Day of Prayer and Fasting

Theme: World Changing Prayer Warriors

*Prayers that Change the World*

Materials for 1st Quarter
Sabbath, January 5, 2019
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Why a Day of Prayer and Fasting?

Imagine you are a parent about to leave your children, knowing you will not see them again until the Kingdom of Heaven. What is the most important thing you could say to them?

Jesus had that dilemma as He prepared to return to heaven after His crucifixion. What was the burden of His last words to His disciples? As we read through His last prayers and counsel in John 15-17, we discover repeating themes: Unity, love, and seeking God through prayer. Jesus longed for His fledgling church to come together in purpose, harmony, and mission. Today, amid perhaps unprecedented polarization in the world, our nations, and our church, we too need to heed Jesus' counsel to seek His Spirit and come together for mission. The task seems daunting and impossible in our humanity. That's why we need to pray as never before for the miracle of reconciliation that only God can bring.

We invite you to pray “in your closet.” We invite you to pray with your local church family. And we invite you to the global Revival and Reformation initiative of prayer and fasting. Perhaps you will not choose to fast totally from food. Perhaps you will fast from desserts or social media, or eat sparingly of plant-based food for a time.

“Now and onward till the close of time the people of God should be more earnest, more wide awake, not trusting in their own wisdom, but in the wisdom of their Leader. They should set aside days for fasting and prayer” (Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, Feb. 11, 1904).

As you choose to focus more deeply on prayer, God will bless you and strengthen your heart for the challenging days ahead.

Cindy Tutsch
For Revival and Reformation Committee
Suggested Planning Guide

Program for the day:

- A devotional/sermon, “Prayers that Change the World,” is included in this resource. It can be used for the morning worship program or as a devotional before the prayer time.
- If it is used for the morning worship service, a scripture reading and children’s story is suggested below.
- A suggested afternoon prayer time is provided. We recommend scheduling 1-2 hours for this, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
- Invite church members to join in prayer and fasting. Copy and share the information on fasting at least a week before so that members have the opportunity to understand fasting and pray and choose how they want to be involved in fasting during the day.

Scripture Reading: James 5:13-16

Suggested Children’s Story:
Tell the story of Samuel from 1 Samuel 3 about God calling to him. Points to emphasize:

- **Samuel was a child** – God invites children to know Him and serve Him
- **Samuel didn’t know how to listen or talk to God so he asked Eli** – we have parents, SS teachers, grandparents and others who can help us know how to get to know God better
- **God used Samuel to helps others get to know God** – even when we’re kids, we can still help others know about God and His love for them through our word and actions
Sermon/Devotional

Prayers that Change the World

Her name is mentioned only eleven times in scripture. Her story contained to a chapter and a half before she fades back into her ordinary daily life. Yet her one recorded prayer changes a nation.

She was an unlikely candidate for a world-changing prayer warrior. In part because she was a woman living during a time when women lived quietly in the background. Going about their daily lives tending to the needs of their families. Birthing babies. Caring for homes. Cooking meals. Gathering around the well to talk and gather water as they began their tasks for the day. But those mornings at the well revealed another reason why most people wouldn’t have chosen her to pray prayers that changed a nation.

People saw her as a sinner. They treated her like an outcast. Not because of anything she had done. But because of something she hadn’t done. Couldn’t do.

1 Samuel 1: 2 shares simply, “Hannah had no children.”

In a world where a women’s value was measured by the number of sons she gave her husband, Hannah was barren. Her infertility seen as a punishment from God. As she walked the stands at the market, went to the well to draw the day’s water, and headed to church on Sabbath, Hannah saw the way people looked at her. Saw the whispering. The turning away. The hurt that came from once-friends no longer able to look her in the eye or talk with her was great. The loneliness enveloping her like a blanket.

And what if it was true? What if God was punishing her? What had she done? She tried so hard to live good and right. She prayed, but God was silent. She wondered if He, too, had turned away from her and didn’t want anything to do with her. Guilt and shame filled her heart and her view of herself.

But nothing was as painful as that first night. The night her husband brought home his new young wife, Peninnah. The overwhelming grief and tears that flooded her heart as she lay alone for the first time knowing her husband lay in what had been their shared bed with another woman.

As Peninnah’s body grew large with the much-longed for child, Hannah experienced a new pain. She experienced a new level of grief and pain, guilt and shame. Why not her? Why was God punishing her? What had she done to deserve this barrenness? Would she never have a child of her own? She longed for God to take away the pain and give her a baby to call her own. But He remained silent. Her friends distant. Her husband creating a family with a second wife.

Peninnah’s family grew as more sons and daughters were born. But something else grew in Peninnah’s heart. Her own pain and grief. While God had blessed her with children, she was missing the one thing she wanted more than anything. Her husband’s love.

The author of 1 Samuel shares the painful battle of these two women simply. “And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the Lord had closed her womb.” (verses 4-5)

Hannah longed for a child. Peninnah had sons and daughters.
Peninnah longed for her husband’s love. But he loved Hannah.

The pain and grief created a rivalry between the two women sharing a house and husband.

“And (Hannah’s) rival (emphasis added) also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the Lord had closed her womb.” (verse 6) The Bible calls them rivals. And reveals that Peninnah purposely hurt Hannah in the deepest wound of her heart. Her barrenness.

Sadly, the most painful moments between the two were experienced during their trips to the temple in Shiloh to worship God. “So it was year by year, when (Hannah) went up to the house of the Lord, that (Peninnah) provoked her…” (verse 7) A time for worship and celebration, visiting with family and friends from afar, became one of the most painful times of the year. Year after year after year. Instead of worship, Hannah wept.

Tucked in the middle of their story, the author of Samuel offers what may seem to be an out of place piece of information. “Also, the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there.” (verse 3) Why mention them in the middle of a story about two hurting women battling for their hearts’ desires?

This little tidbit offers a glimpse into a bigger story happening.

Hophni and Phinehas were the priests at the temple. Spiritual leaders. Guiding the Israelites to worship, know and connect with God. There was just one problem. “Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord.” (1 Samuel 2:12) The priests didn’t know God. Nor did they care to know Him or serve Him. They would not obey God’s commands about sacrifice and would force people to disobey. They slept with women who came to the temple. Their father, Eli, knew. He tried talking to them, “You make the Lord’s people transgress.” (verse 24) But they refused to listen to him. And Eli refused to do anything about it.

Their sin impacted the nation and the church. “And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.” (1 Samuel 3:1) God wasn’t speaking to His people corporately. People weren’t studying and growing. The lamp of God, representing the Holy Spirit, was growing dim in the tabernacle (verse 3), a reminder that the Holy Spirit was slowly pulling away from a people who no longer listened.

Hannah was hurting. The church was dying. But God was watching.

Her heart so broken she could no longer eat (1 Samuel 1:7), Hannah finally took her pain to God. Leaving her family behind, she headed to church. With pain so great she could only weep and pray in her heart, she pours out her heart honestly and completely to God. “And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish.” (verse 10) She promises God that if He will hear her prayer and answer, she will give her son completely back to Him, surrendering her hopes and dreams to God.

Eli passes through the tabernacle as Hannah prays. It’s been so long since he has seen anyone truly worship God honestly with all their heart, that he assumes she must be drunk. Most others are. He reprimands her, but that doesn’t deter her from her mission. “No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I
have spoken until now.” (verse 15-16) She is hurting. In pain. Grieving. But she is giving it all to God. Honestly. Completely. Expecting Him to answer.

“Go in peace,” Eli tells her, “and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.” (verse 17)

Hannah believes Eli’s words. She gets up. Goes home. And trusts that God will show up. “So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.” (verse 18, emphasis added) She believes. No more reason to grieve or worry or be sad. God will answer.

We don’t know how long it takes. The Bible simply says, “in the process of time” (verse 20) Hannah conceives and a son is born. His very name revealing that this child is a gift from the One who listens to prayers, Samuel—Heard by God.

All the years of waiting and hoping and longing. A son. Many of us may have held onto that child and not let him out of our sight. But Hannah had promised God. Committed her son to serving God all his life. So when he is weaned, she takes him to Shiloh and leaves him with Eli. She surrenders the very thing she wanted more than anything else and believes that God will use him for His service and glory.

And He does.

He calls out to the young boy and so begins a friendship that changes the Israelite nation. “So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord. Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.” (1 Samuel 3:19-21)

God again speaks to His people. He again reveals Himself. He guides and directs His people.

The result of an unlikely world-changing prayer warrior.

What does Hannah’s story teach us about praying and changing our world?

1. **Fast and pray.** There are things we care about so deeply that it drives us to fast and pray. For Hannah, it was the pain of not having a child. What in our lives creates such an ache that we are moved to pray and fast? Our children? Family and friends who do not know God? Sin or addiction of which we long to be rid? Challenges that leave us discouraged and distracted from the life and work God calls us? Corporately as a church family, what drives us to pray and fast together? Our families, missing members, neighbors and those in our community living without Christ and the hope, peace and joy He brings? Are we driven to fast and pray for the salvation and growing relationship with God of those He loves? Are there challenges within the church that need to be prayed about and addressed?

2. **Get real.** We pray together as a church every week. We pray for people’s needs (health, jobs, finances.) We pray for our church service and speakers. These are all important, but are they the deep longings on our heart? Hannah prayed beyond the typical prayer requests to what was deep in her heart—hurts/bitterness/grief, as well as her hopes and dreams. Hannah’s example of prayer reveals our need to go deeper and really pray what’s deep in our hearts:
   - Are there hurts and divisions within the church for which we need to pray?
   - Do we need to pray for forgiveness? Healing? Courage?
• What are the goals, visions, dreams of our church? Are we really praying for these?
• What breaks our hearts as individuals for which we can pray together as a family?
• Who are missing on Sabbath mornings?

3. **Commit it all to God.** Hannah asked for the deep desires of her heart, but immediately promised to give it all back to Him, trusting Him to fulfill His plan. She could have prayed and asked God for a child and then clung tightly to him, but she prayerfully committed to allowing God to take her dream and use it the way He saw best. We can take our hopes, dreams, visions, and goals for people, the church, our ministries, and commit them to Him, asking Him to do as He desires.

4. **Expect God to answer.** When Eli spoke, Hannah listened because she believed God would hear her prayer and respond. Are we praying expecting God to really hear us and answer? Or are we just hoping that He hears and answers? We need to confess our doubt and ask God to deepen our belief and trust. Claim promises that remind us He hears and answers. Thank Him in advance for what He is doing—even when we don’t see anything happening, trusting Him to move in the ways He knows are best.

5. **Stop crying.** Maybe we aren’t actually crying like Hannah, but too often we walk away from our prayer time still worrying and trying to figure out the people, needs, plans and circumstances we’ve just given to God. Do we continue to worry and struggle or are we living in peace and belief that God is already at work and will complete it? Hannah walked away and “her face was no longer sad.” She believed God heard her and would answer, so she let it go and left it with Him. Every time we find ourselves worrying or agonizing over what we’ve given to God, we need to give it to Him again, claiming His promises and reminding ourselves that He is working by thanking Him for doing that very thing.

6. **Wait and work.** Hannah’s prayers were answered “in the process of time.” While she waited patiently expecting God to answer, she didn’t just sit there. She did her part in enabling the answer to happen. How can we be a part of the answer? How can we reveal God and His grace, love and mercy to those for whom we’re praying? Are their battles we’ve asked Him to take, sin we’ve asked Him to forgive and enable us to overcome? Are we doing our part? Walking away, saying no, creating new behaviors? Have we asked God what He desires us to do?

7. **Praise and thank.** As Hannah takes Samuel to the house of the Lord, she praises God. "My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn (strength) is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You...” (1 Samuel 2:1-2) We need to take time to praise and thank God for how He has answered and all He has done for who He is—not because He needs our praise and thanksgiving, but because of what it does in our hearts and minds. The way it changes us and reminds us of who God is and how He loves, cares and provides, giving us courage and strength for the next battle.

We, too, can pray world-changing prayers. They may not change the entire world, but will change the world around us or even just the world of one person for eternity. And that one person changes the life of another and a ripple effect begins. We may not even realize the impact of our prayers or all God does as a result of them this side of eternity, but one day—one day soon—Jesus will take us home and we will begin to hear the stories of how God used the prayers and faith of ordinary people like Hannah, like you, like me, to change the world for Him.
Afternoon Prayer Program

Place: Gather together in the sanctuary or if your group is small, a comfortable room that offers privacy and no distractions.

Opening: Music always helps invite people into worship and sets the mood, so begin with a few songs of worship your congregation enjoys that will set a mood of reverence and seeking God.

Welcome: The leader should welcome people and share a few words of instruction:
- This is a time of prayer and seeking God.
- Anything shared is confidential and should not be shared outside the room.
- As we pray, prayer is more than just our words. Claim scripture, praying God’s promises back to Him. Sing a verse or two of a song—-with others joining in.
- Don’t take prayer requests ahead of time. Explain that this is a time to pray and not talk, so prayer needs will be prayed about during the prayer time, not talked about first.
- If a person prays for a need or person, others are invited to join them in praying, also lifting up that need or person in prayer aloud—there is power in hearing others pray for the needs and people on your heart.
- The theme of the afternoon is “Prayers that Change the World.” We’ll be following Hannah’s example of praying honestly and for the deep needs of our hearts. Today we’ll specifically focus on praying for people for whom we long to see surrender to God and commit to walking with Him.

Notes for the leader:
- Remember that silence in prayer time is okay. Don’t feel the need to fill every silence or end the prayer time prematurely. While some people jump in and pray quickly, there are always others who take longer to feel comfortable jumping in and praying aloud. When a silence happens, let it linger. Even just letting it linger and counting a few seconds—-even just 30 seconds if you’re uncomfortable with silence, will give the Holy Spirit opportunity to nudge people.
- If you’re congregation isn’t used to praying together in groups and including scripture and singing during the prayer time, you may need to lead by example and/or ahead of time, ask others to lead by example of intentionally praying scripture or starting a song during the prayer time. Remember that while the priority of the time is to pray together, it is also an opportunity to teach people how to pray.

Prayer time: An outline, “Praying World-Changing Prayers,” is provided for the prayer time. The leader should walk participants through prayer, using the outline as a guide.

Closing: The outline closes the prayer time with praise and thanksgiving. Choose a song or two that focus on praising God to sing at the end to close out the afternoon.

Some churches may choose to have a meal together at the end of the prayer time to break the fast. Keep the meal simple, but make the tables pretty, thus creating a special time together.
Praying World-Changing Prayers Prayer Outline

**Opening with commitment:** Leader can open the prayer time by praying and committing this prayer time to God. Invite God to have all power and authority, to move on hearts—convict, encourage, challenge and affirm. Invite others to pray prayers of commitment and surrender, completely giving this time to God and asking Him to lead the prayers time, show us for whom to pray, help us see people the way He does—deepening our love for them and breaking our hearts for the hearts of others.

**Really pray.** This is where we will spend the majority of our prayer time. Praying for the real needs of our hearts, individuals and church. This will be where they may be moments of allowing silence. As leader, walk people through pray by asking questions. Remember those raised in our story of Hannah’s example:

- Are there hurts and divisions within the church for which we need to pray?
- Do we need to pray for forgiveness? Healing? Courage?
- What are the goals, visions, dreams of our church? Are we really praying for these?
- What breaks our hearts as individuals for which we can pray together as a family?
- Who are missing on Sabbath mornings?

It will be easiest to begin by praying for people. Inviting people to lift up those for whom they long to see surrender to God in salvation. Encourage people to just use first names and not pray many details of their lives, but just pray for their salvation, claiming God’s promises. As people pray, invite others to pray for the names being lifted, *Is there someone who will join Alice in praying for this person?*

Let the prayer time flow, but also guide. At some point, ask, *Who are we missing on Sabbath mornings? Who in our membership do we need to pray for?* Again encouraging people to not pray specific details of what’s happening in lives, but praying for God’s power. We want to discourage “holy” gossip and pray for people without gossip, judgment or criticalness.

You may want to move into a time of praying for the church. Begin by praying something like, *Father, we want our church to be a safe place for these people to come and discover You. A safe place for them to grow and even fail as they begin walking with You. Are there things we need to confess and ask forgiveness?*

**Commit it to God.** Hannah prayed for Samuel, then gave it back to God wholeheartedly. Take time to surrender the people and situations for which were prayed, giving them completely to God, giving up our “right” to worry or the ways we think it should work out, giving God permission to do as He desires. This is a time for confessing the ways we’ve doubted Him—doubted that He would really answer or is answering. The leader will need to begin this prayer time by praying in example and then inviting others to pray prayers giving God their requests completely and surrendering worry, doubt, fear, etc.

**Expect God to answer.** Spend some time building the belief in God and His promised answer. Invite people to claim promises. To thank Him for what He is doing—even if they don’t see it yet. Thank Him for loving those for whom we’re praying even more than we do. Praise Him for wanting more for them than we can hope or imagine. Claiming the promises that God has plans, dreams, and WILL complete the work He has begun.
**Be a part of the answer.** Take time to ask God to show us how to be a part of the answer, giving us ideas, prompting us do to do things or speak words that will reveal Him and His love. Pray, too, that God keeps us from doing or saying anything that would do harm and not reveal Him. Invite God to continue to prompt us and open opportunities in the days ahead to be a part of the answer. This prayer time is important because it reminds us that God may have a work for us to do, too.

*Before closing, you may want to go back to the beginning and ask if there is anyone else for whom someone wants to pray and then walk through the same steps again—though you may go more quickly this time. As the prayer time has happened, other people or things may come to mind and/or those more introverted or shy may not have had courage to speak up before.*

**Praise and thanksgiving.** Close the afternoon with a time of praise and thanksgiving. Invite people to now just focus on God. Praising Him for who He is. Thanking Him for what He is doing and will do.

Close the afternoon with a song or two of praise and thanksgiving.
An Invitation to Fast and Pray

“Now and onward until the close of time the people of God should be more earnest, more wide-awake, not trusting in their own wisdom, but in the wisdom of their Leader. They should set aside days for fasting and prayer. Entire abstinence from food may not be required, but they should eat sparingly of the most simple food.” Counsels on Diets and Foods, p. 188-189

“In the Bible, fasting is not an option. It’s a given. Matthew 6:17 doesn’t say, “If you fast,” but rather, “When you fast.” Fasting has always been part of the lifestyle of believers, just like praying and studying the Bible. In fact, every major character in the Bible fasted...If you study out all the fasts in the Bible, you will find that every time God’s people prayed and fasted, God worked mightily on their behalf. From deliverance from their enemies in battle to supernatural deliverance from prison, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and on and on, we see a pattern. And this pattern repeats itself all down through Christian history.” Melody Mason, United in Prayer Coordinator, General Conference

We’re inviting members to join us for a day of prayer and fasting for our church and specifically for those we long to see come to know Christ in a real relationship that leads to salvation and a life of commitment to God. Our children. Friends. Family. Neighbors. Co-workers. Community.

What is fasting?

Fasting is more than not eating. In fact, the real emphasis of fasting is not skipping meals, but increasing prayer. Fasting is choosing to do without something in order to pray more intentionally and focused. While it is true that many choose to skip meals, not everyone can do without food completely, and not everyone chooses that type of fast. You can choose to eat more simple and light meals. Fast from an item or two—like dessert or processed foods. But fasting can also include doing without social media, television, or other habits that are time consuming.

The focus of fasting is not what you give up, but intentionally praying instead. Should you choose to fast completely from food (making sure to continue to drink enough water and/or juices), use the time you would typically prepare or eat food to pray. If you fast from an item or two, every time you’re tempted to eat that or think about it, pray instead. Every time you’re tempted to check out social media, pray.

Remember that fasting does not guarantee that your prayers will be answered in the way you desire. Fasting doesn’t mean God’s going to hear us better or reward us more. Fasting is about what it does in our own hearts and minds. Making us more aware of our weaknesses. Making us more dependent on God. Creating an intentionality about prayer—a reminder to pray and pray more focused prayers for those things that are deepest on our heart.

We’re inviting you to first pray and ask God how you should fast—what is He inviting you to give up in order to spend more time with Him in prayer?

Then we’re inviting you to join us for a day of prayer and fasting together as a church. Even if you choose not to fast at all, join us for a day of praying together as a church. Spend time before our Sabbath services, praying and inviting God to prepare your heart and mind. Invite Him to convict you of any sins that stand between Him and you. Confess those. Ask forgiveness and for cleansing. Healing.
Invite Him to show you for whom He wants you to pray. Bring those names with you for our afternoon prayer time and we will join you in praying for them.

Some are uncomfortable praying aloud and so avoid times of corporate prayer. We invite you to come and join us anyway. You can pray silently with us, lifting up the prayer requests prayed aloud and praying for the people and things God brings to your own heart. And should for those afraid that their prayers aren’t “good enough” or aren’t sure they have the right words, know that God hears not only our words but our hearts. He’s not looking for “good enough” prayers but for sincere worshippers seeking Him. He welcomes even faltering prayers where we stumble over our words and may not “say it right” or even know what to really pray. He knows. He hears. And He invites us to pray together.

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.” Matthew 18:19

We’re looking forward to praying together with you.