

## Seeking God's Spirit

### DAY 8—SUBMISSION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

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**"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men" (Matthew 12:31, NKJV).**

#### Testimony

"No one need look upon the sin against the Holy Ghost as something mysterious and indefinable. The sin against the Holy Ghost is the sin of persistent refusal to respond to the invitation to repent" (Ellen White, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1093).

Even Spirit-filled people sometimes make mistakes. Abraham, Moses, David, and Peter all had defects of character and momentary failures in the hour of temptation. Even Jesus was tempted (Matthew 4), though He never yielded. So just because we are walking in the Spirit at this moment does not mean we are beyond the possibility of making mistakes, and a mistake is not the same as hardening our hearts in sin.

A woman in her later years had become calloused, discouraged, and angry. She had little tolerance for others except for her closest friends from years gone by. When visitors came to church she often made offensive comments regarding their children, their attire, or something else. Newly baptized members and others were offended by her rude criticisms. Some became so discouraged that they would not come back to church. I was in the dark about all of this until one elders' meeting. I asked the elders if they knew why people were not returning to church. Several hung their heads in silence. Finally one elder spoke up: "Pastor, we have a lady in our congregation who cannot control her tongue. She gossips and criticizes nearly everyone. This is why people will not return to our church." "How long has this been going on?" I asked. "For many years," was the response. "Why hasn't anyone done something about this?" I continued. "A couple of pastors have tried, but there is never any change." "This simply cannot continue," I said, "so here is what I am proposing. I will go visit this lady and require her to change her behavior within two weeks. If she is unwilling to change, then her name will be brought up to the next board meeting for discipline. Will you elders back me up on this?" The elders unanimously backed the plan.

I made arrangements to visit the lady in question. "I know why you are here," she said when I sat down in her living room. "You do?" I replied. "Yes," she continued, "you have come here to talk about the way I talk to people." "That is exactly right," I said, "but how did you know that?" "Because two other pastors have come to my home to talk about the same thing." "Did it do any good?" I questioned. "No, it did not." "Why?" I asked. "Because I have the right to say what I think best, and people are way too sensitive. They wear their feelings on their shirtsleeves."

I discussed Christian behavior using verses like Ephesians 4:29-31, but the woman was still unwilling to change. With a prayer on my heart, I said, "You have two weeks to change your behavior, or I will be forced to take your name to the church board for discipline, and I have the support of all the elders on this." "You wouldn't do that!" she exclaimed. "Oh, yes, I will unless you decide to change the way you talk to people." "I don't believe the elders will back you on this," she said. "They already have, and you can check with them if you want to, but that is the way it is," I asserted. This revelation caused the woman to sit back and solemnly reflect in silence. I gently said, "We all love you and want you to be part of our congregation, but this behavior has to change."

The following Sabbath she did not come to church. Her friends avoided me. I knew they were all struggling with the situation. The next Sabbath, just before her two weeks were up, she came to church. I walked up to greet her. Her face was sober, but she took my hand and held it firmly. "Pastor," she said, "I thought over everything you said. I want you to know I now see clearly that I have been in the wrong all these years. I hope you will forgive me, and I intend to ask the forgiveness of the elders and the rest of the church. With the help of God, I will be a different woman." Her eyes glistened with tears at this admission, and I am happy to say she was faithful to her promise. People began to come back to church, and the congregation grew rapidly.

### **Bible Texts to Pray About**

- Matthew 12:31, 32—Blasphemy is excusing sin and taking God's place (Mark 2:7-11; John 10:33).
- Hebrews 6:4-6—Truly converted people are capable of turning away from Jesus.
- Hebrews 4:7—The best time to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit is the first time He speaks to you.
- Acts 7:51—Do not resist the guidance and warnings of the Holy Spirit.
- Luke 13:34—Give your life to Jesus before it is too late, as it was for His beloved Jerusalem.

### **Suggested Prayers**

- Dear Father, may I listen to Your voice always. Forgive me when I have been stubborn. Open my eyes and ears to discern Your will and give me courage to obey.
- Dear Jesus, forgive me for the pain I have caused You when I have been unwilling to give up my sins. Please do not take Your Holy Spirit from me and soften my heart to receive Your instruction.
- Please forgive our church when we have not listened to Your voice in the Bible. Help us as a congregation to cleanse ourselves of sin and restore the presence of Your Spirit among us.
- Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Do not cast us away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from us. Restore to us the joy of Your salvation. Then we will teach sinners Your ways, and they will be converted to You (Psalm 51).
- Father, we intercede for those who may be victims of circumstances or controlled by addictions. Please break the chains that bind them! May we win them back to You through our love and concern.
- Please teach us how to proclaim our fundamental church beliefs with clarity, creativity, and biblical authenticity. May the love of Jesus be at the core of everything we believe.
- We ask You to prepare young people to plant churches for the 789 people groups in the 9 countries of North American Division.
- We ask You to raise up medical missionaries to plant churches among the 830 people groups in the 11 countries of East-Central Africa Division.
- We ask You to raise up prayer warriors to intercede for the 2,568 people groups in the 4 countries of Southern Asia Division.
- We ask you to raise up new youth leaders and bless our SYL training initiative (Senior Youth Leadership).
- Thank you, Father, for sending the Holy Spirit to convert the seven people on our prayer lists.
- Local Prayer Requests:

### **Suggested Songs**

Thank You, Lord; Come Thou Fount (Hymn #334); Have Thine Own Way, Lord (Hymn #567); I Surrender All (Hymn #309); I'd Rather Have Jesus (Hymn #327); Give Me Jesus (Hymn #305); I Will Bow to You; Lord, I Need You.