

Day of Prayer and Fasting

Theme: World-Changing Prayer Warriors
Prayers that Change People

Materials for 3rd Quarter
Sabbath, July 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 People,” 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 are 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 understand fasting and prayer and can choose how they want to be involved in fasting during the day.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21

Suggested Children’s Story: *Tell the story of the early church praying for Peter when he was imprisoned. Read Acts 12:1-16.*

Points to emphasize:

- *When Peter was in prison, the church united in prayer for him.*
- *God answered their prayers and rescued Peter.*
- *When Peter arrived outside the house where they were praying, they were surprised!*
- *Herod searched for Peter but couldn’t find him. God protected him because the church prayed.*

Ask the children whom they would like to pray for and have a short prayer time with them.

Sermon/Devotional

Prayers that Change People

What is your picture of a prayer warrior? (*You may ask this question and allow people to respond.*)

If we are honest, many of us picture an older woman praying with her Bible in her lap. We don't usually picture someone who truly looks like a "warrior." The Merriam-Webster.com dictionary defines a warrior as "a person engaged or experienced in warfare; *broadly*: a person engaged in some struggle or conflict."

"Engaged in warfare"? "Engaged in a struggle or conflict"?

As we pray for others, do we see ourselves as warriors? Engaged in a conflict? Battling for the hearts and lives of others? Do we pray like we're engaged in a battle? Like someone's life will truly be impacted through our prayers?

Paul did. The letters he wrote to the early churches reflected his heart and passion for these new Christ-followers. He prayed big prayers for them—prayers focused on their knowledge and understanding of God, prayers for their growth.

"I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:4-8).

"[I] do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:16-20).

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ. . ." (Philippians 1:9-11).

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy" (Colossians 1:9-11).

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell

in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

These do not sound like typical Wednesday-night prayer meeting prayers. Paul was a warrior fighting to share the gospel, fighting for those he was teaching and leading into a real life-transforming relationship with Christ. He prayed with power and believed that God would and could do powerful things in answer to his prayers.

There is nothing wrong with praying for physical healing, surgeries, jobs, and our loved one’s finances—the typical things we pray about during prayer meetings and Sabbath morning prayer request time. God invites us to pray about anything that concerns us. But we also need to pray fervently for others, for their relationship with God, and for their impact on the world. Paul prayed these prayers for others. He prayed with an eternal perspective.

Too often we forget that we live in a battle. We have an enemy trying to destroy us, to devour us. He’s not just trying to tempt us to sin. The Bible clearly tells us that he is out to kill, steal, and destroy. He fears what would happen if we believed we are who God says we are, that God is who He says He is, and that He has called us to live world-impacting lives. The enemy does all he can to keep us discouraged, to keep us focused on things other than God—television, internet, social media, jobs, fitness, friends. He wants to keep us afraid and insecure.

He tries to keep us from praying powerfully for others—from truly fighting for others and their salvation. Paul fought the battle for others by praying for these specific areas:

- 1. Paul expressed gratitude for those for whom he prayed.** Paul often began by telling those for whom he was praying that he gave thanks for them. *“I do not cease to give thanks for you.”* He shared specific things for which he was grateful about them. Something changes in our thoughts and hearts when we begin with gratitude. As we give thanks for our family, friends, co-workers, the difficult people we encounter, or those in our communities with whom God gives us opportunities to connect, it causes us to see them differently. We can see them a bit more from God’s perspective.
- 2. Paul prayed for their relationship with God.** In his prayers, Paul prayed for wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and discernment. He wanted them to know God, His riches, His power, His glory, and the hope that comes from recognizing and believing who God is and what He’s promised. He also prayed for them to comprehend the love of God, while telling them that God’s love “passes knowledge”—it is bigger than we can understand or grasp.
- 3. Paul prayed for their impact/influence on the world around them.** He prayed that their love would abound “more and more,” that they would be “sincere and without offense,” that they would approve the things that are excellent and be filled with the fruits of righteousness. He asked God to make them fruitful in every good work. He desired to see them fulfill God’s good pleasure and share their faith effectively.

We can pray like Paul for people, using his example and even praying the scriptures that outline Paul’s prayers.

1. **Begin with gratitude.** As you pray for specific people, give thanks for them. Praise God for specific things about them and for the way you see God working through them.
2. **Pray for their walk.** We can pray about many things for others—jobs, relationships, finances, health. But nothing is more important than their relationship with God. We don't often remember this unless we are praying for their salvation. Paul was praying for people who had already surrendered their lives to God. Are you unsure what to pray for? Use Paul's prayers and scripture as guidelines, praying God's Word to Him, while personalizing it for the person for whom you are praying.

God, thank you for NAME and for Your grace which You've given NAME by Christ Jesus. I ask that You would enrich NAME in all utterance and all knowledge, confirming Your testimony in NAME, so that NAME comes short in no gift and eagerly waits for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Make NAME blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (based on 1 Corinthians 1:4-8).

3. **Pray for their impact.** Pray for their influence on those around them and that they will reflect Christ. Pray for their God-given gifts and the opportunity to use them for others. Pray for the Fruit of the Spirit in their lives. Ask God to bring into their lives those to whom they can minister best and to give them eyes to see these opportunities.

As you pray, like Paul, believe that God hears your prayers and answers. Remind yourself that you are a prayer warrior, fighting a battle for those God has brought into your life. Claim promises so that you can pray with power, truly recognizing that you are partnering with God for the hearts and souls of others.

"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

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 to inspire reverence and encourage seeking after 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.
- Prayer is more than just our words. Claim scriptures and pray God's promises back to Him. Sing a verse or two of a song, with others joining in.
- Get comfortable. Feel free to change positions—sitting, kneeling, etc.
- 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.
- When someone prays for a need or person, others are invited to add their own prayers and lift up the need or person aloud. There is power in hearing others pray for the needs and people on your heart.
- Since our prayers will focus on other people this afternoon, remind participants that this is a time to pray—not gossip. No need to share specific details or confidential information.
- The theme of the afternoon is "Prayers that Change People." Using Paul's example, we will pray for family, friends, each other, and our community.

Notes for the leader:

- *Remember that silence in prayer time is fine. Don't feel the need to fill every silence or end the prayer time prematurely. While some people jump in and pray quickly, others take longer to feel comfortable praying aloud. When silence happens, let it linger. Just count a few seconds—even just 30 seconds if you're uncomfortable with silence—to give the Holy Spirit an 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. Or you might ask others ahead of time to lead by example, intentionally praying scripture or starting a song during the prayer time. While taking time to pray is the priority, this is also an opportunity to teach people how to pray corporately.*

Prayer time: An outline, "Praying for People," 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. Close the afternoon with one or two songs that focus on praising God.

Some churches may choose to have a meal together after the prayer time to break the fast. Keep the meal simple, but make the tables attractive to create a special atmosphere.

Prayer Outline: Praying for People

Opening: Begin by committing this prayer time to God. Invite God to have all power and authority, to move on hearts, to convict, encourage, challenge, and affirm. Invite others to offer prayers of commitment and surrender, completely giving this time to God and asking Him to lead. Ask God to help us truly worship Him and learn to trust Him with every battle we face.

Remind of the battle. Remind participants that there is an enemy seeking to destroy us, including those for whom we are praying. We are prayer warriors, partnering with God to fight for the salvation of those He has entrusted to us.

Begin with gratitude. Invite people to offer corporate prayers of gratitude, first for the church, then for the community and those God desires to reach with the gospel. Remind them that if they need help, they can claim Paul's prayers of gratitude. (Give each person a copy of the scripture handout located in the appendix.)

Pray for their relationship with God. Allow people silent prayer time—at least 10 minutes—to pray scripture and ask God to show them specifically whom He wants them to pray for. Lead by example in the way you pray. The included handout offers scriptures to claim and pray, but walk people through praying for wisdom, knowledge, understanding, discernment, knowing God—His riches, power, glory, and love—and the hope that comes from recognizing who God is and believing all He's promised.

Pray for people to know God personally. I often pray that they will know Him as intimately as is humanly possible. Pray that God will reveal Himself in undeniable ways, showing His love for them in powerful ways. You may also pray for them to want to study and pray and for God to open His Word to them and give them wisdom and understanding. And pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Invite people to pray their own prayers and words. Use Paul's examples as a starting point but emphasize that these are not the only things for which to pray.

Pray for their impact on those around them. God has given each of us gifts and abilities to use, not only to edify the church but also to reveal Him to others. He has commanded us to go and share what He has done for us. Invite people to pray corporately for the church and its impact on the community around it. Pray for the Fruits of the Spirit for the church corporately. Pray for the church to have passion and vision for those who have not yet encountered God.

Invite people to pray silently for individuals and their impact on the world. Give them ample time to do this, remembering that not only are we gathering as a church to pray this afternoon, but we also want people to learn to pray powerfully and grow as prayer warriors in their own daily prayer life. These corporate prayer meetings offer tools, examples, and experience that can grow people's personal prayer time and ultimately impact the church.

Close by claiming promises. As you close the prayer time, invite people to thank God for who He is and for what He will do as a result of this prayer time. Encourage them to claim promises that God does hear and answer.

End the time with a song of thanksgiving or praise.

Scripture Handout for Prayer Time

Paul's Prayers

Gratitude Prayers

"I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:4).

"[I] do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:16).

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:3-5).

"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (Colossians 1:3-5).

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God" (1 Thessalonians 1:2-4).

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure" (2 Thessalonians 1:3, 4).

"I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day . . . when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you" (2 Timothy 1:3-5).

"I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints" (Philemon 1:4, 5).

Relationship with God

". . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:17-20).

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9).

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

Impact the World Prayers

“. . . that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:5-8).

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:9-11).

“. . . that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy” (Colossians 1:9-11).

“Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12).

“. . . that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus” (Philemon 1:6).

An Invitation to Fast and Pray

“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” (*Counsels on Diet and Foods*, pp. 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. Let’s pray together for 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 with more focus. Many choose to skip meals, but not everyone can do without food completely, and not everyone chooses that type of fast. You may choose to eat simpler, lighter meals. Or you might fast from an item or two, such as dessert or processed foods. Fasting can also include doing without social media, television, or other time-consuming habits.

If you do choose to fast completely from food (making sure to drink enough water and/or juices), use the time you would typically use for cooking and eating to pray. If you fast from an item or two, every time you’re tempted to eat that item, 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 will hear us better or reward us more. Fasting is about what happens in our own hearts and minds. It makes us more aware of our weaknesses and more dependent on God. Fasting creates an intentionality about prayer and reminds us to pray more focused prayers for what is deepest in our hearts.

We invite 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 invite 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 prayer. 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 you and Him. Confess those. Ask for cleansing, healing, and forgiveness. Invite Him to show you whom He wants you

to pray for. Bring those names to our Sabbath afternoon prayer time, and we will join you in praying for them.

Some are uncomfortable praying aloud, so they avoid times of corporate prayer. We invite you to join us anyway. You can pray with us silently, lifting up the prayer requests of others and praying for the people and things God brings to your heart. And for those who fear their prayers aren't "good enough," know that God hears not only our words but also our hearts. He's not looking for "good enough" prayers but for sincere worshipers seeking Him. He welcomes even faltering prayers where we stumble over our words and may not "say it right." Even if we don't know what to 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 look forward to praying together with you.