

Day of Prayer and Fasting

Handbook and Resources

Pioneer Prayer: Today in Reformation

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Revival
& REFORMATION

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 Richard Constantinescu for the Day of Prayer and Fasting global initiative.

Visit www.revivalandreformation.org for information.

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Contents

Why a Day of Prayer and Fasting?	4
Suggested Planning Guide	5
Suggested Program Format	6
Appendix	8
Sermon/Devotional: “Today in Reformation”	9
Testimony Handout for Prayer Time	12
Prayer Outline: “Pioneer Prayer”	14
An Invitation to Fast and Pray (print and share with members the week before)	16

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, “Today in Reformation,” is included in the appendix of 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 program is provided. We recommend scheduling 1-2 hours for this time; however, many plan to pray together for a full afternoon. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead.
- 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. A handout is provided in the appendix.
- Make copies of the handouts “Prayer Outline: Pioneer Prayer” and “Testimony Handout for Prayer Time” for attendees.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:33

Suggested Children’s Story: *Tell how the Holy Spirit descended on the believers at Pentecost.*

Points to emphasize:

- *Briefly tell how Jesus gave His church the mission to heal and preach the gospel (Matthew 28:19).*
- *The gospel of healing and teaching was for Jews and Greeks.*
- *The Jewish nation also needed reformation.*
- *The disciples needed power for their mission (Acts 1:8).*
- *The disciples humbled themselves and asked for Jesus’ character.*
- *One hundred twenty disciples met for ten days, confessed their sins, and claimed God’s promise for the Spirit.*
- *In response to their united prayer, God sent His Holy Spirit, and reformation swept around the world!*

Ask the children if they want to be like Jesus and help others have everlasting life. Have a short prayer and ask God for the character of Jesus and the power to share the gospel, just as the church had in the book of Acts.

Suggested Program Format

Place: Gather in the sanctuary, outside under some trees, or, if your group is small, meet in a comfortable room that offers privacy and no distractions.

Opening: Music always sets the mood for worship, so begin with a few songs of worship to inspire reverence and encourage seeking after God. Invite group members to share short 30-second testimonies of answered prayers or praises to God between songs.

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.
- Don't take prayer requests ahead of time. Explain that this is a time to pray, not talk, so prayer needs will be prayed about during the prayer time, not talked about first.
- Get comfortable. Feel free to change positions—sitting, kneeling, etc.
- Raise your head when you pray. Pray loud enough for others to hear.
- Prayer is more than just our words. Claim scripture and pray God's promises back to Him. Sing a verse or two of a song, with others joining in.
- 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 (Matthew 18:19).
- Claim the righteous life, sacrifice, and ministry of Christ in prayer (John 14:14; Revelation 8:3).
- When possible use inclusive pronouns "we," "us," and "our," instead of "I," "me," and "my" (Matthew 6:9-13) in prayer.
- The theme of the afternoon is "Pioneer Prayer." Take turns at the beginning to read the Testimony Handout. Then pray for family, friends, each other, and the world.

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 a request from the Testimony Handout 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.*

Devotional: If the sermon/devotional reading has not already been shared, the coordinator or a designated leader may read it before the prayer time.

Prayer time: An outline, “Pioneer Prayer,” is provided for the prayer time. The leader should walk participants through prayer, beginning with the Testimony Handout and using the outline as a guide.

Closing: Close the prayer time with praise and thanksgiving. Choose perhaps one or two praise songs to end the program.

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.

APPENDIX

Today in Reformation

By Richard Constantinescu, pastor and Revival and Reformation Committee member

July 4, 1519, was a significant date for the Protestant Reformation. On this day in Leipzig, Germany, noted reformer Martin Luther debated papal champion John Eck. Christian historian James Wylie notes that this discussion “was, in fact, the first distinct tracing-out and settling of . . . the essential and eternal boundary between the two theologies.”¹

Historian Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigné describes Luther as having “presented himself with a good conscience, a firm resolution to sacrifice everything in the cause of truth, and an assurance grounded in faith in God, and in the deliverance He grants to all who trust in Him.”²

“New convictions had sunk deep into [Luther’s] soul . . . [and] in the heat of the combat they flashed forth like lightning. Serious and daring, he showed a resolution that made light of every obstacle. On his features might be seen the traces of the storms his soul had encountered, and the courage with which he was prepared to meet fresh tempests.”³

Where did Luther, a monk, derive strength to resist earthly powers and advance God’s truth, without rank or authority? Luther did not trust His own strength. He insisted that “the doctrine of the gospel should be defended by God alone. . . . The less man meddled in the work, the more striking would be God’s intervention in its behalf.”⁴ He also wrote: “Satan is putting forth his fury; ungodly pontiffs are conspiring; and we are threatened with war. Exhort the people to contend valiantly before the throne of the Lord, by faith and prayer, so that our enemies, vanquished by the Spirit of God, may be constrained to peace. Our chief want, our chief labor, is prayer; let the people know that they are now exposed to the edge of the sword and to the rage of Satan, and let them pray.”⁵

Luther discovered from Christ that power is not found in trusting our own ability. It is found by humbly seeking the powerful moving of God’s Spirit. “From the secret place of prayer came the power that shook the world in the Great Reformation. There, with holy calmness, the servants of the Lord set their feet upon the rock of His promises.”⁶

Luther depended upon God so much that, in a time of danger, he “‘did not pass a day without devoting three hours at least to prayer; and they were hours selected from those the most favorable to study.’ In the privacy of his chamber he was heard to pour out his soul before God in words ‘full of adoration, fear, and hope, as when one speaks to a friend.’ ‘I know that Thou art our Father and our God,’ he said, ‘and that Thou wilt scatter the persecutors of Thy children; for Thou art Thyself endangered with us. All this matter is Thine, and it is only by Thy constraint that we have put our hands to it. Defend us, then, O Father!’”⁷

Luther’s firmness was the same that Paul exhibited before Nero, that the apostles demonstrated before Jewish leaders, and that Elijah displayed in the court of Ahab. We do not have this power of ourselves. In

¹ Wylie, J.A. *The History of Protestantism*, p. 294.

² d’Aubigne, Jean-Henri Merle. *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ d’Aubigne, Jean-Henri Merle. Quoted by E.G. White in *The Great Controversy*, p. 209.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ White, E.G. *The Great Controversy*, p. 210.

⁷ White, E.G., with quotes from d’Aubigne. *The Great Controversy*, p. 210.

Zechariah 4:6, we read the secret to our working effectively for God: “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.”

The reformation “that began in the time of Wycliffe, grew broad and deep in the days of Luther, and is to be carried forward to the close of time by those who also are willing to suffer all things for ‘the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ’ (Revelation 1:9)” can only be accomplished by God’s power.⁸

Bible prophecy predicted a great apostasy at the end of time. Paul warned Timothy that “in the last days perilous times will come,” even in the church. “Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:2-5).

How can we avoid these evils ourselves and influence those around us for good?

Jesus was often found in prayer. Paul prayed “without ceasing.” The apostles were baptized with the Spirit at Pentecost after praying together for ten days, and Elijah was especially noted by James the apostle as a man who “prayed earnestly.” Today, we must pray as they did if we wish to be filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to share the truth boldly with the world.

Malachi 4:5 says that Elijah will come again at the end of time. Malachi is not speaking of literal Elijah but of all who have the spirit of Elijah. Jesus said that we would stand for our faith before the rulers of the world, just as Elijah and John the Baptist did. “They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake. *But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony*” (Luke 21:12, 13).

The world needs reformers like these today. “Now is the time for God’s people to show themselves true to principle. When the religion of Christ is most held in contempt, when His law is most despised, then should our zeal be the warmest and our courage and firmness the most unflinching. To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test. At this time we must gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason.”⁹

The power to shake the world in reformation today will come from the same source it always has—from the *secret place of prayer*. Will you choose to spend this time in prayer? Why not silently tell God now and ask Him for help? He will give you victory as you seek and serve Him with all of your heart.

⁸ White, E.G. *The Great Controversy*, p. 78.

⁹ White, E.G. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 136.

Testimony Handout for Prayer Time

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, pp. 14-16

In March, 1840, William Miller visited Portland, Maine, and gave his first course of lectures on the second coming of Christ. These lectures produced a great sensation, and the Christian church on Casco Street, occupied by Mr. Miller, was crowded day and night. No wild excitement attended these meetings, but a deep solemnity pervaded the minds of those who heard his discourses. Not only was there manifested a great interest in the city, but the country people flocked in day after day, bringing their lunch baskets, and remaining from morning until the close of the evening meeting.

In company with my friends I attended these meetings and listened to the startling announcement that Christ was coming in 1843, only a few short years in the future. Mr. Miller traced down the prophecies with an exactness that struck conviction to the hearts of his hearers. He dwelt upon the prophetic periods, and brought many proofs to strengthen his position. Then his solemn and powerful appeals and admonitions to those who were unprepared, held the crowds as if spellbound.

Special meetings were appointed where sinners might have an opportunity to seek their Saviour and prepare for the fearful events soon to take place. Terror and conviction spread through the entire city. Prayer meetings were established, and there was a general awakening among the various denominations, for they all felt more or less the influence that proceeded from the teaching of the near coming of Christ.

When sinners were invited forward to the anxious seat, hundreds responded to the call, and I, among the rest, pressed through the crowd and took my place with the seekers. But there was in my heart a feeling that I could never become worthy to be called a child of God. A lack of confidence in myself, and a conviction that it would be impossible to make anyone understand my feelings, prevented me from seeking advice and aid from my Christian friends. Thus I wandered needlessly in darkness and despair, while they, not penetrating my reserve, were entirely ignorant of my true state.

One evening my brother Robert and myself were returning home from a meeting where we had listened to a most impressive discourse on the approaching reign of Christ upon the earth, followed by an earnest and solemn appeal to Christians and sinners, urging them to prepare for the judgment and the coming of the Lord. My soul had been stirred within me by what I had heard. And so deep was the sense of conviction in my heart, that I feared the Lord would not spare me to reach home.

These words kept ringing in my ears: "The great day of the Lord is at hand! Who shall be able to stand when He appeareth!" The language of my heart was: "Spare me, O Lord, through the night! Take me not away in my sins, pity me, save me!" For the first time I tried to explain my feelings to my brother Robert, who was two years older than myself; I told him that I dared not rest nor sleep until I knew that God had pardoned my sins.

My brother made no immediate reply, but the cause of his silence was soon apparent to me; he was weeping in sympathy with my distress. This encouraged me to confide in him still more, to tell him that I had coveted death in the days when life seemed so heavy a burden for me to bear; but now the thought that I might die in my present sinful state and be eternally lost, filled me with terror. I asked him if he thought God would spare my life through that one night, if I spent it agonizing in prayer to Him. He answered: "I think He will if you ask Him with faith, and I will pray for you and for myself. Ellen, we must never forget the words we have heard this night."

Arriving at home, I spent most of the long hours of darkness in prayer and tears. One reason that led me to conceal my feelings from my friends was the dread of hearing a word of discouragement. My hope was so small, and my faith so weak, that I feared if another took a similar view of my condition, it would plunge me into despair. Yet I longed for someone to tell me what I should do to be saved, what steps to take to meet my Saviour and give myself entirely up to the Lord. I regarded it a great thing to be a Christian, and felt that it required some peculiar effort on my part.

My mind remained in this condition for months. I had usually attended the Methodist meetings with my parents; but since becoming interested in the soon appearing of Christ, I had attended the meetings on Casco Street. The following summer my parents went to the Methodist camp meeting at Buxton, Maine, taking me with them. I was fully resolved to seek the Lord in earnest there, and obtain, if possible, the pardon of my sins. There was a great longing in my heart for the Christian's hope and the peace that comes of believing.

I was much encouraged while listening to a discourse from the words, I will "go in unto the king," "and if I perish, I perish." In his remarks the speaker referred to those who were wavering between hope and fear, longing to be saved from their sins and receive the pardoning love of Christ, yet held in doubt and bondage by timidity and fear of failure. He counseled such ones to surrender themselves to God, and venture upon His mercy without delay. They would find a gracious Saviour ready to present to them the scepter of mercy, even as Ahasuerus offered to Esther the signal of his favor. All that was required of the sinner, trembling in the presence of his Lord, was to put forth the hand of faith and touch the scepter of His grace. That touch ensured pardon and peace.

Prayer Outline: Pioneer Prayer

Opening: The prayer topics below are from the Testimony Handout, which the group should read either together or individually. The leader will divide the prayer topics among group members, or ask individuals which prayer topics they would like to pray about. Volunteers should write their initials on the blanks by their topics, and the group leader should note them too. The group leader may open prayer by thanking God for every person in the room and asking that each heart will be blessed. Before someone prays for a new topic, they should try to agree aloud with the previous one. Please keep individual prayers short, under one or two minutes.

1. _____ Thank the Lord Jesus that He will return soon (Revelation 22:20).
2. _____ Pray for solemnity to be in our meetings as in the pioneer days (Hebrews 12:28).
3. _____ Pray that the world may hear the tidings of Christ's soon return (Matthew 24:14).
4. _____ Pray for a love for Bible truth to be awakened in our hearts (John 17:17).
5. _____ Pray for the Holy Spirit to explain Bible prophecies to us (John 16:13).
6. _____ Pray that we may be prepared for judgment and Jesus' return (Ephesians 5:26, 27).

10-Minute Open Prayer Time: When the last volunteer finishes, a time of open prayer begins. This is the time to uplift other prayer requests. Have a song leader sing one verse to end the open prayer time.

7. _____ Pray that we will not wander needlessly in darkness and despair (John 8:12).
8. _____ Pray that God will forgive our sins (1 John 1:9).
9. _____ Pray that we will encourage others (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
10. _____ Pray that we will know what steps to take to intimately know Christ (John 17:3).
11. _____ Pray that Christ would give us hope and peace (John 14:27).
12. _____ Pray that timidity and fear of failure will not keep us from sharing (John 8:31, 32).

10-Minute Open Prayer Time: Song leader sings one verse to end the open prayer time.

13. _____ Thank Jesus for His pardoning love (John 6:37).
14. _____ Thank God for the scepter of His mercy (1 Peter 2:10).
15. _____ Pray that God will use us to turn many to righteousness (Daniel 12:3).
16. _____ Pray for light for those struggling against darkness and perplexity (Colossians 1:9).
17. _____ Pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 39).
18. _____ Pray that God blesses and heals His people (2 Chronicles 7:14).

5- or 10-Minute Open Prayer Time: Take time for thanksgiving and praise, with the prayer leader closing. God bless!

Register for Weekly Pioneer Prayer at www.RevivalPlan.com/pioneerprayer

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.