

Day of Prayer and Fasting

1st Quarter
January 7, 2017

Theme: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

Fighting for the Church

Revival
and REFORMATION
YOU, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR CHURCH, YOUR COMMUNITY

Ideas and Resources for Day of Prayer and Fasting

- **Suggested key verse: 2 Chronicles 7:14**
- **Suggested sermon theme or topics for church:**
 - We're All in This Together*
 - The Great Controversy and the Church*
 - The Battle, the Church, and God's People*
 - The Battle Belongs to the Lord*
- **Suggested children's story:**

Share the story of Joash from 2 Kings 12:1-19. Point out that even though he was just a little boy, he cared about God's church and wanted to make sure that God had a beautiful church where people could worship Him. So Joash took a chest, drilled a hole in the top, and invited people to come and give whatever God encouraged them to give. They could use these offerings to rebuild the temple (church). No matter how young or old we are, God has something for each of us to do to help the church grow and help others know God.

If you'd like to include a visual activity, fill a large bowl with brown rice. Hide a couple of pennies in the rice. Invite kids to look for the pennies with chopsticks. Do this before the story, then share how the church was falling apart and needed repair, but they needed to find money to pay for rebuilding the church. God gave Joash an idea for finding the money.
- **Prayer theme for 1st Quarter Day of Prayer and Fasting:**

"Fighting for the Church"
(See also World Church Requests, included with these materials.)
- **Suggested afternoon prayer program and activity:**

Schedule about two hours for afternoon prayer, but allow the Holy Spirit to lead. Many groups plan for a full afternoon of prayer.
(See Pointers for Prayer Leaders, included with these materials.)
- **Day of Prayer and Fasting devotional:**

"The Prayers of a Breaking Heart" (included). This could be shared before the prayer time or used with the sermon.
- **Additional inspiration and resources for fasting:**
 - "The Biblical Call to Prayer and Fasting"
 - "Spiritual Breakthrough"

(See attached materials.)

Scripture quoted in this guide is taken from the New King James Version,
copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers.

Things to Keep in Mind Regarding Fasting

While not everyone is able to skip food, encourage those who can to fast from something during the morning and afternoon of this special day.

Possible types of fasting could include a water fast, juice fast, Daniel's fast, avoiding dessert or rich foods, avoiding social media, etc. Encourage members to pray and ask God to indicate what type of fast He wants them to undertake. (For more on Daniel's fast, see the attachment called "The Biblical Call to Prayer and Fasting.")

While fasting is a "given" in the Bible (see Matthew 6:16), we must remember that fasting is not a magic key to righteousness or blessings, nor is any other spiritual discipline we undertake. We can't earn God's blessing or answers in prayer by fasting any more than we can earn our own salvation. Also, fasting doesn't substitute for obedience or personal surrender and Christlike love. In fact, we are told, "Fasting or prayer that is actuated by a self-justifying spirit is an abomination in the sight of God" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 280).

Finally, even if people choose not to fast, we still don't want to discourage them from being part of the day's prayer activities. God knows the heart, and the decision to fast or not to fast (or how to fast) should be between a person and God, not dictated by anyone.

The whole purpose of the Day of Prayer and Fasting is to lay self aside as we intercede for others. As we seek the Lord with humility of heart, and as we put away earthly distractions, we become more receptive to what God wants to do in our life and through our prayers.

As Pastor Derek Morris says, "We fast from the world so we can feast on Jesus!"

Prayer Session for January 17, 2017:

Time to Pray!

- **Place:**

Gather together in the church sanctuary to begin this time of prayer.

- **Getting started:**

After a few songs to set a reverent atmosphere, the song leader should lead everyone in the hymn “The Church Has One Foundation” (*Adventist Hymnal*, no. 348).

Follow with this Scripture: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

- **Opening prayer and official welcome:**

Have the prayer ministries director or a designated leader welcome everyone to the time of prayer and share the devotional “The Prayers of a Breaking Heart” (included with these materials).

Then go over the prayer theme for the Day of Prayer and Fasting (see included Prayer Theme sheet called “Fighting for the Church”). If possible, you might print up multiple copies of this page for people to have during the prayer time. This is also a good time to remind people to keep each prayer brief so that multiple people can pray. (See “Pointers for Prayer Leaders.”)

- **Prayer time:**

Spend two hours minimum. This time will go quickly. Many enjoy spending the whole afternoon in prayer. Keep the focus and emphasis on actual time in prayer. This is the day to pray!

- **Closing:**

In closing, sing a few songs of praise, thanking God for what He’s going to do. Encourage members, even after the Day of Prayer and Fasting is over, to continue praying for members of other faith groups in their community and to seek ways to reach out to them.

- **Ending the Day of Prayer and Fasting:**

Have a special potluck supper or evening meal to break the fast together as a church family.

Prayer Theme:

Fighting for the Church

Spend the afternoon prayer walking your church—covering every ministry, every Sabbath school class, every leader, and every aspect of church life. This can be done as a large group but may work best in small groups. Give each group the following outline in a different order so that each group is praying in a different part of the church at a given time. After finishing in one area, groups may rotate to the next place.

- Begin this time of prayer by spending time **praising** God in the sanctuary—focusing on who He is.
- While still in the sanctuary, lead in a time of **confession**, asking God to forgive and heal the church. Include a time for personal, silent confession, inviting each person to ask God to convict their hearts of sin. Allow time for people to silently confess, ask for forgiveness, and invite God to replace that sin with more of Him.
- Pray on the platform for the **worship service**: the sermons, music, children’s messages, etc. Ask that God’s Word would accomplish all that He desires each Sabbath, opening the hearts of people to be convicted, challenged, encouraged, and affirmed by the message.
- Pray in the pastor’s office/study (if there isn’t one, choose a spot that best represents the pastor), and pray specifically for the **pastor and his family** by name.
- Pray in each **Sabbath school classroom**, lifting up each teacher and each student by name. Ask God to use this weekly time to draw each person closer to Him, to open hearts to understand His Word, and to grow the classes.
- Pray in the fellowship hall for the **social activities and friendships of the church**. Ask God to grow friendships and enable every single member to feel accepted and to feel a sense of belonging in the church.
- Pray in the lobby for the **visitors** who attend church. Pray that they feel welcome, that they learn more about God, and that they want to return.
- Pray outside the front doors for the community, asking that God would draw **those who are seeking** Him to the church. Also pray for the church’s outreach ministries, inviting God to give wisdom, discernment, and ideas for connecting with people in the community.
- Pray in the room where the church board meets for the **church board and leadership** of the church by name. Ask God to give each member wisdom and a heart for Him and for others so that leaders can focus most of their energies on ministry and not maintenance.
- Choose spots to pray for **each ministry** of the church—community services, women’s ministries, personal ministries, etc.—and pray specifically for the ministry leaders and committee members. Ask God to give them wisdom, ideas, and a heart for Him and people.
- Return to the sanctuary and end the time of prayer with a season of **thanksgiving and praise**, thanking God for the ways He is working in and through the church.
- In addition, pray for the World Church Prayer Requests on the attached sheet.

World Church Prayer Requests

- Please pray that our churches worldwide become houses of prayer, interceding on behalf of the nations around us.
- Please pray that churches worldwide will participate in the upcoming Ten Days of Prayer (Jan. 11-21) and that members will be revived and inactive members reclaimed.
- Please pray for the upcoming Total Member Involvement evangelistic series that will take place in Ukraine, Georgia, Romania, and Moldova in February 2017.
- Please pray for your local church leaders and pastor, conference leaders, union leaders, and division leaders, asking that God will give them wisdom and strength for their tasks.
- Please continue to pray especially for the work to go forward in the difficult 10/40 region of the world.
- Pray for the Euro-Asia Division and especially for Russia, where sharing about Christ is becoming more difficult.
- Please pray that every member in your church will feel the call to get involved in sharing the gospel with those in their sphere of influence—whether via friendship evangelism, literature outreach, prayer, or other initiatives.
- Pray that we would be strong, both as a church and individually, no matter what trials we face as the coming of Jesus grows closer!

Pointers for Prayer Leaders

While people are encouraged to pray multiple times during the prayer service, remind them of the importance of keeping individual prayers brief. Ellen White writes, “Make short prayers in meetings, and lengthy prayers when you talk and commune with God in your closet” (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 10, p. 130).

So while the prayer time can be long, the individual prayers should not be. Praying short prayers tends to keep the prayer time active and moving. It also binds the members’ hearts together and keeps adults and children from growing restless.

We encourage you to start with a time of **praise and confession** before beginning to really intercede for the prayer themes. Based on Psalm 100:4, we are to enter God’s gates with praise. And, based on Psalm 66:18 and Isaiah 59:1, 2, if we want God to hear our prayers, our sins must be confessed and put away!

If starting with praise and confession, you might begin the prayer time as follows: “Dear Lord, we come before You today with hearts full of praise. Before we give You our requests for our brothers and sisters of other faiths, we want to take a few minutes just to praise Your name. Thank You for being our mighty King and deliverer.”

Then allow others to pray. When it’s time to move to confession, lead again.

We encourage a brief time for private confession to God first, followed by corporate confession, especially for sins like apathy and lethargy in reaching souls for Christ. This time of confession might be followed by singing “Amazing Grace.”

As you move about the church, praying for the various ministries, classes, and leaders, encourage everyone, by your own example, to pray God’s Word and claim His promises. Be specific! Pray in faith! And allow this time to go as long as the Holy Spirit leads.

Throughout the prayer time, feel free to interject well-known hymns and songs that correspond with the prayers being prayed. “As a part of religious service, singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer” (*Education*, p. 168).

Encourage the group to agree with each other in prayer, claiming Matthew 18:19.

These are ideas to help you get started, but it’s most important that the Holy Spirit leads!

For more prayer pointers for leading group prayer, you can download *Praying for Rain: A Mini Handbook for United Prayer* at www.revivalandreformation.org.

Continue to Fight for the Church in Prayer

Covering the church in prayer is a great way to start the year, but it's also important to pray for the church throughout the year. Here are some ideas to help keep members praying for the church throughout the year:

- Include prayer requests for the church in the weekly bulletin or e-blast.
- Invite Sabbath school teachers and ministry leaders to share specific prayer requests for their area of ministry.
- Begin a weekly prayer focus for the church, choosing one ministry or Sabbath school class to focus on each week. Pray for that ministry/Sabbath school class on Sabbath, then invite church members to pray throughout the following week. Consider creating a bulletin insert with that week's focus and things to pray specifically about for that area of ministry, and include the names of leaders involved.

Check out the included resource "A Praying-Like-Crazy Church" for more ideas on praying together as a church.

Devotional Thoughts for Day of Prayer and Fasting:
The Prayers of a Breaking Heart

What breaks your heart?

What drives you to your knees?

Has your heart ever broken for the church? Have you found yourself wanting so much for the church that you were compelled to fast and pray?

What about for *your* church? Have you ever spent time earnestly fasting and pleading with God for the ministry, members, and leaders of your church? Have you prayed prayers that go beyond “please bless my church”? Heartfelt prayers pleading with God for healing, hope, and impact?

Nehemiah prayed that kind of prayer.

In Nehemiah 1, we find a king’s cupbearer heartbroken and weeping for his city and temple.

A little history: The children of Israel had been taken captive. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed. And along with it, the temple. Years later, this scattered nation is now free. Ezra and others return to Jerusalem and begin the task of rebuilding the temple. But they cannot seem to make progress because of the attacks of enemies who do not want to see God’s temple—or His people—restored. They have no protection from enemies because the walls of Jerusalem lay in shambles all around the city. They are discouraged and struggling.

When Nehemiah learns of their plight from far away, it breaks his heart. He “sat down and wept, and mourned for many days” (Nehemiah 1:4). Wept. Mourned. For days. He is grieving for his city, his people, and the temple. His heart is breaking for his church. Not just for the building but for the people and for their witness to the nations around them. He does not want the enemy to win. And so he fights for his church.

“I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven” (verse 4). He begins battling for his church by spending time fasting and praying. He knows where to go to find the power and resources to win this battle. To God. And he knows that this is no ordinary battle. It requires more than just a “bless our efforts” prayer. It requires committed fasting and prayer.

The disciples once questioned Jesus about why they weren’t able to heal a man’s son. They had healed many people and participated in miracles. But for some reason, they couldn’t seem to bring freedom to this child from the demon out to destroy him. “Why could we not cast it out?” (Matthew 17:19). Jesus told them, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (verse 21). There are battles to be prayed that require the commitment that fasting brings to the heart of the pray-er. Nehemiah recognizes that this is one of those moments. His breaking heart drives him to fast and pray for his people and church.

As he prays, he spends time praising God for who He is: “O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments” (Nehemiah 1:5). Nehemiah begins praying by praising God—not because he’s attempting to get on God’s good side and thus receive the answer he wants but because it reminds him of who God is, what He has promised, and how He loves and cares for His people.

While his heart is heavy for his church, he next spends time confessing sin. He wants to make sure things are right between himself and God before making any requests. “I pray before you now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You” (verse 6). Nehemiah confesses the sins of God’s people—and sees himself as part of the sinners. “Both my father’s house and I have sinned” (verse 6). He recognizes that it’s not just everyone else who has sinned. He has, too. He takes on the responsibility of the entire nation and confesses their sin.

Nehemiah knows that God is merciful. Forgiving. And He has promised to never abandon or forsake His people. Even though He allowed them to be taken captive, He still sees them, loves them, and has a plan for them. The often-quoted promise in Jeremiah 29:11—that God has a plan that includes hope for His people—is given right after His people are told that they will be in captivity for 70 years. God challenges them to live *there*. Build houses. Plant gardens. Raise children. See those children married and raising their own families. They are going to be captive for a while. So live there, God says. But He promises them that He has a plan.

Nehemiah reminds God of His promises. He prays God’s Word right back to Him, claiming the promises God made to His people. “Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if You return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for My name’” (verses 8, 9). He claims God’s promise, believing God will answer. Then he gets back to work.

Yet when he shows up in front of the king, he is still heartbroken and grieving, still longing for his church to be rebuilt and his people protected from the enemy. And the king immediately sees it. He knows Nehemiah. He knows that Nehemiah is a man of joy and peace. He doesn’t typically walk around grieving. So the king asks, “What’s wrong, Nehemiah?”

Nehemiah tells him about the plight of his people.

“What do you request?” Nehemiah recognizes the king’s question as God’s possible answer to his prayers. He’s been watching and waiting for God to answer. Expecting God to answer, He sends up a quick prayer (Nehemiah 2:4) and confidently asks the king for help. And not just a little help. He asks for huge things.

“Send me to Judah . . . that I may rebuild it” (verse 5).

The king asks, “How long will you be gone?” Nehemiah “set him a time” (verse 6). As we continue

reading the story, we see that Nehemiah is gone 12 years. So he's not asking for a couple of weeks off work, but a dozen years.

"Furthermore I said to the king . . ." (verse 7). And he's not done yet. He asks for letters that will ensure him safe passage all the way to Jerusalem, as well as timber from the king's own forest for the rebuilding supplies (verse 8).

"And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me" (verse 8). Nehemiah recognizes that the king answers these outrageous requests because of God. And not only does he give Nehemiah all he requests, but he also sends captains of the army with him to protect him on this journey. God is answering Nehemiah's prayers.

Trusting God to continue to answer and be with him, Nehemiah heads off to Jerusalem and leads the rebuilding efforts. It's not an easy task. The enemies don't give up easily and continue to attack. But they are no match for the prayers of a heart that is breaking for God's people and church. Nehemiah and God are successful. The wall is rebuilt. The city fortified. The people encouraged. The enemy defeated.

"So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elui, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God" (Nehemiah 6:15, 16).

"There is need of Nehemiahs in the church today—not men who can pray and preach only, but men whose prayers and sermons are braced with firm and eager purpose. . . . The success attending Nehemiah's efforts shows what prayer, faith and wise, energetic action will accomplish" (*Christian Service*, p. 177).

We need Nehemiahs in the church today. People whose hearts are breaking for the church. People who are compelled by their love for God and His people to spend time fasting and praying for the church. People who are willing to ask God for big things for His church—and then expect Him to answer. People who don't just sit back and watch but become part of God's answer by getting involved. By taking action. By being part of the rebuilding—not of a physical building but of people's lives.

Today we can take a first step toward becoming Nehemiahs. As we spend this day fasting and praying, we can offer real, intentional, heartfelt prayers for our church—our leaders, our ministries, our Sabbath school classes, our members, our visitors, and those seeking God in our community. Join us as we step out in faith and fight for our church in prayer.

Summary—Just to Recap

The condition of the church broke Nehemiah's heart. His response is a great outline for us as we pray for our churches:

- He fasted and prayed.
- He praised God.
- He confessed sin.
- He claimed God's promises.
- He asked for huge things.
- He got involved.

A Praying-Like-Crazy Church

The 1-2-3's of a Praying-Like-Crazy Church

1. Okay, while we'd love three simple steps and—ta-da—we're guaranteed a praying church, it's not that simple.
2. But we can create a culture of prayer in our churches.
3. And we can provide opportunities for prayer to happen.

culture

noun | cul-ture

Simple Definition of culture:

1. the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time
2. a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc.
3. a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (such as a business)

Creating a Culture of Prayer

We can grow churches with a culture of prayer, a culture where prayer is an essential part of how we think and plan, a central focus of all of our events and gatherings, and a key component in how we work together.

Remember Why We Pray

- Prayer is about really getting to know God.
- God invites us to ask.
- God answers prayers.
- There is power in praying together.
- Praying together and for each other connects us.
- We all need prayer.
- We have an enemy.

Pray Like Crazy

- As leaders, model prayer.
- Do this in a variety of ways—not only opening and closing prayers, prayers before meals, or long praying-about-everything-at-one-time prayers.
- Don't just talk about prayer at prayer meeting—pray. Pray more than you talk or study.
- Really pray together as a church family on Sabbath mornings—it may be your only chance.
- Create more opportunities to pray during the week than just the mid-week prayer meeting.
- Talk about praying.
- Talk about how God has answered prayers.
- Talk with vision: "We are a praying church."
- Not only offer to pray *for* people, but pray *with* them, right then and there.

- Follow up later and ask how things are going.
- Get kids praying.
- Create a prayer room at your church.
- Have a place where people can submit prayer requests—including anonymously.
- Plan fun events that include or are about prayer—like prayer breakfasts.
- Offer a prayer tent at community fairs.
- Prayer walk your neighborhood.
- Prayer walk your church.
- Create a prayer focus for your church by praying for a different church member/family each week. (Encourage people to send notes, call, text, or in some way let people know that they're praying.)
- Have prayer meeting by phone—can be offered at several times during the day to catch a variety of people.
- Include a prayer list in your bulletin or e-blast—and include answers to those prayer requests.
- Teach people how to pray.

Guidelines for Praying Together

Through an unscientific survey on Facebook, I asked why people don't want to pray corporately or attend prayer meeting. From that research, here are some guidelines for creating prayer times where people may feel more comfortable participating:

- Encourage people to keep it short—one or two sentences, one topic at a time.
- Pray more than you talk.
- Include praise, singing, and Scripture in your prayer time—as part of your prayers.
- You don't always have to take separate time to ask for requests. Instead, invite people to pray for their need and others to then pray for them.
- Protect against “holygossip.”
- Model praying (and don't feel like you need to be an expert).

Prayer Walk Your Church

Spend a Sabbath afternoon covering your church in prayer:

- Begin in the sanctuary and take time to praise God first.
- Then pray for the worship service, the sermon, the pastor, the musicians, and church leaders.
- Pray in each Sabbath school room, specifically praying for the teachers and students by name.
- Pray in the lobby for guests who enter and for the friendliness of the church.
- Pray in the fellowship hall for the social life of the church.
- Pray for your leaders in the room where your board and committees meet.
- Pray for each ministry of the church at a place that seems appropriate for that ministry.
- Pray on your front step for the community and those who are searching for God.

Prayer Walk Your Neighborhood

Spend a Sabbath afternoon covering your community in prayer:

- Create door hangers that you can leave on every door, letting your neighbors know you prayed for them while they were gone. Include your contact information and a tear-off portion that they can return with specific requests or to ask for information/Bible studies.
- Before going out, pray together as a group for those you'll meet and for yourselves.

- Knock on doors and let them know, “We’re from the church down the street, and we’re out praying for our neighbors. Can we pray for you? What can we pray about?”
- Meet back at the church to enjoy a fun meal together and share experiences.

Prayer Walk Your Church Family

Spend a Sabbath afternoon covering your church family in prayer.

- Invite people to spend the afternoon carpooling to pray for members.
- Map out a route for each car with addresses and names of each family.
- Then hit the road.
- Visit each family, offer to pray for them, and then leave—keep it quick.
- Meet back at the church to enjoy a fun meal together and share experiences.

Creating a Prayer Booth

Offer a prayer booth at a local community event:

- Set up a tent or some shelter that offers a bit of privacy.
- Have comfortable (as possible) seating.
- Make it attractive—pictures of Jesus, boxes of tissues just in case, flowers, etc.
- Play instrumental music softly.
- Have several people available to pray with people.
- Have a box for prayer requests for people who aren’t comfortable being prayed for—then make sure to pray.
- Have a friendly greeter or two outside inviting people in.

Resources for the Day of Prayer and Fasting:

The Biblical Call to Prayer and Fasting

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. And even now Jesus is fasting: He promised He would not drink grape juice again until we are all together in heaven (see Matthew 26:29).

Have you ever thought about the fast Christ is currently keeping for you and me?

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 down through Christian history.

Hudson Taylor once said, "Perhaps the greatest hindrance to our work is our own imagined strength; and in fasting we learn what poor, weak creatures we are—dependent on a meal of meat for the little strength which we are so apt to lean upon" (J. Hudson Taylor, ed., *China's Millions*, 1887).

Of course, in Bible times fasting wasn't merely a denial of food. It was a time of heart evaluation as the petitioner sought God's blessing or deliverance in some situation.

Inspiration encourages us, "Men need to think less about what they shall eat and drink, of temporal food, and much more in regard to the food from heaven, that will give tone and vitality to the whole religious experience" (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 90).

If a fast is not combined with extra time in the Word and seeking God in prayer, it would be better to term it dieting! However, true biblical fasting is not about dieting, nor is it about self-righteous attitudes to impress others of our piety.

Referring to the outward type of fasting the hypocrites practiced, one Bible commentator writes,

Do we not often [even today] feel that there is something meritorious in the very inconveniences which we suffer in our acts of self-denial? . . . [However,] the pain and inconvenience which we may endure by the most rigid fasting are not meritorious in the sight of God. They are not that at which he aims by the appointment of fasting. He aims at justice, truth, benevolence, holiness (Isa. 58:6, 7); and he esteems the act of fasting to be of value only as it will be the means of leading us to reflect on our faults, and to amend our lives (Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible* [1834] on Isaiah 58:5).

It's important to remember that we can't earn God's blessing or answers by prayer and fasting any more than we can earn our own salvation. Fasting doesn't substitute for obedience or personal surrender. However, it is a means of cleansing the heart of distractions and helping us have a more receptive frame of mind to what God wants to do in our life and through our prayers. And we are promised, "To those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance, angels of God draw near. The Holy Spirit is given to open to them the rich treasures of the truth" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 59).

Speaking to early Adventists, Ellen White writes, "It is your privilege to receive more of the Spirit of God, as you engage in fasting and earnest prayer." In fact she correlates this fasting and prayer with the ability to more clearly present the truths of God's Word to the unconverted. Continuing, she writes, "You need to accept the promises and assurances of God and walk out on them in faith. You need to learn how to present the truths of the Word to those around you in all their binding force and in all their encouragement, that the unconverted may feel the influence of the Spirit of God upon heart and mind and character" (*The Review and Herald*, Jan. 13, 1910).

In the book, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, Wesley Duewel writes the following:

The great leaders of the Reformation, in their spiritual warfare to restore purity to the church, naturally made great use of the biblical means of fasting. Martin Luther not only maintained the spiritual discipline of fasting one day a week but additionally fasted so often along with his three hours of daily prayer that he was often criticized for fasting too much. But he blessed the whole church and impacted the world for God by his prayers, fasting, and holy boldness. . . . John Calvin was called an inveterate [habitual] faster—and lived to see God's power sweep Geneva. The Moravians fasted, as did the Hussites, Waldensians, Huguenots, and Scottish Covenanters. Except for prevailing prayer that included fasting, we would have had no Reformation and no great awakenings over the centuries (p. 181).

Throughout the Bible we see many examples of God's people fasting: for wisdom (Daniel 1; Acts 14:23), for deliverance (Esther 4:16; 2 Chronicles 20:3), when beginning in ministry (Matthew 4), when seeking spiritual revival (Nehemiah 9:1; Joel 1:14; Jonah 3:5), when seeking victory over demonic oppression (Matthew 17:21), and many more.

Ellen White also has written a number of reasons why and when we should consider fasting. Consider the following:

We should fast when searching out the truths of Scripture so our understanding is clear.¹

We should fast when seeking heavenly wisdom that God has promised.²

We should fast when seeking God's direction in making important plans.³

We should fast when dedicating our talents to God's service.⁴

We should fast when requesting God's help in crisis.⁵

We should fast when contending with demonic oppression.⁶

We should fast when seeking God for more laborers for the harvest.⁷

We should fast for unity among church members.⁸

We should fast when seeking heart cleansing and spiritual renewal.⁹

We should fast when seeking to overcome spiritual temptation.¹⁰

We should fast when seeking to develop an appetite for plain food.¹¹
We should fast when seeking to conquer disease (for a meal or two).¹²
We should fast over our decaying zeal and languishing spirituality.¹³
We should fast as we seek a deeper walk with God in the last days.¹⁴
We should fast when seeking to see the lost brought into the Kingdom.¹⁵

In addition to fasting when specific problems or issues arise, there is also *an advance fasting* we might consider. This is what Christ did in the wilderness for 40 days *before* He started His ministry. This is what we should do *before* we make big decisions, or *before* we go forward in our work, as we want to make sure we have God's full blessing upon our lives.

Prayer and fasting should go hand in hand! Prayer is the means by which we grasp the invisible things of God, while fasting is the means by which we let loose and cast away the visible things that we are prone to depend upon. Ultimately, the goal of true fasting should be the fulfillment of Isaiah 58. This is the kind of fast that God is calling us to:

The true fast is no mere formal service. The Scripture describes the fast that God has chosen,—“to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke;” to “draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul.” Isaiah 58:6, 10. Here is set forth the very spirit and character of the work of Christ. His whole life was a sacrifice of Himself for the saving of the world. Whether fasting in the wilderness of temptation or eating with the publicans at Matthew's feast, He was giving His life for the redemption of the lost. Not in idle mourning, in mere bodily humiliation and multitudinous sacrifices, is the true spirit of devotion manifested, but it is shown in the surrender of self in willing service to God and man (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 278).

The Daniel Fast and More Specifics

The Daniel Fast is based upon the prophet Daniel's fasting experiences as recorded in the Bible. While we don't know Daniel's complete menu, we are told a few things. In Daniel 1, Daniel chose not to eat the royal food that he was being served and ate only vegetables and drank water. Another time (in Daniel 10:2, 3) he deprived himself of choice food, meat, and wine as he sought the Lord in prayer. Most commentaries believe “choice food” would have been bread and sweets.

You will find some variation in the specific guidelines for what different people think you should or should not eat for a modern-day Daniel Fast. But our word of advice: don't stress about the details. Just keep it simple. The most important part of the fast is not necessarily what is on your plate but what is happening in your heart.

Ellen White writes, “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. Entire abstinence from food may not be required, but they should eat sparingly of the most simple food” (*The Review and Herald*, Feb. 11, 1904).

The intention of today's Daniel Fast is not to duplicate exactly what Daniel did but rather the spirit in which he did it. Daniel's passion for the Lord caused him to hunger and thirst more for spiritual food than for physical food, which should be the desire of anyone choosing to participate in this type of fast.

With that in mind, here are some general guidelines.

Fasting Guidelines

It's important not to get too hung up on what we should and shouldn't eat. Again, remember that the most important part of the fast is what is happening in our hearts. We deny ourselves physically so that we can seek the Lord in prayer with fewer distractions and more clarity of mind. We fast because we desire to grow closer to Him. Our particular fast may look a little different than someone else's fast, but that's OK. Some people may choose to be stricter than others in their food choices; however, that doesn't make them more spiritual or holy. That just means they are being led to do something different.

Thus, these food guidelines are meant to be just that—a guide. They are given to help create some healthy boundaries for a fast. But ultimately the decision on how and what to fast from should be between us and God.

Suggested Foods for a Modern-Day Daniel Fast:

- **All fruit:** fresh, frozen, dried, juiced, or canned
- **All vegetables:** fresh, frozen, dried, juiced, or canned
- **All whole grains:** amaranth, barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa, millet, or whole wheat
- **All nuts and seeds:** almonds, cashews, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, pine nuts, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, nut butters
- **All legumes:** canned or dried black beans, black-eyed peas, cannellini beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), great northern beans, kidney beans, lentils, pinto beans, and split peas
- **All quality oils:** avocado, coconut, grapeseed, olive, peanut, sesame, or walnut
- **Beverages:** distilled water, filtered water, spring water, or herbal teas
- **Other:** unsweetened almond milk, coconut milk, rice milk, or soy milk; herbs; spices; salt; unsweetened coconut flakes; Bragg's Liquid Aminos; soy products; or tofu

Foods to Avoid on the Daniel Fast:

- **All meat and animal products**
- **All dairy products:** butter, cheese, cream, eggs, milk, etc.
- **All sweeteners:** agave nectar, artificial sweeteners, cane juice, honey, molasses, raw sugar, syrups, stevia, sugar, etc.
- **All leavened bread and yeast:** baked goods, Ezekiel bread, etc. (if they contain yeast and honey)
- **All refined and processed food products:** artificial flavorings, chemicals, food additives, preservatives, white flour, white rice, etc.
- **All deep-fried foods:** corn chips, French fries, potato chips, etc.
- **All solid fats:** margarine, shortening, etc.
- **Beverages:** carbonated drinks, coffee, energy drinks, and regular tea

For more inspiration on fasting, I recommend reading chapter 10, “Fasting,” in the compilation *Counsels on Diet and Foods* by Ellen White.

Remember that fasting for more effective prayer and spiritual breakthrough is not about mastering a method but about having a change of heart. Only as we listen to the Holy Spirit’s promptings and allow Him to lead us into deeper surrender will our fasting truly be effective.

—Melody Mason
United in Prayer Coordinator
General Conference World Headquarters

¹ *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 187.

² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

³ *Selected Messages*, Book 2, p. 364.

⁴ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 134.

⁵ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 517, 518.

⁶ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 431.

⁷ Letter 26, 1883.

⁸ Letter 98, 1902.

⁹ *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, pp. 187, 188.

¹⁰ *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 202.

¹¹ *Counsels on Health*, p. 148; *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 190; and G. D. Strunk, “Fasting,” *Canadian Adventist Messenger*, Dec. 21, 1978, p. 5.

¹² *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 189.

¹³ *Gospel Workers 1892*, p. 37.

¹⁴ *A Call to Stand Apart*, p. 69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*