

# Back to the Altar

## 100 DAYS OF PRAYER

FOR THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

June 6-12, 2025

### The Heart Surgery Miracle: Forgiving the Unforgivable

by Connie Jones



The testimony I am going to share with you is a testimony of our God, Who is the Great Restorer and Healer of a bitter and broken heart.

I was born into an Adventist home, and my father was a pastor. He was loved and highly respected by our church family and everyone thought we were a normal, happy pastoral family. After all, from outward appearances, that's what we looked like. But, as we all know, looks can be deceiving. No one knew the sadness and pain that existed in our home.

I was awakened at a very young age to what sounded like fighting in my parents' bedroom. What I saw was something no child should ever see: the abuse of my mother and the raging temper of my father.

We moved a lot. In my childhood mind, I didn't understand why we moved more than other pastors' families. It was confusing. I would settle in and make friends, then we would move again, changing schools every few years. I felt constantly uprooted.

As I grew into middle school and was old enough to understand, I became aware of why we moved so often. You see, my father was having affairs with the different women in our church, so we had to keep moving to escape the fallout from these affairs.

As I grew into my teen years, I struggled spiritually and lost my connection with my Lord. I started letting go of His hand. When I heard people speak of our Heavenly Father's unconditional love, I couldn't relate. How could I relate to a Father of unconditional love, a God who heard and answered prayers, when I had never experienced the unconditional love of my earthly father, only a father of anger and abuse?

When I was 16, my parents separated. My father took a leave of absence from the ministry, and my mother and I moved to Collegedale, Tennessee. The rumors about my father were spreading, and I was humiliated and ashamed. Friendships were destroyed. During this time, I attended a different academy every year. Deep bitterness began to fill my heart.

However, even though I was letting go of my Heavenly Father's hand, He never let go of mine. God had a plan for me. He knew what lay ahead for my family and that I would need someone's hand to hold.

During my senior year in academy, He brought Donnie Jones into my life. Donnie has been the love of my life for 45 years now. His coming into my life was the perfect timing, and his hand would be the hand I would hold that would give me the strength to face what was about to come. My Heavenly Father was also with me through it all, even though I didn't love and trust Him at the time.

My parents eventually reunited, and my father returned to the ministry, but sadly nothing changed. The rages, affairs, and abuse of my mother continued.

Donnie and I married, and three years passed. Finally, after many broken hearts and broken lives, the Lord said it was enough, and my father was told he would have to leave the ministry.

My parents divorced, and the Lord gave my mother the strength to walk away from the abuse and shame of the years. It was then that I swore I would never have anything more to do with my father because of the choices he had made. He would no longer be a part of my life. Bitterness and hatred toward him consumed my heart.

For thirty-five years, this bitterness and hatred grew, and I would have nothing to do with my father. I felt I had every right to make him suffer for what he had done to our family. We all knew that how he had treated us and the choices he had made were wrong. His choices had shattered our family. However, my loving Heavenly Father had not given up on my father, and He had a different plan.

In February 2019, Pastor Don MacLafferty came to the Collegedale Church where Donnie and I attended, and he and his daughter, Julie, gave a revival.

One night, Pastor Don read the verses in Ezekiel 36:26-27: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

He said that if we wanted to be used by the Lord, we needed to search our hearts and empty our hearts of any bitterness and hatred so that the Holy Spirit could dwell in our hearts.

I knew the Holy Spirit was speaking to me that night. I had that heart of stone. I knew what I had to do. The thirty-five years of bitterness and hatred in my heart were turning me into someone I didn't like.

After the meeting, Donnie and I met personally with Pastor Don, and I told him my story. Without judging, he prayed with us and encouraged us. For days after, Donnie and I prayed together that the Lord would give me a new heart, but the bitterness, pain, and hatred were too deep, too intense. How could I forgive someone who had hurt me so deeply, someone who hadn't even asked for my forgiveness?

One morning as my husband Donnie and I knelt in prayer together; we prayed for God to heal my stony heart. I got up from my knees, feeling no different. I had not slept well for days struggling with this, and I was exhausted. I told Donnie that I was

going to lie down and try to get some sleep. I went to our bedroom and knelt by our bed again as I poured my heart out to the Lord with tears. I pleaded with Him to remove my stony heart full of bitterness and hatred and to change me. I didn't want to carry this heavy burden any longer.

Finally, after thirty-five years, I surrendered my heart of bitterness to Jesus and lay it all at His feet. I asked Him to do His total and complete heart surgery on my heart.

I crawled into bed, and tossed and turned for a few minutes, but then a peace came over me like I have never felt before. It was as if my loving Savior reached His nail-scarred hands into my chest, removed my stony heart, and gave me a heart of flesh filled with His peace. I felt as if He was saying, "You have carried it long enough, my child. Now you have surrendered it to Me; it is no longer yours to carry."

I immediately got out of bed and went downstairs. I told Donnie what the Lord had done and what I knew I had to do. I needed to go see my father and ask his forgiveness for how I'd treated him and how I'd held bitterness against him for so many years.

Although I'd only seen my father once, over the past thirty-five years, when we got to my father's house, I was warmly welcomed. I knelt down by his side and took his hand. "Daddy," I began. "God has done a wonderful thing for me, and I am here to ask your forgiveness for all the hatred and bitterness I have held in my heart against you for these past thirty-five years."

My father graciously forgave me as we both wept. Then I turned to his wife and asked her forgiveness for my bitterness towards her for having a part in what had happened to our family. Once again, I was graciously forgiven. We prayed together, and as Donnie and I started to leave, my dad spoke up. "Connie, there is just one more thing I would love to be able to do before I leave this world: I would like to ask your mother for forgiveness for what I have put her through." (My parents had not seen or spoken to each other since their divorce thirty-five years previous.)

You see, the Lord had already sent the Holy Spirit to work on my father's heart too, to bring healing to our family, and God made that moment happen. He also spoke to my sweet husband Donnie's heart to help orchestrate bringing my parents together. My father was given the opportunity to ask my mother's forgiveness, and she was able to forgive. God brought healing to a hurting and broken family, and both my parents found forgiveness towards each other.

In June of 2024, I was given the precious gift of being at my father's side in the hospital right before he went to sleep in Jesus at the age of ninety-four. We read and prayed together, and he expressed to me how he was at peace with the Lord. What if I had not allowed the Lord to humble my heart and give me a new spirit of forgiveness toward my father? I would have missed this precious experience as well as the peace that my own heart needed.

My friends, our precious Savior forgave as He hung, dying on the cross and cried out, "Father, forgive them." How can we not also forgive those who have hurt us and caused us pain?

Of course, forgiveness is very difficult if the person causing our pain doesn't recognize

what they've done. It's also difficult when they don't see their need to be forgiven, or when they are continuing to wound us. We do not turn a blind eye or encourage ongoing abuse by offering our forgiveness. We must maintain safe boundaries. But this journey of sacrificial love and forgiveness toward our family members (or anyone who has hurt us) is not about enabling destructive behaviors but about allowing God to set us free from the destruction occurring inside our own souls. Bitterness is a deadly disease that destroys from the inside out. It sucks the life out of our spiritual journey like a deadly cancer. It cannot exist in the hearts of those preparing for heaven. While we cannot change the character or choices of those who have wounded us, we can allow God to change our own heart. He will remove the deadly poisonous root of bitterness, if we give Him permission.

Jesus truly is the Healer and Restorer of bitter and hurting hearts. He is the Master Heart Surgeon. If He did this beautiful miracle in our family, He can do the same miracle for you. The question is, will you let Him?

*Connie Jones is a retired nurse and spends her time with her husband Donnie loving their grandchildren and volunteering with In Discipleship. She and her husband also assist with Back to the Altar discipleship training events all around the world.*



## Love Your Family Sacrificially

Welcome to another session of **Back to the Altar | 100 Days of Prayer!**

In Malachi 4:5-6 we are told, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

This prophecy foreshadows what is going to be happening in our homes as we near the second coming of Jesus.

As we begin this study, let's listen to a powerful testimony of how God turned one father's heart back to his children. This video sets the stage for what will be shared in this lesson.

- **Play Video 1:** Testimony: A Father Turns His Heart Toward Home – <https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW10VID1>

If you could ask for any miracle for your family relationships or your home life, what would that be? (*Journal your answers or share with a friend.*)

Change is possible. Miracles are possible. Nothing is too difficult for God. But change must start with us personally!

Ellen White writes, "The cause of division and discord in

Supplemental  
Material to Take  
This Series Deeper

**Testimony: A  
Father Turns His  
Heart Toward  
Home**

[https://tinyurl.com/  
BTTAW10VID1](https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW10VID1)

**Elijah Calls for  
Heart Healing**

[https://tinyurl.com/  
BTTAW10VID2](https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW10VID2)

**Submitting to One  
Another in Love**

[https://tinyurl.com/  
BTTAW10VID3](https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW10VID3)

**Practical  
Discipleship in the  
Home**

[https://tinyurl.com/  
BTTAW10VID4](https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW10VID4)

families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ. Picture a large circle, from the edge of which are many lines all running to the center. The nearer these lines approach the center, the nearer they are to one another. Thus it is in the Christian life. The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another” (*Adventist Home*, p. 179).

As we begin to learn what it means to love our family sacrificially, let’s open our Bible to Luke 1:17.

Watch and listen as Pastor Don shares this powerful passage in the context of the Last Elijah message that we are called to share in these last days. In this video, we see another beautiful testimony of what heart healing looks like.

- **Play Video 2:** Elijah Calls for Heart Healing – <https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW10VID2>

Do you long for heart healing in your family? Are you willing to take the necessary steps to see this happen?

## Bible Study

### 1. Connect Activity

Take a few moments and think of one of your favorite family memories. If you do not have any happy family memories, think of happy memories that you may have made with a best friend or with your church family. (*Journal your memory or share it with a family member or friend.*)

What ingredients make up a good family memory?

What would God love to do with our families before Jesus returns to take us all home? (*Journal your responses to these questions or share with someone near you.*)

Now let’s get into our Bible study!

### 2. How to Love Your Family Sacrificially

**Read/Reflect on Romans 13:8** - What kind of debt does God ask us to keep? (*Answer: Owe nothing except to love each other.*)

**Read/Reflect on Ephesians 4:29–32**

- What filter should we use for all our conversations?
- What should we do with resentment and bitterness?
- To what level should we forgive each other?

**Read/Reflect on Matthew 5:23, 24** – What should you do when you remember someone

has something against you? How should you apply this passage to your time of personal or family worship?

Ephesians 6:12 tells us, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

It's important to recognize that when we are in conflict, we are actually not fighting against a person. It's a bigger spiritual battle we face. We are warring against spiritual powers and wickedness in high places. If we recognize who our true enemy is — Satan, not each other — and remember that we and our family members are on the winning side when we choose to honor Jesus, what a difference it will make in helping us forgive and work through conflict.

### 3. How to Love Your Spouse and Children Sacrificially

From the pen of Inspiration we read, “The wife, united with her husband in the fear of God, is to be a strength and power in the church” (*10 Manuscript Releases*, 179).

Now let's open our Bible to Ephesians 5:22-33 as we learn how a husband and wife can sacrificially love and serve one another, so that their lives reflect the glory of God.

- **Play Video 3:** Submitting to One Another in Love – <https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW10VID3>

It's difficult to put away pride and take the first step to approach your spouse in humility. But pride is usually the biggest roadblock to working through difficult relationships. It's what drives division both in the home and in the church. The Bible tells us, “By pride comes nothing but strife” (Prov. 13:10) Imagine what would happen if we would put away our pride and allow God to humble our hearts.

“If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties. Angels have been grieved, and God has been displeased by the hours which have been spent in justifying self” (*Early Writings*, p. 119).

Are you a humble person? If your answer is yes, you probably aren't. Consider the questions on the following chart which contrast pride and humility.

- **Download Pride Versus Humility** – <https://tinyurl.com/Pride-Humility>

Are you moved by what you just heard? Let's pause for a moment right now and pray for God to help us be more Christlike and more humble towards each other.

Would you like God's vision for your family? Let's turn to Acts 2:17 and then Deuteronomy 6:4-9 as we watch the next video, teaching what discipleship looks like in daily life.

- **Play Video 4:** Practical Discipleship in the Home – <https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW10VID4>

“Ellen White writes, “The sweetest type of heaven is a home where the Spirit of the Lord presides” (*Adventist Home*, p. 15).

As you've just finished this powerful teaching segment in this video, what practical ways come to your mind of how you could be more in tune and loving towards your spouse, your children, your parents, or those in your home? (*Journal your response or share your answers with someone you want to love more intentionally.*)

Perhaps you have a difficult family situation, or you've already lost the heart of your children. Don't miss the bonus video and testimony at the end of this lesson, where Pastor Don and April share more about their personal journey. We pray their testimony will be an inspiration to all watching, that God is able to redeem the years the locusts have eaten.

#### 4. Time for Heart Surgery

Before we close this lesson, it's time to ask a hard question. Do you need heart surgery to be able to forgive someone who has wronged you? Do you need heart surgery to be a more loving and lovable Christian, especially in your own home?

**Read/Reflect on Ezekiel 36:26, 27** - Who performs this heart surgery — you or someone else? Read through this passage several times. How many promises does God give you in this passage?

Will you be willing to get on your knees right now and ask God to do His miracle heart surgery in your own heart?

Now time for the Practical Heart Challenges.

#### 5. Practical Heart Challenge

To take this message deeper, here are three practical challenges.

- **1<sup>st</sup> Challenge:** Every day, ask God to help you put away pride and love your family members (or those closest) sacrificially.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Challenge:** Make a commitment to only speak words that build up for this next week. Every time you are tempted to complain or criticize, replace those words with a positive affirmation or word of encouragement.
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Challenge:** Outline 3-5 new goals of family habits that you want to integrate into your home and lifestyle. Talk with your family about these goals so everyone is on board. Commit to seeking these goals together as a family! (*Example: "We are going to have worship together every day," or "We are going to eat together on these days," or "I'm going to make intentional time for an activity my child or spouse wants," or "We are going to do a specific activity together every week as a family," etc.*)

You are invited to join the General Conference weekly Back to the Altar revival on Zoom that takes place every Sunday at 6 A.M. Eastern Standard Time. All are welcome!

You are also invited to pray daily with believers from around the world at [www.247unitedprayer.org](http://www.247unitedprayer.org). There are multiple prayer calls in multiple languages all praying over the Back to the Altar themes from 100 Days of Prayer.

**Zoom Link:** <https://tinyurl.com/BTTA100> **Password:** 18442025

## Bonus Material

Following are some more testimonies with Pastor Don and April, as well as some prayers and promises that you can pray over your marriage and over your children. Also included are some prayers and promises for singles or for those who have spiritual children.

- **Play Video 5:** Testimony: Winning Back the Hearts of Our Children – <https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW10VID5>
- **Download:** Promises to Pray for your Marriage – <https://tinyurl.com/PrayingForYourMarriage>
- **Download:** Promises to Pray for your Children – <https://tinyurl.com/PromisesForYourChildren>
- **Download:** Prayers and Promises for Singles – <https://tinyurl.com/PrayersForSingles>

Would you like creative ideas how to make God's Word the welcome and witness of your property or home, or as part of prayer walks with your children? Consider inviting your children and others to join you on a Bible prayer walk on your property. If you don't have much property or don't live where you can do Bible prayer walks in nature, walk your neighborhood and pray for your neighbors — and let them know you are praying for them. Ask, when possible, how you can pray for them.

For ideas for Bible prayer walks, see the book ***Meet Jesus Outside: Bible Prayer Walks***, by Don MacLafferty. This book is downloadable for free at <https://indiscipleship.org/resources/> and is a great resource for families of all ages.

# Prayer Focus

For June 6 - 12, 2025



## **Promises to Claim as You Pray**

*"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3*

*"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." 1 Cor. 13:4-8*

*"Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" Matthew 18:21-22*

*"And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." Matthew 20:27*

## **Prayer Focus for Week 10**

1. Dear Heavenly Father, as we learn afresh what it means to love our family members sacrificially, please pour out Your Spirit on our homes and in our hearts. Pour out Your Spirit on our church. Prepare us to meet you in the clouds of glory. (Claim Luke 1:17)
2. Our Heavenly King, Creator of the Universe, and Lord of our hearts, please do something so special for our family this Sabbath. Turn our hearts back to You. Help us to make strong the altar of worship and find fresh reasons to rejoice in Your goodness. (Claim Ps. 34:1-3)
3. Dear Jesus, we pray for the upcoming General Conference session. We ask that You guide the agenda, the discussions, and the worship services. We pray that You would do something so special at this session that it would be clear to anyone watching that You are on the throne and You are leading our church. (Claim Jer. 33:3)
4. Lord, as we seek to love our family members sacrificially, help us only speak word that edify and build up. Help us to put away pride and humble ourselves as we serve one another in sacrificial love. (Claim Prov. 15:1)
5. Heavenly Father, help our homes to become a little heaven on earth, a place where Your Holy Spirit loves to dwell. (Claim Ps. 127:1)
6. Heavenly Father, please save our children, and those we love who are not walking with You. Deliver them from the clutches of the enemy and bring them back to the fold. (Claim Jer. 31:16-17)
7. Dear Lord, Just as You tell us in Malachi 4:5-6, please turn our hearts back to our children and our children's hearts back to ours. Prepare us for Your soon coming. (Claim Mal. 4:5-6)