

Day of Prayer and Fasting

Theme: World-Changing Prayer Warriors
Prayers that Change Our Perspective

Materials for 2nd Quarter
Sabbath, April 6, 2019

Prepared for church group and individual use by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in coordination with the Revival and Reformation Committee. Written by Tamyra Horst for the Day of Prayer and Fasting global initiative.

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Why a Day of Prayer and Fasting?

Imagine you are a parent about to leave your children, knowing you will not see them again until the Kingdom of Heaven. What is the most important thing you could say to them?

Jesus had that dilemma as He prepared to return to heaven after His crucifixion. What was the burden of His last words to His disciples? As we read through His last prayers and counsel in John 15-17, we discover repeating themes: unity, love, and seeking God through prayer. Jesus longed for His fledgling church to come together in purpose, harmony, and mission. Today, amid perhaps unprecedented polarization in the world, our nations, and our church, we too need to heed Jesus' counsel to seek His Spirit and come together for mission. The task seems daunting and impossible in our humanity. That's why we need to pray as never before for the miracle of reconciliation that only God can bring.

We invite you to pray "in your closet." We invite you to pray with your local church family. And we invite you to the global Revival and Reformation initiative of prayer and fasting. Perhaps you will not choose to fast totally from food. Perhaps you will fast from desserts or social media, or eat sparingly of plant-based food for a time.

"Now and onward till the close of time the people of God should be more earnest, more wideawake, not trusting in their own wisdom, but in the wisdom of their Leader. They should set aside days for fasting and prayer" (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Feb. 11, 1904).

As you choose to focus more deeply on prayer, God will bless you and strengthen your heart for the challenging days ahead.

Cindy Tutsch
For Revival and Reformation Committee

Suggested Planning Guide

Program for the day:

- A devotional/sermon, “Prayers that Change Our Perspective,” is included in this resource. It can be used for the morning worship program or as a devotional before the prayer time.
- If it is used for the morning worship service, a scripture reading and children’s story 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 choose how they want to be involved in fasting that day.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 147

Suggested Children’s Story:

Tell the story of the ten lepers from Luke 17:11-19. Points to emphasize:

- *The ten men were lepers. Leprosy was a type of infectious skin disease. When someone had a skin disease, they went to the priest, who decided if it was leprosy. If it was, the priest told the leper to stay away from everyone else so that the disease wouldn’t spread. People looked down on lepers because they thought leprosy was a punishment from God for being bad.*
- *All ten came to Jesus for healing. Jesus told them to go to the priests and show that they were healed—even though, right then, they still had leprosy. Only the priests could say they were healed so they could be around everyone else again.*
- *On the way to the priests, they were healed.*
- *When one man realized he was healed, he turned around and went back to Jesus to say thank you. No one else did. They kept going to the priests.*
- *Jesus asked where the other nine were. He was disappointed that they didn’t come back. He had hoped they would be thankful too.*
- *Jesus didn’t want them to come back and say thank you because it made Him feel good, but because it was good for them. The leper who returned received more from Jesus than the others did. Jesus told him that his faith had made him well. While all ten lepers were healed physically, only this one was encouraged spiritually.*
- *Saying thank you to Jesus for all He does makes our faith in Him stronger.*

Sermon/Devotional

Prayers that Change Our Perspective

The news struck fear in his heart. Their enemies were ganging up and coming together with one intent: to destroy God's people. They had no way out.

What could they do? All eyes were on him. He was king, after all; he was supposed to have the answers. It was his job to protect and guide the nation. But their enemies were too many and too well prepared. God's people were doomed.

Or were they?

Jehoshaphat did know one thing to do. Seek God. The Bible says, "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah" (2 Chronicles 20:3). He "set himself" to seek God. This was intentional, a choice. He was afraid, but he would not let fear overwhelm him. He chose instead to go to God. He also invited others to join him and proclaimed a fast for all Judah.

And the people came. "So Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord" (2 Chronicles 20:4). This was not your typical Wednesday-night prayer meeting. The people knew it was life and death. They needed God desperately—they needed a miracle. They didn't know what to do, but they knew Who did and sought Him together.

As Jehoshaphat led the people in prayer, he focused more on God than on the enemies at their doorstep. He began by focusing on who God is, then on what God had done for them. He recalled their commitment to God and then laid out the problem. He offered God no advice—no "here's what we want You to do for us"—instead, he admitted Judah's helplessness and left it with God. "We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You" (verse 12).

Then they all just stood there and waited for God. This was the tough part. Typically, we want to pray and get busy, hoping God will bless our efforts. Despite the pressure of oncoming enemies, they stood still and waited. They wanted to hear from God, and they *expected* Him to respond.

And God did. "'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you" (verses 15-17).

God began and ended His message by telling them not to be afraid or discouraged. They needed these reminders. He knew that they weren't just battling enemies but also fear and discouragement, worry and doubt. God reassured them that He knew right where they were and that He would take care of it. The battle didn't surprise Him, for He had a plan.

God told them exactly what to expect—where the enemy would come from and where to find them. He promised to fight the battle for His people, but that didn't get them off the hook. He didn't tell them to

run and hide, didn't promise to "zap" the enemy away. Letting God fight battles isn't passive. You still need to show up, believing and trusting that He will fight the battle and not let you down.

What was Judah's response? Worship. "And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the Lord, worshiping the Lord" (verse 18). This is *worship* as a verb. Many times we talk about *worship* as a noun (such as "going to worship") or even as an adjective (such as a "worship service"), but these people *participated* in worship. It was active, not passive. They didn't rush out of God's presence once He responded. They lingered and took time to honor Him with praise and respect—not because *He* needed it but because *they* did. Worship kept them focused on God, not the enemy. It deepened their trust and belief.

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

And with those words of encouragement, they moved into formation to head out. Jehoshaphat decided to put the musicians in front—those who led the singing and worship—not the battle plan of most leaders. Usually the strongest soldiers go out first. But off they went with the musicians leading the army and singing praises to God.

"Now when they began to sing and to praise . . ." (verse 22). As soon as they began praising God, He began fighting the battle *for* them. By the time they reached a place where they could see the battlefield, their enemies had killed each other. No one escaped.

When they finally arrived at the battlefield, they spent three days collecting treasures from a battle they didn't fight. Three days! The Bible says they found an "abundance of valuables"—"more than they could carry" (verse 25). What did they do after collecting all the treasure? They worshiped and headed home "with joy." When they got back to Jerusalem, they went straight to church to worship and praise God again.

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

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

Jehoshaphat and the children of Judah went from fearful and discouraged to courageous and confident. Their enemies were destroyed, and surrounding nations recognized that God was fighting for them.

How was Judah transformed? By staying focused on God through prayer and worship. It changed their perspective on the world around them. It will change ours too. What can we learn from their example?

1. **Intentionally seek God.** Especially when fear, worry, or discouragement threatens to overwhelm our hearts.
2. **Invite others to join us.** Everyone affected by the upcoming battle came together to pray, fast, and seek God. Imagine what would happen if we followed Judah's example. What if couples came together to pray, fast, and seek God for their marriages? What if parents came together to pray, fast, and seek God for their children? What if church members came together to pray, fast, and seek God in our battles with sin, lust, addiction, jealousies, insecurities, fears, pornography, gossip, and so on? How would our lives change if we came together to really pray and seek God, admitting our fear and helplessness?
3. **Spend more time focusing on God than on the problem.** Worship is choosing to focus on something or someone—giving them your time and attention. If we spend most of our time focusing on our problems, fears, doubts, or challenges, is it possible that we're worshipping the problems instead of God? Like Jehoshaphat and the children of Judah:
 - Praise God for who He is.
 - Thank Him for what He's already done.
 - Restate your commitment to God.
 - Lay out the problem/challenge.
 - Recognize your helplessness in "fixing" or changing things.
 - Keep your eyes on Him.
4. **Expect God to answer.** Too often we ask God to do something, maybe even admitting our helplessness, and then we get up and try to do something on our own. The children of Judah lingered in God's presence. They watched for how God would respond, believing that He would. We may not be able to just stand still until we know God has answered, but we can live with an expectation that God *will* answer. We can watch, wait, and look to Him.
5. **Continue to worship.** After God responded, they didn't rush off into battle. They continued to praise and worship Him. Thank God for what you see Him doing.
6. **Go.** When God told them He would fight the battle, they didn't just hide out at camp. They had to face their enemies. Even while marching to battle, they had no clue how God would fight or what He'd do—or what they'd need to do. But they went, singing and praising Him the entire trip. And God began fighting as soon as they began walking and worshiping. He won the battle long before they reached the battlefield—even before they could see the armies below them. Don't hide. Go out. Trust God to show you what He wants you to do in relation to your prayer.
7. **Collect treasures.** The Bible tells us that God "daily loads us with benefits" (Psalm 68:19). Keep a journal or "Gratitude Wall" (a space for sticky notes filled with things you're grateful for). Tell others. In the retelling of what God has done, you'll be reminded, your faith will be strengthened, and you'll be witnessing to someone else about the power of God.
8. **Make worship a way of life.** They worshiped God when they didn't know what to do. They worshiped Him when He answered. They continued to sing and praise Him as they headed into battle. They worshiped Him after collecting the treasures from a battle they didn't fight. They sang and praised Him all the way home, then went straight to church and worshiped some more. Listen to worshipful music in your car. Share the things you see God doing. Keep a list of

3-5 things you are grateful for each day—and try to make the list new every day. Don't just focus on the things God has done *for* you, but focus on who He *is*. Ponder a characteristic of God. Read the Bible and pay attention to how it describes God. Thank Him for that trait and look for it in your life. How has God been merciful? How has He been patient?

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

Worship—intentionally focusing on God—is one way to win this battle, to take every thought captive. And as we worship, it will change our perspective of the world—and the battles—around us.

Afternoon Prayer Program

Place: Gather together in the sanctuary or, if your group is small, a comfortable room that offers privacy and no distractions.

Opening: Music always helps invite people into worship and sets the mood, so begin with a few favorite 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 by lifting up the need or person aloud. There is power in hearing others pray for the needs and people on your heart.
- The theme of the afternoon is “Perspective-Changing Prayers.” Like Jehoshaphat and God’s people, we will spend time praising and worshiping God, trusting Him to fight our battles for us.

Notes for the leader:

- *Remember that silence in prayer time is 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 as a group.*

Prayer time: An outline, “Perspective-Changing Prayers,” is provided for the prayer time. The leader should walk participants through prayer, using the outline as a guide.

Closing: The outline closes the prayer time with praise and thanksgiving. 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: Perspective-Changing Prayers

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.

Praise and Worship. Most of our prayer time will be focused on praise and worship. The leader will need to guide during this time, suggesting different things for which to praise God. We will not just ask God for things but also thank Him for what He is doing and how He is already working.

1. **Praise God for who He is.** Invite members to begin by praising Him for His character traits. What is it that they love about God? What are they most grateful for about Him? Invite people to just mention the traits—no need to pray long prayers. For example: *Praise You for Your patience! Thank You for Your mercies, new every morning!*
 - You can also mention a characteristic of God and invite people to praise Him for the way they've seen Him live out that trait in their lives.
 - When people grow silent or seem to run out of ideas, you can prompt them with other attributes of God, such as: just, all-powerful, sovereign, ever-present, true, holy, righteous, kind, gracious, merciful, patient, etc.
2. **Thank God for what He's done.** Invite people to give thanks for what they've seen God do in their lives. Encourage them to state their thanks in a sentence or two—no need to go into great detail. The goal is to worship God and not talk about the situation, person, or event.
 - If people grow silent, the leader can help by asking questions that may remind people how God has moved in their lives. Invite them to just say thank you. For instance, *Have you seen God work in the life of a person you've been praying for? If so, just say thank you! Or has God blessed you with something you needed? Lift your voice and just say thanks!*

Commitment. Spend time in praise and thanksgiving. Linger there. This is the focus today. Then invite participants to offer prayers of commitment, surrendering their lives and their will to Him.

Intercession. Jehoshaphat and the children of Judah laid out their problem before God. They stated the problem and didn't tell Him what to do or go into great detail. They knew God saw what was happening and trusted Him to answer. Invite participants to present their needs, challenges, or the people for whom they're praying aloud— with no specific details or request. The leader can help with this by suggesting various typical needs:

- *Do you have someone in your life who needs to know God in a real and personal way? Just speak the person's first name aloud.*
- *Are you battling a problem that you need God's help with? You can state the topic aloud (for example, "finances," "health," "addiction") or just pray silently. Give it to God.*
- *Are you or someone you love going through a health crisis? Just speak the person's name as we bring them before God.*

Continue with other questions, inviting people to simply lay out their needs before God—verbally and/or silently. When you close this time of prayer, the leader can pray something such as, *Father God, we give these requests to You. We don't know what to do, but we know You do. Our eyes are on You.*

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

- Thank God that while we may not see Him working, He is already moving and answering prayer.
- Thank Him that He loves those for whom we're praying even more than we do.
- Be grateful that He is bigger than the enemy and has a plan.
- Show gratitude that He answers our prayers.

This may be a harder section for people to pray through if they're not used to thanking God before they actually see the answer. Encourage them to remember who God is and what He's promised to do in response to our prayers. Invite them to claim specific scripture verses—just repeating the verses aloud for all to hear.

Continue to worship. After God responded, the Israelites didn't rush into battle but continued to praise and worship Him. Invite people to sing a song or two of praise before leaving. Sing in a prayerful way. You may choose songs in advance or invite people to spontaneously start singing while everyone joins in. Linger here.

Go. As you close the prayer time, encourage people to watch for God's answers. Ask God to reveal how they can be part of the answer. Challenge people to offer worship and praise whenever they begin to worry, doubt, or become discouraged.

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 that 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 for whom He wants

you to pray. 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 that 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.