



# *Always Pray in the Spirit*

**10<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**

Genesis 1:1-5 | Psalm 29:1-4, 11 | Acts 19:1-7 | Mark 1:4-11

## **Main Point:**

From our baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit affirms our communion with our heavenly Father, thus empowering us with confidence in our prayer life.

## **Intro |**

I have just returned from a week by the beach where, everyday, I walked across the sand to watch the waves rolling into the shoreline.

Naturally enough, as I watched others on the beach, my thoughts went to our next series on prayer. I began to see the similarities between people's enjoyment of the seaside and the various approaches people take to prayer.

Prayer is a lot like venturing into the sea. For some, they enter tentatively, they feel ill-equipped and uncomfortable. The dangers of the sea weigh heavily; they know only too well the predators that lurk deep in its waters. They anchor themselves in the sand, daring to go no further than the wavelets along the edge. They are like those who are cautious in their prayers. They are the controllers of their prayer experience.

Others are a little bolder. They wade further out. They want to dive into the water and feel the thrill of waves breaking over their heads. Still, they advance with caution, constantly checking to stay between the flags. These are the pray-ers who desire to learn more about the prayer experience, their desire calls them to watch and read about those who have gone deeper in their prayer experience.

Still others, like my sons, are totally at home in a tumultuous sea, grabbing surfboards and flippers to paddle further and further out. Then they wait, and they wait, always watching for the next huge wave, with its tremendous, unseen power, upon which they ride back to shore. Likewise, there are those who embrace prayer as an adventure, delighting in the sheer joy of communicating with their Heavenly Father.

How might our Bible passages fit with my thinking about prayer?

All of today's passages focus on the role of the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus ventures into the water – not to go swimming, but to ‘fulfil all righteousness’ (Matthew 3:15) for, as he succumbs to the waters, He rises to new life in the power of the Spirit. As His heavenly Father affirm His identity as His beloved Son, He is empowered for His earthly ministry.

In like fashion, the Holy Spirit is essential to our prayer relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Sadly, rational thinking takes precedence in today’s world; logic, reason and intelligence are used to navigate situations and problems, and the Spirit of God is ignored. But God’s word reminds us of our critical dependence on the Spirit of God:

Without God’s Spirit we cannot live – God’s breath sustains our physical life. (Genesis 2:7, Job 33:4, 27:3, Genesis 6:3, Acts 17:25)

Without God’s Spirit we will not desire God nor want to form a relationship with Him – God’s Spirit is always the initiator of humanity’s quest for the divine. (Philippians 2:13, Romans 3:11)

Without God’s Spirit we will never understand the truth of God’s Word – it is the Spirit alone which brings understanding. (John 14:26, 16:12-25, 1 Corinthians 2:13-14)

Without God’s Spirit we cannot hope to communicate with God, let alone establish a prayer life which fosters that communion. (John 4:24)

So, God’s Spirit is as essential to our spiritual life as oxygen to our physical life.

Although Jesus earthly ministry began at his baptism, it does not mean He did nothing for the first thirty years of His life. Indeed, at the age of 12, Jesus surprised his parents saying, “Did you not know I must be in my father’s house?” (Luke 2:49) for He had already developed a unique relationship with His Father through prayer. Every aspect of Jesus’ earthly ministry was grounded in His prayer relationship with His Heavenly Father.

And so it is for us.

The Bible passages provokes three questions as to how we might grow our prayer lives:

1. Why is the Holy Spirit essential to our prayer life?
2. What does the Holy Spirit bring to our prayer life?
3. What do we gain when we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our prayer life?

**Point 1: The Holy Spirit is essential in our prayer life, for it is through the Spirit alone that we worship and fellowship with God.**

Jesus taught, **“God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth.”** (John 4:24) Prayer and worship are intertwined; they are of the same spirit.

The Apostle Paul knew prayer to be an all-encompassing experience; urging us **“to pray in the Spirit, on all occasions, in all kinds of prayer”** (Ephesians 6:18). When Paul calls for us to ‘pray in the spirit, he contrasts it with how other religions pray: ‘prayer in the flesh’ is the opposite of ‘prayer in the Spirit’.

Yet, at times, even believers pray in the flesh. We mutter words we don’t understand; we mindlessly repeat words so quickly forgotten; we push on despite feeling no connection with our

Heavenly Father. Our feeble attempts propel us even more to draw upon prayers that seem to us to be more religious, more pleasing to God.

Yet, our feeble attempts reveal one thing. They reflect a desire for the liveliness that only the Spirit gives in prayer. Of course, our Heavenly Father hears our calling to Him, no matter how feebly, for He loves His children.

However, God does not act on prayers offered in the flesh.

Why? We look to our second question, 'What does the Holy Spirit bring to our prayer life?'

**Point 2: The Holy Spirit brings communion and fellowship with our heavenly Father, 'carrying us along' in our prayer experience.**

John Chapter 6 verse 63 tells us the flesh, or human effort, profits nothing. So, if praying in the flesh is the counterfeit or imitation of praying in the Spirit, what is prayer in the Spirit?

Let us think back to venturing into the sea. Dive into a wave and immediately you experience the power of that which is greater than any human.

Praying in the flesh is like swimming against the tide, you are the one pushing the words forward; it is hard work, done out of a sense of duty.

Praying in the Spirit is like riding a wave, you feel carried along by the Spirit; it is thrilling and life-giving for only the Spirit brings life. Praying in the Spirit means we join with the Holy Spirit as He fulfils His role as our intercessor, giving our heart-felt desires to the Father in the name of Jesus (Romans 8:26-27).

Just as my sons depend on the power of the waves to drive them forward, praying in the Spirit means submitting to the power of the Spirit to carry our requests into the throne room of God. There is joy in the certainty of being in God's presence.

However, there are also times when God's mighty power seems to be carrying us along in ways we do not understand. These are the times when the Spirit is ready to help us in our weakness and to intercede for us according to the will of God (see again Romans 8:26-27).

So we come to the big question. How do we move from paddling in the shallow waters of prayer to being carried along by the Spirit of God in prayer?

**Point 2 | Praying in the Spirit has three steps:**

- (1) Admit our desperate need of the Spirit of God**
- (2) Cultivate a relationship with our Heavenly Father**
- (3) Experience the surety of God's promises**

**Step One: Admit our inability to pray on our own**

We start by acknowledging that we have often prayed in our own strength. We acknowledge prayer is a spiritual activity and praying in the power of the flesh will not strengthen our spirit (see Jude 1:20).

We confess we have relied on own efforts in praying and that we feel uncomfortable about learning to pray in a new way.

This step is important. It is the act of yielding ourselves to the Spirit. Confession leads to expectation and joyful anticipation.

## **Step Two: Cultivate your relationship and communion with your Heavenly Father God**

As soon as Jesus arose out of the waters, His Heavenly Father affirmed His identity and His relationship with His Son. (Mark 1:11)

In the same way, prayer in the Spirit will become a constant affirming of the deep and intimate relationship our Father desires.

When we submit to the Spirit, we are submitting to the Spirit of adoption which brings us right into the presence of God; it is a living act of fellowship and life-giving communion with the Father. (Romans 8:15) No longer are we trying to make conversation with a god we do not know, who is far from us.

Rather, our relationship with our Heavenly Father becomes our safe place, 'the secret place in the shadow of the Almighty' (Psalm 91:1, 36:7).

Prayer might begin in your living room but before long you find yourself in the throne room of God. The surety of your relationship with your Heavenly Father enables you to develop a holy boldness to stand on the promises of God for His kingdom to come to our world.

## **Step 3: Experience boldness knowing the surety of God's promises being fulfilled**

Now we no longer bow before an unknown, distant God, nor do we push our way into God's presence in a demanding, flippant manner.

Rather, we come into God's presence with an awakened sense of intimacy and awe, knowing the Spirit has breathed boldness into our prayers — a holy boldness that knows God's heart for His promises to be declared on the earth. (see Hebrews 4:16)

### **Application |**

So, when we wade into, what we might perceive as, the precarious waters of the prayer in the Spirit, we do so with an awareness of our desperate need of the Spirit of God and a deep longing to know Him more intimately, and to know His will more surely.

And God acts upon the desires of our hearts. He reveals Himself to us, and He deepens our understanding of His purposes for His creation.

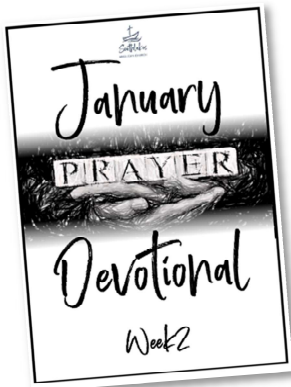
Knowing God's character, we make our requests, having confidence that we are praying according to His will.

Let us pray, always, on all occasions, in the Spirit.

*My loving Father, you have urged all your children to pray in the Spirit. Teach me to acknowledge my continual need for your Spirit, in my life and in all my praying. Teach me how to submit to your Spirit. Give me courage to wade further into different types of prayer, so I may learn how to trust in your Spirit to guide me, carry me, and bring me into your throne room, where I can learn your heart, your character and your will. Teach me how to pray 'your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven'. Amen.*

## Some reflection and discussion questions

1. Have you heard the phrase 'pray in the Spirit' before? If so, what have you heard, or been taught, is its meaning?
2. What do you understand is the difference between 'prayer in the Spirit' and 'prayer in the flesh'?
3. Have you experienced times in your prayer time when you felt 'carried' along by the Spirit?
4. In RevMel's illustration there were those who were fearful of entering into the world of prayer, those who were bolder, and those who were up for the adventure. Which one are you? What would be required to have the courage to delve deeper?
5. What would it mean for you to delve deeper in your prayer life?
6. Use the three-step process described in today's message. Then, think of a situation in your life or neighbourhood which currently does not align with God's kingdom reign. Look up relevant promises, using a concordance or the internet, which God has already declared that are relevant to the situation. Pray God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.
7. If you are new to reminding God of His promises through prayer, read the example of Daniel in chapter 9. Also, meditate on Psalm, 119:49-50 which declares, *"Remember Your word to Your servant, in which You have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your promise gives me life."* The Psalmist says that God's promises give him hope in the midst of affliction and urges us to remind God of His promises. Reflect on this practice. Are you aware of any other Biblical characters who prayed in this way?



### Look out for the January devotional

The January devotional has been developed using a number of prayer resources including:

1. Andrew Murray's 'Teach Me to Pray'
2. Rosalind Rinker's Prayer: 'Conversing with God'
3. Richard Foster's 'Celebration of Discipline'
4. Darren Cronshaw 'Dangerous Prayer'