

Day of Prayer and Fasting

Theme: World-Changing Prayer Warriors
Prayers that Change Us

Materials for 4th Quarter
Sabbath, October 5, 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.

Visit www.revivalandreformation.org for information.

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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 Us,” 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: Psalm 139:23, 24

Suggested Children’s Story: *Daniel and the lions’ den (Daniel 6)*

Points to emphasize:

- *Prayer was very important to Daniel.*
 - *When the king issued a decree that people would be punished if they prayed to anyone but him, Daniel still chose to pray—even though he knew he could be thrown into the lions’ den.*
 - *Daniel didn’t hide when he prayed; he opened his window and prayed just like he had always done.*
 - *Daniel wasn’t afraid because he trusted God. Praying every day helped Daniel trust God.*
 - *God protected Daniel in the lions’ den, which showed the king and everyone else just how powerful God is.*
 - *The king was so impressed by the miracle God performed that he made a new law requiring everyone to respect Daniel’s God.*
 - *When we pray, we learn to trust God.*
 - *People will see God answer our prayers, and it will help them believe in God too.*
- Ask the children whom they would like to pray for and have a short prayer time with them.*

Sermon/Devotional

Prayers that Change Us

If you ask for prayer requests at a typical prayer meeting or church service, you may notice the responses have common themes—prayers for health, jobs, finances, or relationships. You may notice something missing, however: deeply personal prayer requests about internal battles, spiritual struggles, or for help in facing doubt, fear, and discouragement.

Are we praying about our own needs in moments alone with God? Are we wrestling with Him through personal conflict? Asking for guidance and wisdom? Talking to Him like a friend about the things on our hearts?

Prayer doesn't only change the world around us. It changes *us*. Prayer is meant to be a conversation with God that grows our trust and deepens our relationship with Him. It's through prayer that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and righteousness (John 16:8). Through prayer we wrestle to surrender our will and trust God's plan. Prayer is the source of the courage and strength that emerge when we dig beneath the surface and get real with God about our challenges and hopes.

David understood this. A "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22), David prayed real, honest, and sometimes messy prayers—many of which are captured for us in the book of Psalms. He was a soldier who defeated giants, but also a prayer warrior, fighting battles within his own heart. David often began his prayers sounding discouraged, doubtful, and fearful, but by the time he finished, he had found courage, hope, and even joy. In Psalm 13, David cries out to God, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?" But later in the prayer he declares, "But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me" (verses 1, 5).

David's conversations with God are examples of prayers that change us.

Praise and thanksgiving. "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise" (Psalm 100:4). David didn't begin every prayer with thanksgiving and praise, but he often started his Psalms that way. He believed in the power of praise and music. Years later, when his son Solomon became king over Israel, David directed the Levites to assign 4,000 to praise "the Lord with musical instruments, 'which I made,' said David, 'for giving praise'" (1 Chronicles 23:5).

An attitude of praise and thanksgiving turns our attention toward God and away from our problems. When we give Him thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18) as Paul directs, we remember to look for blessings even when circumstances are hard. And by praising God during disappointments we remind ourselves of who He is and what He has promised.

Remember. Thanksgiving and praise also help us remember how God has led so far. David often recounted God's faithfulness—what He had already done (Psalm 66). He remembered God as Creator (Psalm 8), Deliverer (Psalm 18 and 34), and Refuge (Psalm 28). When you spend time remembering how you've already experienced God's power in your life, hope is reignited and fears and doubts are put to rest. This gives you courage to face your current situation, knowing that God will take care of you as He has in the past.

Search me. In one of David's most beautiful prayers—recounting who God is and what He's done—David begins by acknowledging, "O Lord, You have searched me and known me," and closes by inviting God to "Search me . . . and know my heart. Try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:1, 23, 24). In between, David recounts God's thoughts toward him. God thinks about David no matter where he goes. God thought about David before he existed—putting thought into creating David and writing his story. David exclaims, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (verse 14). David's trust in God's love gives him the courage to invite God to search him and reveal anything he needs to repent of or confront in himself. He knows God's thoughts toward him—God isn't going to beat him up. God loves him and intentionally created him, and He will reveal what needs to be changed.

It can be scary to ask God to search us and reveal our sins. Most of us don't enjoy looking at the messy, weak places in our hearts and minds, but we, too, should invite God to search us and reveal anything that stands between us and His perfect will. God convicts with love and kindness and invites us to allow Him to change us and continue the work He has begun in us. God isn't going to accuse us or make us feel shame or guilt. Those are tactics of the enemy. God gently speaks truth and invites us into something better.

Confession. When the prophet Nathan confronted David about his sin of adultery, he didn't deny it. He didn't excuse it. He also didn't let the magnitude of his sin destroy him or cause him to feel "unforgiveable." He didn't try to appease God. He knew that wasn't what God wanted. "You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart . . ." (Psalm 51:16, 17). The prophet's words convicted him and brought him to repentance. He turned to God in confession, asking God not only to forgive but also to create "a clean heart" and to "renew a steadfast spirit." David so trusted God's love for him that he knew God would forgive him. The reality of his sinfulness and the depth of God's love brought David to a place of repentance.

We, too, need to confess our sins as God convicts, not making excuses or trying to fix ourselves but confessing to God and admitting our weakness and our helplessness to change. Then we invite God to do the changing. We must cooperate with Him, but it is God that works in us "giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him" (Philippians 2:13, NLT).

Help. "Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord, in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up" (Psalm 5:1-3). David looked to God for help and guidance. He prayed, "Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day" (Psalm 25:4, 5). David believed God would answer when he asked. "Because He has heard the voice of my supplications! The Lord is my strength and my shield; *my heart trusted in Him*, and I am helped" (Psalm 28:6, 7).

James also knew that when we need help or wisdom, God is very willing to answer. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to *all liberally and without reproach [without disappointment or disapproval]*, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). But James continues with a warning, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:6, 7). God invites us to ask but also to *believe* that He will answer.

Too often we hear that God either says yes, no, wait, or maybe. It might change our perspective to recognize that God always says, “Yes, here’s more of Me.” Instead of thinking, “God must not be answering, or He must be saying no, because this didn’t turn out the way I wanted,” look for how God is revealing Himself in or through the situation. David experienced God’s mercy, help, rebuke, care, and even silence, always believing that God was hearing him.

At times God helps us by changing circumstances, healing illness, or providing for a need. Other times He helps by giving us patience or courage to continue walking in difficult places. In moments when God does not change the circumstances, He offers His strength and peace. Our walk with Him grows in a way that helps us with the next challenge.

Honest. David was honest with God. He poured out his heart. Sometimes his words are beautiful, but sometimes they make us ask, “Really? Is God okay with someone questioning like that or asking Him to destroy an enemy?” Often we sugarcoat our prayers with polite language and generalities, such as asking for “traveling mercies” or for God to “bless the hands” that prepared the food. We must respect God and recognize Him as King of the Universe while also realizing that He invites us to come *boldly* before His throne. He doesn’t want us to hide from Him. When we keep our prayers polite and “churchy,” even though we are wrestling with doubt or fear, we are not inviting God into our darkest places. The crazy thing is that God *knows* what we’re thinking and feeling. He patiently waits for us to honestly and completely surrender even the tough parts of our hearts and minds—and invite Him to change them.

God is big enough to handle your doubts, fears, and anger. When you’re struggling, even with Him, tell Him honestly. This opens the door for Him to respond with courage and healing. When we pretend like we’re fine, bitterness festers and damages our relationship with God.

Wrestle. Many times the Psalmist begins his prayers with questions or even anger, calling out for God to answer. Sometimes they sound a bit dramatic. “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come to You. Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble . . . for my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned like a hearth. My heart is stricken and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. Because of the sound of my groaning my bones cling to my skin” (Psalm 102:1-5).

David persevered through his thoughts and feelings and battles. He wrestled with God in prayer until he got to a place of trust and hope. “How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, ‘I have prevailed against him’; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13:1-6).

God-focused. Prayer helped David refocus his thoughts on God instead of on his challenges or even his dreams. He consistently reminded himself that he *would* hope again because God was trustworthy. Yes, he sometimes looked away from God for a bit, but he consistently pushed through to a God-focus again. He acknowledged his need and dependence on God (Psalm 55:22). He recounted God’s promises, mercies, and faithfulness (2 Samuel 7:21-29). He praised God and reminded himself that he trusted in God (Psalm 6, 7, 11, 13, 16, 17).

More than 30 Psalms refer to God as a refuge, and David knew that God's presence was where he could hide, be protected, find peace, and discover hope and joy again, even when the enemy relentlessly pursued him. We may not have a physical enemy who pursues us as David did, but we, too, have a relentless enemy out to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). Our enemy wants to steal, kill, and destroy our picture of God, our peace, and how we see ourselves. But John 10:10 tells us that Jesus came to give us abundant life. Hope. Peace. Joy. Purpose. We can only live in that place as we turn to and focus on God.

As you read the Psalms, you'll notice that God is the consistent theme. David prayed with a focus on God, not on the problem or on himself or even on the things he was thankful for.

Conclusion

Do you desire to be a person after God's own heart, like David?

Begin by seeking God with all your heart. Pray honestly, wrestling through hard things with your focus on God—who He is, what He's promised, and how He's led already. Remind yourself that He is a God who can be trusted—and that His heart and plans for you are good.

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 scripture 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 Us.” Using David’s examples in the Psalms, we will pray about our hopes, fears, and personal challenges, along with needs of family and church members.

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 a 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, “Prayers that Change Us,” 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: Prayers that Change Us

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. We are prayer warriors, partnering with God to fight not only for the salvation of others but also for our own. While the enemy wants to steal, kill, and destroy, God promises abundant life, a peace that passes understanding, and a joy that is full.

Sing. Because much of this afternoon’s prayer time will be spent in silent personal prayer, you may want to sing between each prayer section. Choose one or two hymns of praise that reflect the theme of the next section (praise, searching, confession, etc.).

Praise and thanksgiving. “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise” (Psalm 100:4). Don’t rush through this time. Linger here, recognizing that praise refocuses our thoughts on God.

- Invite people to share a one-word characteristic of God or a promise of God for which they are grateful (allow silence as people think—some people need a bit of a break in order to jump into the conversation).
- Then invite people to share a sentence thanking God for specific things He’s done or given.
- Close this section by inviting participants to share a name for God that they especially love, such as Creator (Psalm 8), Deliverer (Psalm 18 and 34), or Refuge (Psalm 28).

You may want to begin the next section by singing one or two songs of invitation, asking God to search the heart.

Searching time. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139).

This will be a time of silent prayer. Allow several minutes. This may be new for participants. At first, some may feel uncomfortable asking for or listening to God’s conviction. Remind them that David could ask God to search him because he trusted God’s love and purposes toward him. He knew God wouldn’t shame him but lead him to healing, wholeness, and holiness.

- Invite participants to spend the next few minutes silently asking God to search their hearts and reveal anything that stands between them and His will.
- Encourage them to pray in faith, trusting that God will convict, not shame—bring courage, not shame.

Confession. “You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart” (Psalm 51: 16, 17).

- After 10-15 minutes, speak into the silence and invite people to silently confess as sin the things God has convicted them of. Remind them that this is not a time to make excuses but just to confess.
- Invite them to ask God to create “a clean heart” and “renew a steadfast spirit,” believing that God wants to do more than just forgive sins. He wants to cleanse and change the heart so that we do not fall into the same sins again.
- Encourage them to invite God to change them and give them “the desire and the power to do what pleases Him” (Philippians 2:13, NLT).

One or two hymns of thankfulness would provide a nice transition into the next part of the prayer time.

Personal intercession. “Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up” (Psalm 5:1-3).

Many people are better at praying for others than for themselves. Sometimes we just don’t want to face our own thoughts and hearts. So begin this section by reminding participants that today is about praying for themselves.

- As God convicts and we confess, the barriers we have erected between us and God are broken down. Now is the time to ask, *what next?* David prayed, “Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day” (Psalm 25:4, 5). Invite people to silently ask God what He wants for them. Ask God to teach, lead, and guide.
- Remind people to be honest with God. Maybe they are struggling with fear, doubt, or anger about something. Silently confess this honestly to God. Encourage them to tell God what they’re thinking and feeling, then surrender all of it to Him. Remind them that it’s only when we give all to God that He can speak healing, hope, and peace into that area of our lives.
- After a few minutes of silent prayer, encourage them to pray prayers of trust—stating their trust in and commitment to God. If they battle here, encourage them to ask God to strengthen their trust, like the father of the boy with an evil spirit who prayed, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).
- After a few more minutes, encourage people to consider the issues they have been praying about for a long time. They may believe that God isn’t answering or doesn’t care. Invite them to talk to God about it and tell Him of their struggle to believe that He cares and is answering. Invite God to reveal Himself in these areas. The Holy Spirit may bring a scripture to mind. Claim that promise. These are areas we wrestle through with God. Like Jacob, refuse to let go until God blesses.
- David believed God would answer his request. “Blessed be the Lord, because He has heard the voice of my supplications! The Lord is my strength and my shield; *my heart trusted in Him*, and I am helped” (Psalm 28:6, 7).

Invite participants to close this section of prayer time aloud, thanking God for hearing and answering according to His will. (We’re done with the silent parts of this prayer time!) Allow time for people to pray. Also allow moments of silence to pass as people listen and gain courage to pray aloud.

God-focus. “I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:1-3).

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not His benefits:

Who forgives all your iniquities,

Who heals all your diseases,

Who redeems your life from destruction,

Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,

Who satisfies your mouth with good things,

so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

(Psalm 103:1-5)

As David lived, prayed, and wrestled through life, he focused on God. He consistently and persistently reminded himself of God’s greatness, goodness, and love. Maintaining a God-focus will help us live courageously with hope, peace, and joy. We can keep this focus by reciting scripture that recounts who God is, what He has done, how He has led, and all He has promised.

Let’s end this prayer time with a few minutes of focusing again on God. Invite participants to share favorite scripture verses that reveal who God is, favorite scripture promises, or personal testimonies of how God has blessed. Let this be a time of sharing, not with eyes closed and on our knees, but rejoicing and reflecting together on God.

Close with several hymns that reflect our hope in Christ’s return and the heavenly home that awaits us. Inspiring songs include “We Have This Hope and “When We All Get to Heaven.”

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.