Day of Prayer and Fasting

Theme: World Changing Prayer Warriors
Prayers that Change Our Perspective

Materials for 2nd Quarter
Sabbath, April 6, 2019
Prepared for church group and individual use by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in coordination with the Revival and Reformation Committee. Written by Tamyra Horst for the Day of Prayer and Fasting global initiative.


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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 wideawake, 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 Our Perspective,” 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: Psalm 147

Suggested Children’s Story:

Tell the story of the Ten Lepers from Luke 17:11-19. Points to emphasize:
• The ten men were lepers. Leprosy was any time of infectious skin disease. When someone had a skin disease they went to the priest who decided if it was leprosy and told them they had to stay away from everyone else so that no one else got leprosy. People looked down on lepers. They didn’t want any part of them. They often thought bad things happened to people because they were bad.
• All ten came to Jesus for healing. Jesus told them to go to the priests and show that they were healed—even though right then, they still had leprosy. Only the priests could say they were healed and let them be around everyone else again.
• On the way to the priests, they were healed.
• When one of them realized he was healed, he turned around and went back to Jesus to say thank you. No one else did. They kept going to the priests.
• Jesus asked where the other nine were. He was disappointed that they didn’t come back. He hoped they would be thankful, too.
• Jesus didn’t want them to come back and say thank you because it made Jesus feel good, but because it was good for them and how they felt about themselves and what had happened. The leper who returned received more from Jesus than the others did. Jesus told the one leper who returned that his faith had made him better. While all ten lepers were healed physically, only this one was encouraged spiritually. Jesus told him his faith made him better.
• Saying thank you to Jesus for things He does for us and gives us makes our faith in Him stronger.
Sermon/Devotional

Prayers that Change Our Perspective

The news that came to him struck fear in his heart. Their enemies were ganging up. Coming together with one intent. To destroy God’s people. There were too many and they were too well-prepared and armed for their armies to fight. And there was no way out.

What could they do? All eyes were on him. He was king. He was supposed to have the answers. It was his job to protect and guide the country. But the enemy were too many and too strong for anything he could think to do. They were doomed.

Or were they?

There was one thing Jehoshaphat knew to do. Seek God. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. (2 Chronicles 1:3) He “set himself” to seek God. This was intentional. A choice. He was afraid, but he would not let fear overwhelm him. He chose instead to go to God. And not just him. He proclaimed a fast for all Judah. He invited others to join him in seeking God.

And they came. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. (2 Chronicles 1:4) Everyone came together to pray and seek God. This was not your typical Wednesday-night prayer meeting. The people knew it was life and death. That they needed God desperately. Needed a miracle. They didn’t know what to do but knew Who would and sought Him together.

As Jehoshaphat led the people in prayer, he focused more on God than on the enemies at their doorstep. He begins by remembering who God is, then what God has done for them. He remembers their commitment to God and then lays out the problem. He offers no advice—no here’s what we want you to do for us—instead he admits their helplessness and leaves it with God. We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us, nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You. (verse 12)

Then they all just stand there and wait for God. This is the tough part. Typically, we want to pray and get busy, hoping God will bless our efforts. Despite the pressure of the enemies coming towards them, they stand still. Wait. They want to hear from God. And they expect Him to respond.

And God does. Do not be afraid or dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s. Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem! Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you. (verses 15-17)

God begins and ends His words telling them not to be afraid or discouraged. They needed these reminders. He knew that they weren’t just battling enemies. They were battling fear and discouragement, worry and doubt. He wanted to assure them that He knew right where they were, what was happening and would take care of it. The battle didn’t surprise Him. And He had a plan.
He tells them exactly what to expect—where the enemy will come from and where they’ll find them. He promises to fight the battle for them, but that doesn’t get them off the hook. They still need to go. He doesn’t tell them to run and hide. Doesn’t promise to “zap” the enemy away. They need to go and face their enemies. Letting God fight battles isn’t passive. You still need to show up, believing and trusting that He will fight the battle and not let you down.

Their response? Worship. *And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the Lord, worshiping the Lord.* (verse 18) This is “worship” as a verb, not “worship” as a noun. Many times, we talk about going to worship or about worship as a noun—or even as an adjective (ie., the worship service), but they are participating in worship. Active. Not passive. They don’t rush out of God’s presence once He responds. They linger. Take time to honor Him with praise and respect. Not because He needs it, but because they do. It keeps them focused on God and not the enemy. It deepens their trust and belief.

The next morning, they get up early to do what God told them to do. Go out and face the enemy. As they gather, Jehoshaphat reminds them to believe and trust God. *Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper.* (verse 20)

And with those words of encouragement, he gets them in formation to head out. He talks with them about how to line up and they decide to put the musicians in front of the army. Those who lead the singing and worship. Not the battle plan of most leaders. Usually the strongest fighters and soldiers go out first. But off they go with the musicians leading the army and singing praises to God.

*Now when they began to sing and to praise...* (verse 22) As soon as they begin singing and praising God, He begins fighting their battle for them. By the time the army gets to a place where they can see the battlefield (they’re not there yet), their enemies have killed each other. Every soldier. No one escaped.

When they finally arrive on the battlefield, they spend three days collecting treasures from a battle they didn’t fight. Three days! The Bible says they found an “abundance of valuables”—“more than they could carry.” What do they do when they’ve collected all the treasure? They worship. Then they head home “with joy.” They are still singing and making music and praising God. When they got back to Jerusalem, they went straight to church and worshiped and praised God some more.

They went from being afraid and overwhelmed to confident and joyful (and richer.) But the experience didn’t just impact them. It impacted the countries around them. *And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.* (verses 29-30)

When we truly worship God—looking to Him, trusting Him, remembering who He is, what He’s done, praising Him, it changes us. Changes our worlds. Gives us victory over battles and enemies—like fear, discouragement, worry, doubt. And it also impacts those around us. *Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. These precious*
acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls. – Ellen White, Desire of Ages, p. 347

Jehoshaphat and the children of Judah went from overwhelmed, fearful, discouraged and unsure what to do, to courageous, confident, and joyful. Their enemies were destroyed and those around them recognized that it was God fighting for them. How? Staying focused on God through prayer and worship. It changed their perspective of the world around them. And will change ours, too. What can we learn from their example?

1. **Intentionally seek God.** Especially when fear or worry or discouragement threatens to overwhelm our hearts and become our focus.

2. **Invite others to join with us.** Everyone who would be impacted came together to pray and fast and seek God. Imagine what would happen if we followed their example. If couples came together to pray and fast and seek God for their marriages. If parents came together to pray and fast and seek God for their children. What would happen if we came together as individuals to pray and fast and seek God in our battles with sin, lust, addiction, jealousies, insecurities, fears, pornography, gossip, etc.? How would it change us and our lives if we came together to really pray and seek God, admitting that we are afraid and don’t know what to do?

3. **Spend more time in prayer focused on God than on the problem.** Worship is choosing to focus on something or someone—giving them your time and attention. If we’re spending most of our time focused on our problems, fears, worry, doubts, or challenges, is it possible that we’re worshipping them instead of God? Like Jehoshaphat and the children of Judah:
   - Praise God for who He is
   - Thank Him for what He’s already done
   - Restate your commitment to God
   - Lay out the problem/challenge
   - Recognize your helplessness in “fixing” or changing things
   - Keep your eyes on Him

4. **Expect God to answer.** Too often we pray and ask God to do something, maybe even admitting our helplessness, and then we get up and try to do something on our own. The children of Judah lingered in God’s presence. They watched for how God would respond. Believing that He would. You may not be able to just stand still until you know God has answer, but we can live with an expectation that God WILL answer—watching and waiting, looking for Him.

5. **Continue to worship.** After God responds, they still don’t rush off into battle. They continue to praise and worship Him. Give thanks for what you see Him doing.

6. **Go.** While God told them He would fight the battle, they didn’t get to just hide out at camp. They had to head out to face their enemies. While marching to battle, they had no clue how God would fight or what He’d do—or what they’d need to do. But they went. Singing and praising Him the entire trip. And God began winning the battle as soon as they began walking and worshipping. He won the battle long before they got to the battlefield—even before they got a vantage point where they could see the armies below them. Don’t hide. Go out. Trust God to show you what He wants you to do in relationship to your prayer.

7. **Collect treasures.** The Bible tell us that God “daily loads us with benefits.” (Psalm 68:19) Keep a journal or gratitude wall (a wall with PostIts filled with things you’re grateful God has done.) Tell
others. In the retelling of what God has done, you’ll be reminded and your faith strengthened, plus be witnessing to someone else of the power and love of God.

8. **Make worship a way of life.** They worshipped God when they didn’t know what to do. They worshipped Him when He answered. They continued to sing and praise Him as they headed into battle. They worshipped Him after collecting the treasures of the battle they didn’t fight. They sang and praised Him all the way home. Then went straight to church and worshipped some more. Keep music that causes you to worship on in your car. Share the things you see God doing with others. Keep a list of 3-5 things you are grateful for each day—and try to make the list new every day. Don’t just focus on the things God has done for you, but focus on who He is. Ponder a characteristic of God. Read scripture and how it describes Him. Thank Him for that trait and then look for it in your life. How has God been merciful? How has He been patient?

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ... 2 Corinthians 10:4-5*

Worship—intentionally focusing on God—is one way to win this battle, to take every thought captive. And as we do, it will change our perspective of the world—and the battles—around us.
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 “Perspective Changing Prayers.” Like Jehoshaphat and God’s people, we will spend time praising and worshiping God, trusting Him to fight our battles for us.

**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 your 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, “Perspective 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.*
Perspective Changing Prayers Prayer Time 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 prayer time and help us truly worship Him and learn to trust Him with every battle we face.

Praise and Worship. Because most of us don’t spend a lot of time focused on praise and worship during our prayer time, the leader will need to guide people through this time, helping walk them through different things we can praise God for and learning to not just ask God for things, but thank Him for what He is doing and how He is already working.

1. **Praise God for who He is.** Invite members to begin by praising Him for His character traits. What is it that they love about God? What are they most grateful for about Him? Invite people to just mention the traits—no need to pray long prayers. “Praise You for Your patience!” “Thank You for Your mercies new every morning!”
   - You can also speak out loud a characteristic of God and then invite people to praise Him for the way they’ve seen Him live out that trait in their lives.
   - When people grow silent or seem to run out of ideas, you can prompt them with some new ideas like just, warrior, all-powerful, sovereign, ever-present, truth, holy, righteous, kind, gracious, merciful, patient, etc.

2. **Thank God for what He’s done.** Invite people to give thanks for what they’ve seen God do in their lives—encouraging them to state their thanks in a sentence or two—no need to go into great detail. The goal is to worship God and not talk about the situation, person, or event.
   - If people grow silent, the leader can help by asking questions that may illustrate how people have seen God move in their lives and invite them to just say thank you. For instance, “Have you seen God work in the life of a person you’ve been praying for? If so, just say thank you!” Or “Has God blessed you with something you needed? Lift your voice and just say thanks!”

Commitment. Spent time in praise and thanksgiving. Linger there. This is our focus today. Then move on to inviting participants to pray prayers of commitment. Surrendering their lives, their will, etc., to Him. Praying prayers that restates who God is in their lives.

Intercession. Jehoshaphat and the children of Judah also laid out their problems before God. But they just stated their problem and didn’t tell God what to do or go in great detail. They knew God saw what was happening and trusted Him to answer. Invite participants to give God their needs, challenges, people for whom they’re praying, but to just speak it out loud—no details or specific request. The leader can help with this by walking them through various typical needs:
   - Do you have someone in your life who needs to know God in a real and personal way? Just speak their first name out loud.
   - Are you battling a problem that you need God’s help with? You can state the topic out loud (ie, “finances”, “health”, “addiction”) or just pray silently. Giving it to God.
   - Are you or someone you love going through a health crisis? Just speak their name up as we give them to God.
Continue with other questions, inviting people to simply lay out their needs before God—verbally and/or silently. When you close this time of prayer, the leader can pray something like, “God we give these requests to you. We don’t know what to do, but we know You do. Our eyes are on you.”

**Expect God to answer.** The children of Judah believed God would answer and stood still until He did. Lead participants through a time of prayer that will strengthen their expectation that God will answer. Help them pray prayers of praise and thanksgiving for what God is going to do and is already doing. For instance:

- Thanking God that while we may not see Him working, He is already moving and answering prayer.
- Thanking Him for loving those we’re praying for even more than we do.
- Being grateful that He is bigger than the enemy and has a plan.
- Gratitude that God answers prayers.

This may be a harder section for people to pray through if they’re used to thanking God before they actually see the answer. Encourage them to remember who God is and what He’s promised to do in response to our prayers. Invite them to claim specific scripture verses—just repeating the verses out loud for all to hear.

**Continue to worship.** After God responds, they still don’t rush off into battle. They continue to praise and worship Him. Invite people to sing a couple songs of praise before leaving. Singing them as prayers. You may choose songs in advance and/or invite people to spontaneously start singing and everyone to join in. Linger here.

**Go.** As you close the prayer time, encourage people to look for God’s answers and to look for ways He is inviting them to be a part of the answer. Challenge them to pray prayers of worship and praise whenever they begin to worry or doubt or get discouraged that the answers they’re seeking aren’t coming as quickly as they’d like.
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.