey, you have a history with God. He has been present in your story. He has searched you and is with you regardless of your circumstances.

Read Psalm 139:7–16. *You are seen.* God's presence brings light, which illuminates what is hidden and reveals truth. When you truly see who God is, you are ready to see the truth of who you are—one He has created and knit together in the womb.

Read Psalm 139:17–24. *Search me.* Now step out in humility and ask for God's scrutiny. He knows you, sees you, and has created you. Ask for His revelation as you personally examine anything preventing you from living out your identity as His creation.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Welcome the Lord into this moment, this place, and acknowledge His presence. Trace your journey to this point and recall how God has been with you. Where have you seen Him before? How has He been present? How has He already worked in you?
2. Welcome the Spirit's illuminating presence to bring light to the dark spaces in your soul. Using verse 14, take a moment to praise and worship your Creator.
3. Pray verses 23 and 24, asking God to reveal any offensive way in you. What came to mind as you prayed those words? Ask God to reveal what is hidden. Pray that the Spirit will show you areas that are not aligned with how God created you.

UNCONFESSED SIN

KEN BALDES

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26).

I have often thought of unconfessed sin as like stepping on a garden hose that prevents the fast flow of water. How many times have you had to stop what you're doing to remove the kink in the hose so more water could flow freely? Ezekiel provides another vivid picture of unconfessed sin in chapter 36. He contrasts a heart of stone with a heart of flesh. Take some time today to read Ezekiel 36:22–38.

In Psalm 51, David gives us helpful words in verse 2: “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” As we begin 2021, would you prayerfully consider fixing any kinks in your life's hose between your heart and God's heart so the Holy Spirit can flow more fully in your life? A broken and contrite (repentant) heart (see Psalm 51:17) will produce a tender heart toward God and others.

Over time, unconfessed sin results in a calloused heart to the things that matter most to God. As we ponder this sobering reality, here are three questions to ask yourself (and perhaps discuss with your church's leadership).



PRAYER POINTS:

1. What am I indifferent to that needs to be confessed? Have I, perhaps unknowingly, developed a heart of stone toward the unborn who die through abortion; the injustices around me that I remain silent about; or the marginalized people in my community whom I pass or forget about because they live “over there”? January 17 is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday and provides an opportunity in a few days to corporately repent for the sin of abortion.
2. What pride in my life or lack of dependence on God do I need to confess?
3. What step of obedience is being thwarted because of unconfessed sin in my life that may result in not clearly hearing the voice of the Lord?

SECRET SIN/HIDDEN SIN

TED KANG

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins (1 John 1:9).

“Faithful” and “just”—isn’t it strange to find these two words in one sentence? I’d much prefer to have God’s faithfulness than justice when it comes to my sins. Divine mercy is a profound mystery. In every confession of our wrongs, a transaction takes place on that old rugged cross—a transaction where God keeps His end of the bargain to be faithful, while our Savior takes the blow of God’s ruthless justice. Confession is the Father’s gracious gift to His children. It is the key that unlocks every shackle of guilt and shame that separates us from God and from one another.

As children, my brother and I would play with an antique Omega watch that belonged to my late grandfather. One day, play turned into fight, destroying this family heirloom. I managed to convince my younger brother that he was responsible for this crime. Then I made him an offer he couldn’t resist. We put what was left of the watch back in the drawer and kept the transgression a secret. For the next several weeks, I turned him into my personal slave. When he refused to serve me, all I had to do was point at my wrist as a reminder of my mercy. This went on for weeks until he got so tired of being held hostage that he decided to come clean. He tearfully confessed to my grandmother that he had broken the watch. I will never forget what I heard that day. With a gentle smile, my grandmother said, “I know. I’ve just been waiting for you to tell me.” One confession set him free.

Our Father calls us to confession, not because He is ignorant of our wrongs, but because our shame and guilt keep us from coming to Him boldly.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Let us each come clean before God today.
2. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will restore the purity of His Church.
3. Let us pray that the Alliance family will be a light in spiritually dark places.

STRONGHOLDS THAT NEED TO BE BROKEN **DAVID AND TY KING**

Strongholds usually begin with nothing more than a glance away from the face of Christ toward something or someone else. Over time this substitute (whether entertainment, relationships, money, approval, addictions, unforgiveness) becomes a controlling influence in our hearts, hindering our pilgrimage with Jesus. It grows like a spiritual cancer, killing the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us. It's an idol on steroids, and the issue is always Lordship.

Use the prayer below as you sit in God's presence to evaluate your heart and discern any strongholds. Remember, your Father is waiting with open arms. The ring and the robe are ready. Run home.



PRAYER POINTS:

Lord Jesus, I quiet myself in Your presence and choose to submit to You as my Savior and Lord. I ask that You open the closed-off places in my heart and expose them to the light of the Holy Spirit. Reveal all strongholds and heal me.

- 1.** Where I am blind to my own sin, restore my sight, for only You can bring healing to the hidden places of my heart. (Pause and confess those things that the Holy Spirit brings to mind.)
- 2.** Where I have allowed the enemy to steal Your work in my life, I now take my stand in Jesus' name and authority, taking back the stolen ground. (Continue to pray as led by the Holy Spirit.)
- 3.** I ask, Father, for complete freedom in every area of my life. Fill me afresh with the Holy Spirit so I will be strengthened to stand firm and become more like Jesus. Renew my hunger for Your Word and holiness.
- 4.** I choose now to throw off the sin that has entangled me and once again fix my eyes on Jesus Christ, my only Lord. Amen (see Romans 6:19; Luke 15:11-31; Galatians 5:16; Isaiah 29:13; 1 Peter 2:24-25; Galatians 5:1; James 5:16; Hebrews 12:1-2).

UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS

KAREN GUSTAFSON

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (Rom. 14:19).

Conflict can exist wherever there are people, and whether we like it or not, we all will face interpersonal tensions. When confronting difficulties in a relationship, as in any threatening situation, our initial reaction is often to fight or flee. Fighting can look like accusing the other person or group, attacking their character or motives while defending our own actions. Fleeing can look like withdrawing from interactions with the person involved or cutting them off emotionally. (Certainly in dangerous situations, safety may require distance.) These options, however, leave conflicts unresolved, relationships harmed or broken, and our own soul agitated or cold.

Jesus took unresolved conflict seriously and taught another way. He told us in Mark 11:25 that when we pray and hold anything against anyone, we need to forgive and also receive forgiveness. In Matthew 5:23–24, Jesus instructed us to seek out reconciliation when we go to worship while knowing someone has something against us. In both passages, Jesus links our prayer and worship with the need to resolve interpersonal conflict. No matter how the conflict started, Jesus wants us to take steps to make peace as far as possible (see Romans 12:18).

Not every relationship problem will end the way we desire, but the steps we take will open the possibility for resolution, bring peace to our souls, and give us joy in fellowship with the Lord. May we make every effort to promote peace in these difficult situations and build each other up.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. What conflict is still unsettled or causes unrest in my soul?
2. Who may be feeling that I have offended them (whether justified or not)?
3. What steps is the Lord asking me to take, making every effort to bring peace to these situations?

GOD'S FAITHFUL FORGIVENESS

JASON KIM

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (Jn. 1:9).

As believers we experience two kinds of repentance: one that ushers the natural man from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of light and one that restores the sin-laden disciple to whiter-than-snow purity.

Many Christians live as though God's forgiving grace applies primarily—if not only—to the “first” repentance—the act of justification at conversion. We offer eternal gratitude for this metamorphic act of salvation while often overlooking our desperate need for His daily mercy and forgiveness as we stumble into sin.

This verse brings two simple truths to light that are essential to our ongoing spiritual growth and renewal: (1) Christians—no matter how devout—continue to sin; and (2) God the Father, because of His boundless love for us, made allowance for our transgressions through His Son's shed blood—the source of a vast flowing fountain of grace that washes away ALL our sins.

So, what should we do when we fall? John admonishes us to confess our sins to Jesus—who promises to forgive and purify. We simply need to trust in His faithfulness and take His promise at its word.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Using Psalm 139:33-34 as your prayer, ask God to help reveal your current sinful behavior.
2. Acknowledge and confess these sins, asking for Christ's forgiveness.
3. Give thanks for His faithfulness and celebrate the purity He restores through His shed blood.

40 DAYS OF *prayer*

WEEK 3

SPIRIT EMPOWERMENT/FULLNESS

Having now turned from things that were grieving and quenching the Spirit, in this week we prayerfully welcome His fullness and power. May there be a sense of hunger and holy desperation as we pray for a fresh outpouring and infilling of the Holy Spirit on our lives and in our churches. Come, Holy Spirit!

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THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

KRISY MAXEY

The Holy Spirit is introduced in Genesis 1. Throughout the Old Testament we see the Spirit moving with power among God's people. In the gospels, John the Baptist declared there is One more powerful who will come. "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 1:8).

In John 14–16 Jesus introduced the "Alongsider" (*paraclete* means "called to one's side"), raising high expectations of the One coming after Him. After the Resurrection, Jesus spoke again about this promised gift. ". . . in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4, 5).

But it wasn't until Jesus had been gone for 50 days that the Holy Spirit blew through the small band of followers, baptizing them with miraculous *dunamis* ("power to do"). Acts tells compellingly of a new power for living the gospel—preaching, helping the disadvantaged, worshiping, praying, and healing. And when we meet Paul on his third missionary journey about 20 years later, he's in the city of Ephesus with a group of believers. "Hey guys! Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? No? You haven't even heard of Him? Let me introduce you!" (see Acts 19:1–6). And the Holy Spirit came with power just as Christ promised.

A thrilling expectation accompanies these introductions. The Holy Spirit flames uniquely before us in truth, advocacy, comfort, and power. Come! Meet this Person yourself; Jesus longs to baptize you.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Reflect on how you first met Jesus. Thank the Holy Spirit for the hunger planted in you, and remember key growth points since that time. Then enjoy the memory of your "second baptism." Spend time in gratefulness and joy.
2. If you don't have a clear moment when you were filled by the Spirit, declare your desire to meet Him. Position your body to indicate your openness (open your hands, kneel, etc.).
3. Pray the following: "Come, Holy Spirit, as the transforming Alongsider promised by Jesus. Grow my capacity to receive all I need from You. Transform my comprehension; instruct me in truth; comfort and strengthen me; fill me with an ability to introduce You to others. I want to know You. I desire to be transformed by You. Come!"

THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER JAMES CHUNG

In Ezekiel 1, the prophet had lost his country, his career as a priest, and his future. The hand of God was upon him in a foreign land. He then saw a heavenly vision of four living creatures—each had the face of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (see Ezekiel 1:10). The lion is the king of the beasts, the ox the king of livestock, the eagle the king of the sky, and the human the king of all creatures. Later, Ezekiel saw the Lord enthroned in all His glory. He fell on his face.

When the apostle John was imprisoned in Patmos, he too saw four living creatures while in the Spirit: one like a lion, the second like an ox, the third with a face like a man, and the fourth like an eagle, worshipping the one on the throne (see Revelation 4:7). Like Ezekiel, John fell as though dead.

We've also seen God's glory in our journey. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). Jesus is the glory of the Father, and the cross was the climax of His glory. We have all seen His glory in the cross. We fell at His feet and wept in the presence of the Spirit.

The apostle Paul said, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Recall a moment you wept in the presence of the Spirit. Ask the Lord to open your heart, then pour out your heart and share with the Lord your feelings.
2. Declare to the Lord the words from your soul to bring Him what He deserves.
3. Express your deep desire and longing to see His glory in the presence of the Spirit.

OUR BATTLE WITH THE OLD NATURE

PETER BURGO

We've all seen the classic horror scene with the hand reaching from the grave to snag an unsuspecting soul back into the depths. While it's easy to dismiss this macabre imagery as the fabrication of a fright-mongering filmmaker, we can't as easily dismiss the reality that the old man we "put to death" often reaches from the grave to try to drag us back.

Therein lies the trap that leaves us vulnerable and unsuspecting: our mistaken assumption that the old man will rest in his banished torment and cease to be a threat. Scripture offers a threefold warfare plan to help us avoid ambush.

Be watchful. 1 Peter 5:8

Our old, sinful nature—along with the enemy who arouses it—lies in wait for any opportunity to strike. Like a predator seeking its prey, it launches its attacks when we are tired, weak, and vulnerable. Jesus warned His disciples of this in that crucial hour (see Matthew 26:41).

Suit up for daily battle. Ephesians 6:10–18

Although it's true that Jesus conquered sin and death once and for all, He still leads us into daily battle to retain—and sometimes reclaim—the territory He won. The armor He furnished us is to be kept battle ready and donned daily—not left rusting in a closet to be hastily retrieved after the enemy has already stormed the gates.

Dwell in protected territory. Psalm 91

Although our battle-readiness sometimes requires that we advance into enemy territory to reclaim a hill, we must always retreat back to the place of protection and restoration: Our *Refuge. Mighty Fortress. Strong Tower. Hiding Place*. The soul finds its rest—and its righteousness—in the shadow of the Almighty.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Read 1 Peter 5:8, asking the Lord to keep you watchful throughout the day.
2. Read Ephesians 6:10-18 and put on the full armor piece by piece as you pray.
3. Read Psalm 91, reflecting on how His shadow protects you from the "old nature."

THE FAILURE OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT

JOHN STUMBO

God has a long history of telling His people He wants them to do and be what He knows they can't do or be. He often places us in positions where we see our need of Him. Why? Because He knows we will experience Him most fully when we realize we need Him most completely.

His call contrasts common human thinking. "Be all you can be. Believe in yourself and unleash your full potential." Such teaching has become so common we may not recognize its error.

The Bible teaches we are at our best not by discovering our human potential but in discovering our human limitation—believing that a divine source is available to us.

From my vantage point, the U.S. evangelical church has a decent understanding of salvation but a poor one of sanctification. Many Christians give their lives to Christ in faith but think they can live their lives for Him by works. We typically believe in sanctification by works. We delight that we are saved by grace but then despair, attempting to achieve sanctification by effort.

My brothers and sisters—be encouraged. The entrance to salvation and the pathway of sanctification are the same: humble dependence upon and faith in the One who saves and sanctifies us.

Yes, we participate. We respond, believe, accept, trust. But we don't control or contrive.

The sanctified life is not passive ("I have no participation), nor is it a life of initiation ("It's up to me to get this right"). It is a life of cooperation: "I yield to the influence of the Holy Spirit in my life."



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Be thankful that God desires to live His life through us by His Spirit (see John 7:37-39).
2. Welcome the Spirit to fill you and grant you everything you need to do what He calls you to do and be who He desires you to be (see 2 Peter 1:3).

FULLY SURRENDERED

KELVIN WALKER

Galatians 5:25 is a challenging verse: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” It’s challenging because keeping in step with the Spirit requires surrender. No one likes that word. To me, it means giving up control. And I don’t like to be controlled by anyone.

Yet living a Spirit-filled life means daily coming to terms with and willingly surrendering to the Spirit’s control in my life. Here’s the beautiful thing. For every moment that I surrender to the Spirit, He promises a fresh outpouring and filling of Himself. And, as I am filled with the Spirit, He provides the empowerment I need to keep in step with Him.

In recent years, God has been using one question to let me know it’s time for a fresh outpouring of His Spirit: “Do I have your ‘yes’ no matter the outcome?” Each time He asks that question, I know that my “yes” will require surrendering my control to the leading and voice of the Holy Spirit. Yet each time I say yes, I receive a fresh outpouring of the Spirit that empowers me to keep in step with Him and to live my life in Him as He lives His life through me.

That same empowerment is available to you. It begins with a simple phrase of surrender: “Yes, Lord . . . no matter the outcome, I say yes to You.”

Fully surrendered—Lord, I am Thine;
Fully surrendered, Savior divine!
Live Thou Thy life in me;
All fullness dwells in Thee;
Not I, but Christ in me.
—From “Fully Surrendered,” by Alfred C. Snead



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Prayerfully consider your current life situation. Do you see areas where you are out-of-step with the Spirit? If so, confess those and surrender them to His control.
2. Welcome in prayer a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on your life.
3. Can you truly say that God has your “yes” in everything He’s asking you to do? If not, sincerely give it to Him as you pray through your life this week.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

TERRY SMITH

The Holy Spirit comes to live in us when we trust Jesus as Savior. Before this, we had only the sin nature, or the flesh, in us. It is the Spirit who brings to life within us the new nature. However, the flesh is not pulled out by its roots. In this life, both natures will always be in us. The Spirit and the flesh are in conflict, and both want control.

How do we overcome the influence of the flesh? In The Alliance we believe the answer comes in both a decisive and ongoing surrender to the Spirit. In Galatians 5, when Paul calls us to live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit, he's referring to our ongoing daily experience of welcoming the Spirit's control and experiencing the fullness of His power (see Galatians 5:16, 25).

Paul depicts the Christian life as a step-by-step walk in which we seek the Spirit's strength and direction for our small daily choices and big life-decisions. I walk almost every morning. The path I take and the turns I make control my destination. In the Christian life, allowing the Spirit to direct our steps each day enables us to experience life in such a way that we look more and more like Jesus.

Even if we had a transformative experience with the Spirit in our past, we must ask ourselves if we're living under the Spirit's control right now. If so, we'll find ourselves increasingly overcoming attitudes and behaviors that marked our old way of life—and experiencing the freedom and fullness of new life in Jesus.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Acknowledge your inability to overcome the flesh.
2. Pray daily to surrender your whole life to the fullness and control of the Holy Spirit.
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you areas of your life that are not Christlike—then ask for His power to change.

THE SPIRIT'S POWER FOR MINISTRY JONATHAN SCHAEFFER

The Bible is full of amazing promises. Have we considered how many of those are conditional? God forgives us . . . when we confess our sins to Him (see 1 John 1:9). He blesses us . . . when we honor our parents (see Ephesians 6:1–3). God guides us . . . when we acknowledge Him in all our ways (Proverbs 3:5–6). There is something God asks of us.

The same is true if we want to experience daily the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells His followers, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn. 14:23). This is one of the most remarkable promises in the Bible—He actually comes to live in us. What’s the condition for experiencing that most fully? Obedience to Jesus’ teaching. Peter puts it this way: “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:32).

The Spirit is a gift from the Father, received by grace. There is a sense in which He has freedom to influence us, empower us, and work in our lives—when we obey Him. We surrender, boldly follow, and relinquish anything that displeases Jesus. We could say it this way: Our level of obedience determines our level of blessability. This kind of obedience isn’t mere religious duty. Jesus says we want to please Him because we love Him.

Do you want Him to work powerfully in you and through you? By His grace and power, commit today to obey Jesus in every area of your life.



PRAYER POINTS:

1. Lord, thank You for keeping Your promises to actually take up residence in me.
2. I confess anything that threatens my relationship with You. Cleanse me so You are completely at home in my life.
3. Empower me to walk in obedience to You so I can be fully “blessable” and serve as Your instrument wherever and however You want to use me today.