

International Women's Day of Prayer

Sermon Resource Packet

March 6, 2021

I WILL GO

Written by Danijela Schubert, D.Min.

Includes workshop

Overcoming Obstacles on a Life Journey

Written by Danijela Schubert, D.Min.

Includes seminar

Teach Us to Pray:

Four ways to get the most out of your prayer time

Written by Zdravko Stefanovic, PhD



Prepared by Department of Women's Ministries

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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Seventh-day Adventist® Church

GENERAL CONFERENCE
WORLD HEADQUARTERS
WOMEN'S MINISTRIES



October 6, 2020

Dear sisters:

Joyful greetings my sisters. Women's Ministries Day of Prayer has been ongoing for many years, more than the 19 years that I have worked in General Conference Women's Ministries. Why do we continue to promote this day each year? We do it because all we do must be built on the foundation of prayer. It is through prayer that our faith in God grows as we see His answers and know that He enables us, guides us, fills us, and comforts us.

This year our Day of Prayer is focused on the Seventh-day Adventist World Church theme for the years 2020-2025 – "I Will Go." In Women's Ministries we have adapted the theme to read – "I Will Go Reach My World." This year the writer of the Sabbath sermon focuses on the impossible things God calls us to do and presents examples of women in the Bible that God called to do the impossible and then through His grace and strength made it possible.

So, what about you my sister? What impossible trial or situation are you facing? Are you willing to take it to God in prayer and to continue in prayer waiting expectantly for God to answer? I am. Won't you join us on this Day of Prayer and commit your life to go into your world – your home, your neighborhood, your work community, etc. – and reach your world for Him? Are you willing to pray until God answers as He sees best for our lives? Are you willing? I am.

May God bless and empower you on this special day when millions of His daughters around the world will join their voices and approach the throne of grace with prayers for miracle-working power and wisdom to do our Father's will.

Blessings and joy to you,

Heather-Dawn Small, director

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Prayer Focus

As women we are called to pray, and Ellen White, a woman of prayer, gives us this counsel:

There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God. There is nothing that can prevent us from lifting up our hearts in the spirit of earnest prayer. In the crowds of the street, in the midst of a business engagement, we may send up a petition to God and plead for divine guidance as did Nehemiah when he made his request before Artaxerxes. A closet of communion may be found wherever we are. We should have the door of the heart open continually and our invitation going up that Jesus may come and abide as a heavenly guest in the soul (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 98, 99).

Our focus this year is **I Will Go**. Where will you go? Pray about the location you are going:

- Pray for the leaders
- Pray for stability and peace
- Pray for religious tolerance
- Pray for fathers and families
- Pray for the women
- Pray for the children
- Pray for health
- Pray for education
- Pray for the homeless
- Pray for the fatherless
- Pray for the lost

Always remember the six issues that impact women globally and keep them in constant prayer.

1. Abuse
2. Poverty
3. Health
4. Illiteracy
5. Workload
6. Leadership opportunities

“Let sincerity and faith characterize your prayers. The Lord is willing to do for us ‘exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or do.’ Ephesians 3:20. Talk it; pray it” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 273).

About the Authors

Sermon and Workshop

Danijela Schubert (nee Bratulić), D. Min. (Fuller Theological Seminary), completed two master's degrees, a doctorate. She published two books, *Meaning of Judgment in the Pentateuch: A Word Study* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012) and *Youth Ministry in Papua New Guinea: Challenge, Theology, Curriculum* (Wipf & Stock, 2013), and other publications.

At present, Schubert serves as Discipleship Team Member for Women in the South Pacific Division in Australia and also served as Associate Division Secretary, and Assistant to the Division President. She served as Head of Religion Department in Pakistan, Lecturer and Senior Lecturer in Papua New Guinea.

Schubert was born in the Mediterranean city of Pula, Croatia. With her husband Branimir, whom she met in a Seventh-day Adventist boarding school, she lived in France, the Philippines, and Australia before her employment with the Church began. They have two adult sons.

Seminar

Zdravko Stefanovic, Ph.D., was born in Bosnia & Herzegovina, southern Europe. He completed his education in Croatia, France, and the United States with the area of specialization in biblical languages and interpretation. For twelve years he taught Biblical Studies in various countries of Asia-Pacific and for another twelve years he was professor at Walla Walla University. At present, he teaches at AdventHealth University in Orlando, Florida.

Stefanovic has written popular and academic books and articles. He has contributed articles to the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, *New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*, *Andrews Study Bible*, *Andrews Bible Commentary*, *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary* and *SDAIBTD*. His book *The Aramaic of Daniel in the Light of Old Aramaic* was published by Sheffield Academic Press, England. His commentary on the book of Daniel titled *Wisdom to the Wise* came out of Pacific Press in August 2007.

Stefanovic is married to Bozana, a mathematics professor, and they have two sons.

Scripture References

Danijela Schubert's scripture references are quoted from NIVUK, NLT.
Zdravko Stefanovic's scripture references are quoted from NIV.

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Program Notes

Please feel free to translate, adjust, and edit the resource packet *according to your division's needs*, including the best Bible version for your use. Also, you are free to adapt the packet *according to your cultural audience*. When your division has translated the assigned packet for French, Portuguese, and Spanish, please send us a digital file to share with our sisters who need it.

Outline of Divine Service

Suggested Order of Service

Call to worship

Scripture: Psalm 43:4 (NIV)

Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight.

I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.

Hymn of praise: 12, “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,” *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*

Pastoral prayer

Call for the offering <https://stewardship.adventist.org/tithe-and-offerings-readings>

Children’s Story: “I Will Go”

Special Music or hymn: 578, “So Send I You,” *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*

Sermon: “I Will Go”

Hymn of response: 573, “I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go,” *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*

Closing prayer

Children's Story

I Will Go

By Danijela Schubert

Props to use to make the story more vivid:

clothes peg

rubbish bin

piece of wood for woodfire

Before we start today's story, we need to practice saying something together. We will need it for the story. Can we do that? It's easy. Let's say altogether "I will go." Let me hear it: "I will go." And once more, altogether now, "I will go." Thank you!

Joanna was a little girl who lived in an apartment up on the fourth floor of a building. Does anybody here live in an apartment? (*Check to see if any of the children has raised their hand and thank them.*)

This apartment was new, and the family was happy they could live in it. One of the good things about it was that it had a balcony. From the kitchen Joanna could go onto the balcony and see many things.

Has anyone here been somewhere high from where you can see many things? Perhaps you climbed a hill, a tree, maybe a lift took you high up on a tall building, or maybe your dad's shoulders? (*If time permits, allow a few children to share where they have been, or at least acknowledge if they give answer.*)

Joanna liked looking from the balcony. She could see other big buildings, small houses, trees, cars passing by, airplanes in the sky, people walking by and other children playing nearby.

Her mum used the balcony for an important duty. Whenever she washed family clothes, she would hang them on the lines extended out from the balcony. Perhaps your mum or dad also do that. What do we use to make sure clothes don't fall off the clothes lines? (*Show off the first prop: peg.*) Pegs!

Joanna's mum was hanging the clothes and she took several pegs in her hand. Oops! One slipped out of her hand and fell, all the way to the ground from way up high on the fourth floor where they lived. They could not afford to lose that peg, so Joanna's mum said: "Joanna, please go down and fetch the clothes peg for me."

Joanna was quite pleased that she could go out of the apartment, so she replied (*pause*): Let's say together what we practiced before: "I will go." (*Make sure the children say it aloud.*)

Down, down she ran. In no time she was on the ground, all four floors, all 72 stairs down. She searched for the peg, found it, and happily went back up the stairs to give the peg back to her mum.

Do you like going up and down the stairs? (*Acknowledge their answers.*)

When she completed hanging all the clothes to dry, Joanna's mum started preparing lunch. Joanna was also helping to chop some vegetables. Do you like helping your mum or dad making lunch? *(Acknowledge their answers.)*

Soon the rubbish bin *(show off the rubbish bin)* was full and needed to be emptied. Joanna's mum said: "Joanna, please take the rubbish out to the big bin." Joanna looked at the rubbish bin, and said *(pause, inviting with mannerism or words for children to answer)* "I will go." Off she went, down the stairs again. She could not go as fast, because the bin was a bit heavy and she had to be careful.

Going back up four floors was a bit more difficult this time.

Soon it was getting colder outside, and Joanna's mum needed to light the fire to warm the apartment. But she needed some *(show the wood and see if any child will say the name of the item)* wood and kindling. So again, she called Joanna and said, "Please go down and fetch some wood and kindling."

Joanna looked at her mum with pleading eyes and replied. What do you think she said? *(pause, and let the children answer, "I will go.")* No, she didn't say, "I will go." The last two times she said, "I will go." But not this time.

This time she said, "Do I have to?" Her legs were aching a bit from going up and down the stairs.

Joanna knew that going down would be fun and fast but going back up the stairs carrying heavy wood would be difficult. Maybe somebody else could do this chore.

Do you sometimes have chores to do that are difficult or that you don't like doing? *(Acknowledge children's answers with something like: "Yes, we all have sometimes chores that are difficult, or that we don't like doing, but they are necessary.")*

Mum looked at Joanna with loving eyes and smiled. She replied, "It would help us all be warm at home, and you would like that too, right?"

Joanna loved her mum and wanted to help her family so she said, *(pause and let children say it)* "I will go."

Joanna went many times up and down those stairs in the years she lived there.

When Joanna grew up, she was asked to go and live in different countries to work for Jesus. When they asked her to go to Pakistan, what do you think she replied? *(pause and let the children say)* "I will go." When they asked her to go to Papua New Guinea, what do you think she replied? *(pause and let the children say)* "I will go." When they asked her to go to Australia, what do you think she replied? *(pause and let the children say)* "I will go."

When your mum or dad ask you to help with home chores, what will you say? *(pause and let the children say)* "I will go."

When Jesus asks you to do something for him, what will you say? *(pause and let the children say)* "I will go."

And now, it's time to go back to your parents. What do you say? *(pause and let the children say)* "I will go."

Off you go, and God bless you!

– End of Children's Story –

Sermon

I Will Go

By Danijela Schubert

Introduction

Greetings to all in the name of Jesus!

Do you like stories? I like listening to stories, especially the ones that really happened. Today we will listen to a few stories about people who faced difficult situations. Each person had to make a life-changing decision. Although they faced different circumstances, lived in different places as well as different moments of history, they needed to decide. If they decided one way, history would be different. Not only for them personally, but history for whole nations.

Listen carefully.

(For younger listeners, encourage them to recognize who is the main character in the story, and if they know the answer before it is revealed, write it on a paper and pass it to a deacon. Prepare a little gift for those who have the right answers. Once the name is revealed, their answer doesn't count. This can be done with online app, or pieces of paper, raising of hands, etc., as suitable.)

The Holy Spirit will be speaking to you through those stories. Open your heart and mind to hear His message to you today as you face decisions you need to make.

Story 1

She was beautiful, young, unmarried. Like most young women, she thought of her life and wondered what the future will be like. Would she get married? Or remain with her parents her whole life? If she were to marry, who would she like to marry? What kind of person would be a good life partner for her? Would he be handsome? Kind? Rich? I wonder what qualities in a man would have been on her list. It was common that girls would marry a distant relative. But there were none around where she lived. She knew that some of them moved to another place, but that was too far, and they never visited each other.

One of her daily duties was to go and fetch water for the family. She would join other girls from the village, but today she was alone. As she approached the well, she saw a foreigner who had obviously come from far away. She knew everybody in her village, so it was not difficult to spot the stranger. There were also camels resting nearby – another clue.

She was curious – who is he? Where is he from? What is he doing here? Did he come to visit someone in her village, or this is only a stopover before he continues his journey?

She had no idea that because of this man, this very day (in less than twenty-four hours) her life would be changed forever.

Her thoughts were stopped abruptly, and it was the stranger who startled her with his request followed by questions. He needed water to drink. But her hospitality went further – she also gave water to his camels. That was a big task, but she volunteered gladly. Little did she know that this very act was fulfillment of a sign this man requested from God!

She noticed that he was watching her intently while she worked and saw him take something out of his bag. What a surprise! He gave her a gold nose ring and two bracelets! What girl doesn't like such gifts?! Then he asked questions: "Whose daughter are you? Is there a room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" First question she answered politely by saying her name and she also answered the second saying that they did have space to accommodate him and his camels. When he mentioned Abraham, she ran as fast as she could.

Now at home, she told her family what happened to her. Her brother went to bring the stranger in, and they looked after him well. They fed the camels, they prepared food for him and his entourage as well as water to refresh themselves. But the guest would not eat until he disclosed the purpose of his visit.

He wanted to secure the girl for marriage to his master. Her family decided to give their daughter in marriage. Now, finally he could relax, while she heard some answers to her questions about her future. She was getting married! There was a wedding to plan!

Perhaps an even bigger shock came in the morning. This man declared he wanted to leave immediately. Her family wanted ten days of farewell with her, but he wanted to leave straight away. They resolved that it would be up to the girl to make that decision.

Have you ever been in a situation where you need to make a decision quickly, and that decision will completely change your life? I like to have some time to think, to evaluate pros and cons, to get familiar with the circumstances.

She had no indication whether she would ever again see her parents or her brother. I'm sure she would have wanted to say a proper goodbye to her village friends, to have a party – she was getting married, it was a big deal!

We find her answer in Genesis 24:58 (NIVUK). "So they called Rebekah and asked her, 'Will you go with this man?' 'I will go,' she said."

Story 2

It was a very difficult time. Twenty years of oppressive foreign government with military far superior than other governments. Twenty years! That is a long time. A whole generation of people was born and grew up in this cruelly oppressive environment.

Sometimes people just get used to whatever circumstances they find themselves in. But eventually, all cruel governments are toppled down. However, nothing was happening for twenty years in this part of the world.

And then a revelation came. She received a clear message from God which she needed to pass on. It was exciting news. God had a plan for freeing her people from this terrible oppression. She acted immediately.

As per God's revelation, she had to deliver a message to a man who was going to lead the people out of bondage. It was an amazing plan and she was eager for this to happen as soon as possible. God was going to lure the enemy forces to a large flat area near a river. She knew what God was going to do. With the heavy machinery that this oppressive government was counting on, it was to be the perfect trap. The area was prone to become impassable when the rain fell. And the name of the man chosen to lead the revolt meant "thunderbolt." It was all perfectly clear. The

enemy army would be lured to this area. Not knowing the conditions that well, they would be stuck there when God sent rain, lightning, and thunder. It would be easy to overpower them and deliver the nation from the oppressor.

She was a well-known person, very well respected. She served as a judge and people came to her constantly to solve their disputes. So, her request to fetch this man was obeyed straight away. They probably saw the excitement in her eyes, something great was going to happen.

What she didn't expect was that her excitement would not be reciprocated by the receiver of her message. When Thunderbolt came and heard the message from God which she delivered to him, he was not excited at all.

He replied with an ultimatum. It is a strange ultimatum.

Until now in the Bible we have only seen men go to battle. Women had other duties. She did not plan on being involved in this venture either. She had her duties. She was a wife, a judge, and a prophetess. She already had plenty on her shoulders.

His ultimatum was as follows: "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." She probably couldn't believe her ears! Instead of hearing "This is fantastic plan! I am ready! I will do what you said!" He basically said, "I'm not interested."

Have you ever been in a situation where you are busy with your life, you are excited about the new future ahead of you, and then something happens that demands that you completely change the way you look at things?

What would she do in this situation?

We find her answer to Barak's ultimatum in Judges 4:9 (NLT), "'Very well,' Deborah said, 'I will go with you.'"

Story 3

There are different ways some people stand out from the crowd in a community. A sure way to achieve that for a woman is to marry a man who is a foreigner. In close communities everybody knows everybody, and such decisions are very important decisions to make as the consequences last a lifetime. And that is exactly what she did. She married a foreigner. But that was only the beginning of her amazing story and often difficult life.

Her husband had a brother who also married a woman from her village. I don't know who married first, or whether they both married at the same time, but we can assume that it must have been easier for these women to navigate around the people who were talking about their decisions with two of them together. As the talk in the village subsided, she worked her way to fit in the new family where she now belonged.

As it happens in new marriages, a lot of adjustments must take place. Each person brings their tastes, their habits, their manners, their language, their way of thinking which needs to be explored, understood, challenged, respected, adopted. Another significant matter they were dealing with was religion. His religion was different to hers, and she began to admire his God and his religion.

The first year of their marriage passed and there was no news to share. The second passed too, and now the village started talking and speculating. Why is there no child yet in their family? As if it was not difficult enough for her to struggle with that issue, comments from others must have added to her difficulties. But the worst was yet to come.

First her father-in-law died. It was such a heavy blow to the family. Her mother-in-law was inconsolable. She liked her mother-in-law and they got along well. It is something all mothers-in-law should learn—to be on good terms with their daughters-in-law.

But as if the death of her father-in-law were not difficult enough, two more heavy blows hit the family. Her brother-in-law and her own beloved husband both died. Some disease took all the men in this family. What sorrow fell on all three women! It is hard to imagine what depths of sadness they must have felt. No husbands to look after them and no children to give hope for the future!

Then the news came which was both good and bad. They heard that famine in the land where her husband came from, which brought him to this place, ended and there was plenty of food there. That was good. But her mother-in-law now decided to return there. That was bad.

What was to happen to her? What future was there for her?

The initial decision was that the three women would go together. They were a family now, and it was good that they stick together. Preparations were made, goodbyes were said, and they were on the road walking.

She was leaving the place she was comfortable with, people she knew, customs she knew, language she knew, to go to a place she had never seen before, to live with people she did not know. That is a difficult decision. But it was made, and they were on their way.

Then her mother-in-law stopped. She realized that it is too much for these young women, her dear daughters-in-law, to leave their people and come with her. She had nothing to offer them where they are going. Her mother-in-law said she didn't know how she herself would be accepted once back after ten years of absence. How would she look after herself, let alone another two women? So, her mother-in-law urged her two daughters-in-law to go back to their own home village and start a new life. It would be easier to do that than to continue on with her.

Have you ever been in a situation where life has given you so much grief, your loved ones have died, and then you must make a difficult decision?

Perhaps you also needed to leave your homeland to go to another country, another people? How difficult was that?

Her sister-in-law decided that her mother-in-law had a valid point and reluctantly said goodbye and turned back.

What should she do now? Join her sister-in-law and return to her relatives? Perhaps find a husband or remain unmarried for the rest of her life? Or stay with her mother-in-law and start a new life, without any assurance that there would be a future for her. Where would she stay? How long might she live? Where would she die and be buried?

Her decision was firm and very clear. We read it in Ruth 1:16 (NIVUK), “But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go.’”

Story 4

“He is doing what?” —she was shocked.

“He is covered with ashes, his clothes are torn, he is wailing loudly and bitterly and is wearing sackcloth,” her maids replied.

This was terrible news. She had no idea what in the world was happening with her dear uncle. Her love and gratitude toward him swelled. Images of her growing years flashed through her mind.

She didn’t remember much of what happened when her parents died, but she remembered growing up with her loving uncle who looked after her. He loved her dearly and did all he could for her to grow up with enough food, shelter, education. He protected her and installed a strong sense in her of who she was.

Other memories flashed through her mind. How she was taken from him to join other young women in the royal house. A smile came across her face remembering all the pampering she received for a whole year in preparation to meet the king. Then the amazing banquet when she became the queen.

Royal life and duties separated her from her dear uncle, and she was not able to spend as much time with him as she wished. But to hear this news about his condition disturbed her greatly.

Her first impulse was to send new clothes to him. Perhaps he was in financial difficulty and she was more than happy to help him out. But soon matters became even worse. Her uncle refused to take the clothes. Why? She had no idea and had to find out.

She could not have imagined how bad the news would be.

Although she was now part of the royal family, she was not an active part of the politics of the day. Her uncle was very informed of what was happening. Once before, because of him and her intervention with the king, her husband the king’s life was spared, but this time the stakes were much higher. Her uncle sent her all the information, including the written publication of the new edict that affected everyone who was a Jew. Her uncle urged her to see the king, to beg for mercy, and to plead with him for her people.

By now she was very aware of the royal protocols, and due to the previous plot to assassinate the king, the security measures were tighter. Anybody approaching the king would be killed unless the king showed special mercy by lifting a scepter. It was too much of a risk. She didn’t think that she could do what her uncle asked.

I don’t know whether her uncle was surprised with her reply. But he had a strong opinion which he shared with her. According to him, this situation was possibly the main reason why God allowed her to be in the position that she was in, and if she didn’t step in now and fight for her people it would be detrimental for her, while God would find other means of helping them.

Have you ever been in a position of leadership where you needed to make a difficult decision, where you had to speak on certain issue or speak on behalf of somebody else who had no voice, but relied on you to speak for them? What did you do? Did you speak out or did you keep silent? How did that make you feel?

What would you have done in her situation?

She seriously considered her uncle's words.

Then she sent him her reply. We read in Esther 4:16 (NIVUK), "Go gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go."

We have heard four stories about different women in the Bible.

Can we have one about a man?

Story 5

Some people can see the future. They are visionary leaders. They see a much bigger picture and adjust their life accordingly as well as prepare their followers.

He was one such leader. He clearly saw the future and tried to prepare his team for what was coming. He knew that for them it was going to be a very difficult time. So, he tried to prepare them for these difficult few days, devastating few days, terrible few days.

For months, if not years, he had been trying to make them understand.

It was to no avail. They were completely blind to his vision of what was ahead.

And this evening was the last evening he spent with his closest team members.

What better way to spend the last evening together before a big event than to have a dinner together? It was one of yearly occasions when families get together for this meal. However, he made sure that this one they would remember, so he changed some rituals associated with the occasion.

When dinner was over, they went for a walk. It is a good idea to go for a light walk after a meal. You should do it too.

He told them that this very night they would experience what none of them expected. They just had this special meal; yes, it was somewhat different, but it was still great being together. They loved their leader and enjoyed spending time together. So again, they could not understand what he meant when he said that they would all desert him. This word he used meant that they would fall away, turn away, have their faith in him shaken, stumble in their faith on account of him; they would be ashamed of him and leave him.

He knew how devastated they would be. He had to find a way to give them hope. Something that they would remember. Something that would bring them out of the bottom they would hit. Something simple yet profound.

Have you ever been in a situation when you needed to say something important to someone at the crossroads of life? What did you say? What do you wish you said?

We read what He said in Matthew 26:31, 32 (NIVUK), "Then Jesus told them . . . But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

This was not the first time Jesus said, 'I will go'. Long time before the sin came to this world and a solution was needed, he said, 'I will go,' although he knew it was going to be difficult, very difficult. It was going to be painful. He would be misunderstood, dishonored, disrespected, hated, eternally separated from his Father, and yet he said, 'I will go.'

Why would anybody be willing to go on a mission like that?!

Conclusion

Today we met Rebekah, Deborah, Ruth, Esther, and Jesus at major moments in their lives.

They all had one thing in common. At the crucial time, whether it affected them personally or their whole nation—and one that impacted the whole human race—they needed to decide. Each time it was a life-changing situation. The decision they made is summarized in these words: I WILL GO.

Today you are also facing a decision.

God is calling you to go to your spouse and ask for forgiveness. You have hurt them in the past. What will you answer?

“I will go.”

God is calling you to go to your neighbor. Invite them for a meal. Listen to their story. Share with them your story of how God has changed your life. What will you answer?

“I will go.”

God is calling you to go help those on the streets. Offer them food, clothes, work, sit with them and listen to their story. Tell them how much Jesus means to you. What will you answer?

“I will go.”

God is calling you to go to another country to live and work there and share the Gospel through your life. What will you answer?

“I will go.”

What is it that the Holy Spirit is whispering in your ear? Where is God calling you today? What will you answer?

May the love of Jesus empower you to answer, “I will go.” Let’s say it altogether now: “I will go!”

– End of Sermon –

Workshop Outline

Overcoming Obstacles on a Life Journey

By Danijela Schubert

Suggested Program

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Short Stories with Discussion Time

Prayer and reflection

Steps for overcoming obstacles

Prayer and decision to choose one or more of the steps for overcoming obstacles

Prayer and Blessing

Romans 15:13

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Materials to use:

Pen

Paper – to write points of discussion in a group

Tables – if possible, people seated in groups of 3-4 around tables

Big sheets of paper – to write summary of solutions

Card – with space to write one or two options for each person to take home

Workshop

Overcoming Obstacles on a Life Journey

By Danijela Schubert

Introduction

We start our time together by reading Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

It is a wonderful verse and promise we can claim. But sometimes we face situations that don’t seem to be conducive to prosperity; rather they seem to harm us, we lose hope and a future. What do we do then?

Short Stories with Discussion Time

This afternoon we will meet Skyla, Katerina, Tessa, and Jasmin. We will use our experience and imagination as we listen to their brief stories. They will help us to reflect about our life and help us find ways of overcoming obstacles we face.

Please form groups of 3-4 people.

Listen to a few short stories from a life of women who faced obstacles, then reflect on the difficulties they faced.

Skyla

Skyla grew up in a family where her father and brother were alcoholics. It was very poor family that lived in a city. Her mum would go to the food market when it was closing so that she could buy produce at reduced price, or to get the damaged fruits and vegetables for free, so she can feed the family. As Skyla was growing up, she faced humiliation and abuse because of her family situation.

In small groups of 3-4 reflect on what difficulties Skyla might experience in her adult life due to her upbringing.

Katerina

Katerina was a young woman with plans. She left her village as the work there was too difficult for her because her health was not that good. She came to the city and found work and an apartment to stay. All seemed to go according to her plan until a young man followed her into her apartment and forced himself in. He didn’t want to leave. Although she protested, he forced himself on her and she became pregnant.

In small groups of 3-4 reflect on what difficulties Katerina might experience in her life due to this experience.

Tessa

Just when Tessa and her husband finally started being financially stable and prospering, the country plunged into economic crisis and the value of the money was dropping daily. With five children to feed, it was a difficult task ahead. What used to be money for milk and bread only, now had to cover all food needs.

In small groups of 3-4 reflect on what difficulties Tessa might face in this calamity.

Jasmin

Jasmin loved going to school although it was far away. However, her parents wanted her to help on the farm and not spend time reading and doing her homework. She needed to look after farm animals and knit socks for the family. Her grades in school dropped and soon she would lag so that she would need to repeat the grade or stop schooling altogether.

In small groups of 3-4 reflect on what difficulties Jasmin experienced then, and what would be the potential consequences later due to her lagging education?

Prayer and Reflection

Spend 10 minutes praying and reflecting on obstacles you personally face now, or obstacles that your community is facing. Jot a list of these obstacles and problems.

Steps for overcoming obstacles

In small groups of 3-4, discuss options for overcoming obstacles the four women in the stories faced. Compile a list of those options.

As a whole group, share each group's suggested options. Make a combined list of all the suggestions from each group.

The end of the story

Would you like to know what happened to women in the stories we looked at, and how they overcame their obstacles?

Skyla

Skyla was blessed that her mother was able to pay for her education, and later that her husband was also supportive of her education. She completed two diplomas, two master's degrees, a doctorate, and a post graduate diploma. This opened doors for a successful career in education and church administration. She discovered the consequences of growing up in an alcoholic family by reading literature. She also struggled with low self-confidence and chronic mild depression. But she found answers by consulting counsellors and coaches. Above all, she never gave up praying and seeking God.

Katerina

Katerina married the man who assaulted her. They had three children together. It was a very difficult life, because not only her husband was an alcoholic, but her son became one too. Her health was bad for most of her life, but she managed to live to ninety years of age, giving God the glory. She was always faithful to God and fought for justice. She was a true missionary in her city, giving out literature and speaking words of encouragement wherever she went. Her daughters became faithful followers of God and gave her much joy. Her husband eventually became a believer too.

Tessa

Tessa searched through any literature she could find on how to feed her family in this difficult time. She found what food is nutritious, available, and reasonably priced. She found recipes of how to prepare such food in a tasteful way. Instead of cow's milk which was expensive, she learned to make soymilk. Instead of expensive meat products, she learned how to prepare delicious food with variety of vegetables. She raised healthy and well-nourished children. Her five children are all faithful Jesus followers.

Jasmin

Jasmin found ways of educating herself. She continued studying as much as she could while still doing her family chores. Her older brother gave her lessons in math, but she had to keep it a secret. Her teacher was also helpful in making sure she completed her grade and she continued to the next class. She completed a few grades of elementary schooling, before war broke out in her country ending her formal education. She continued reading every day throughout her life. The number one book she read was the Bible, her daily companion. She found ways of educating herself and staying informed, such as by listening to radio. She made sure that her children received as much education as was possible for her to finance, and some of her children completed very high schooling. She gave glory to God for the wisdom she displayed in her dealings with others.

Options to adopt

Now, each one, choose one or two of the listed options that you can adapt and use from the group's suggestions, your own reflection, and the true ending from the stories you heard. Write them down on the card or blank piece of paper. Take that with you and place it somewhere you can see, as a reminder. Watch how God will transform your pain into blessing.

Prayer and Decision Time

Spend time praying (alone or in small groups) for God's help to overcome obstacles in your life, in the lives of other women, and in your communities.

Prayer

Let us pray this prayer together:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

May your promise come true for me that you know the plans you have for me, plans to prosper me and not to harm me, plans to give me hope and a future.

Help me to trust you to turn my difficulties into blessings for other people.

Concluding Blessing

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

– End of Workshop –

Seminar

Teach Us to Pray:

Four ways to get the most out of your prayer time

By Zdravko Stefanovic

When Jesus was on earth, He ministered to many needs. At times His disciples presented Him with special requests. One of the most memorable came just after Jesus had finished praying. "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1), they said.

No request ever fell on deaf ears. Jesus immediately proceeded to teach His disciples the prayer par excellence, known widely today as the Lord's Prayer.

#1 Learning Is Doing

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He didn't deliver a lecture on the topic, not even a sermon. Instead He taught His disciples the actual words of a prayer. He was saying, "You want to learn how to pray? Then let's pray. This is how it goes."

Many other biblical passages contain actual prayers. You won't find lengthy discourses on the topic. The Bible contains, rather, numerous spirit-filled prayers that came from the hearts and mouths of God's faithful.

A prayer of personal request to God is the prayer uttered by Hannah at the sanctuary in Shiloh (1 Sam. 1). Or consider Jonah's prayer for deliverance from inside the great fish (Jonah 2). The prophet Elijah's prayer on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) is an excellent example of a prayer about God's greatness. King Solomon's dedicatory prayer for the Temple (1 Kings 8) is an illustration of the inaugural prayer for a holy place. We can learn much about intercessory prayer from Danijela's prayer for his people in Babylon (Dan. 9). A fine example of a prayer of commitment is Christ's prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew 26), when He so readily surrendered to His Father's will. Furthermore, Jesus' prayer in the upper room (John 17) is the best prayer for unity among Christ's followers.

Clearly prayer is a natural, spontaneous expression of our immediate feelings for, or about, God.

#2 So Great, and Yet So Near

To many of Jesus' contemporaries, God was a transcendent being, enthroned on high. With Jesus it was different. That all-powerful God He called *Abba* Father in His prayers. This way of addressing God, so often found on Christ's lips, is an intimate word that is better translated with the word "daddy" or "papa." Jesus prayed as a child speaks to his or her father, with simplicity, intimacy, and confidence.

The prayers of God's people in Bible times tell of a God whom even the highest heaven cannot contain (1 Kings 8:27). Yet that same God is said to dwell through faith in the heart of the praying believer. To pray means to humbly open one's heart to the King of the universe so that He can dwell in it by faith.

King David's prayer in Psalm 8 praises the Lord, whose name is majestic in all the earth, whose glory is set above the heavens, and whose acts of creation are the moon and the stars, the work of His fingers. But the psalm also teaches that the Lord is mindful of His creatures. When David felt miserable and exclaimed, "But I am a worm and not a man" (Ps. 22:6), he could still pray, "But you, O Lord, be not far off" (verse 19).

Can we address God the same way Christ did? We can, of course. In fact, we should. One dramatic moment was in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus said: "Abba, Father . . . everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36).

The apostle Paul tells us that we are God's children who pray through His Spirit "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). He also told the believers in Ephesus that he knelt before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name; that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen us with power so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:14-17).

#3 First Things First

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught people to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and all the other things that they need would be given to them as well (Matt. 6:33). Jesus practiced what He preached. His prayer to the Father touches first of all on the sanctity of His name, the coming of His kingdom, and the accomplishment of His will on earth. This comes first because everything that God had made and formed, He had created for His glory (Isa. 43:7). Since glory is due to God alone, we should give Him what belongs to Him.

After having prayed about God's name and kingdom, Jesus focused on our daily need for food, forgiveness, and faith. All three of these come to us as God's gifts. Throughout the Bible, too, the praying person usually begins with a statement of praise to God or giving glory to Him, and only then presents his/her petitions.

Solomon's prayer for the Temple began, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below" (1 Kings 8:23). In a similar way King Jehoshaphat, when faced with a serious threat, prayed, "O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you" (2 Chron. 20:6). Habakkuk, the prophet, began his prayer, "Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord" (Hab. 3:2). When the believers in the church were threatened with persecution, they prayed, "Sovereign Lord . . . you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them" (Acts 4:24).

This is not to say that the people of the Bible did not pray concerning their everyday needs. On the contrary, they prayed often for these things. Yet they began their prayers giving glory to God, praising Him for His power and mercy, and then focusing on their other needs.

When it comes to prayer, Jesus and the Bible teach us to put first things first.

#4 Not to Change, But to Be Changed

An important statement in Jesus' prayer is found in the words "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10, KJV). This is further enhanced by the use of the word "Amen" (verse 13, KJV), customarily ending a prayer today as it did in Bible times.

Many of us know that amen means "May it be so!" What some may not know is that the amen at the end of a prayer does not affirm the wishes of the praying person, but God's plan for that person's life. It is a plea that God's will may be fulfilled. Our saying "Amen" to God is an expression of our readiness to submit to God and accept His will.

The true purpose of prayer is not to try to change God's mind or His plans for us or those for whom we pray. It is rather to change us and make us conform to His will. That's why Jesus prayed in Gethsemane: "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39).

The psalmist confesses in the beginning of his prayer that "before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord" (Ps. 139:4). He ends his prayer by requesting: "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" (verses 23, 24).

The Christian church was born in the atmosphere of prayer. Its leaders and members alike sought God's direction daily (Acts 1:4; 2:4, 42). During this period, prayer was the most powerful tool Christians had to face opposition and persecution. That's how the church was gradually molded into its Master's design.

We can say the same of Paul. The Lord described him to His disciple Ananias by simply saying, "He is praying" (Acts 9:11). As Paul became a man of prayer, he was shaped into an apostle and the first missionary of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Through prayer the Holy Spirit gave him the wisdom and understanding he needed for his ministry.

Christians pray to God with open heart and mind, leaving the answers to God. Says the prophet Amos, "Seek good, not evil, that you may live. . . . Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:14, 15). This same teaching is found in the book of Joel: "Rend your heart and not your garments. . . . Who knows? He [God] may turn and have pity" (Joel 2:13, 14).

These examples teach us that our prayers do not change God, but instead, we ourselves become changed and are ready to accept His will for our lives.

We can know four things from both Jesus' prayer and numerous other prayers in the Bible: First, the best way to learn how to pray is by actually praying. Second, God, to whom we pray, is great, yet so near to us that we can call Him Father, Daddy, or Papa, just as Jesus did. Third, when we pray, we should put God's kingdom and His righteousness before our everyday concerns. And fourth, our prayer has the purpose of making us ready to accept God's will for us, and not of changing God or His plans for us.

– End of Seminar –