

Day of Prayer and Fasting

Sabbath, January 5
1st Quarter, 2019

World-Changing Prayer Warriors

Handbook & Resource

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* This material has been prepared for church groups and individual

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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 wide-awake, 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.

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 Diets 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”

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.

Planning Guide

Program for the day:

- A devotional/sermon, "Prayers that Change the World," 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 participate in fasting that day.

Scripture Reading: James 5:13-16

Suggested Children's Story:

Tell the story about God calling Samuel from 1 Samuel 3. Points to emphasize:

- *Samuel was a child. God invites children to know Him and serve Him.*
- *Samuel didn't know how to listen or talk to God, so he asked Eli. We have parents, Sabbath School teachers, grandparents, and others who can help us get to know God better.*
- *God used Samuel to help others get to know God. Even as children, we can help others learn about God's love through our words and actions.*

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 invites 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 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 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 "Prayers that Change the World." We'll be following Hannah's example of praying honestly for the deep needs of our hearts. Today we'll specifically focus on praying for people whom we long to see surrender to God and commit to walking with Him.

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 may 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 by intentionally praying scripture or starting a song during the prayer time. While the priority is praying together, this is also an opportunity to teach people how to pray as a group.*

Prayer time: An outline, "Praying World-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.

Prayers that Change the World

Her name is mentioned only 11 times in scripture. Her story is confined to a chapter and a half before she fades back into her ordinary life. Yet her one recorded prayer changed a nation.

She was an unlikely candidate for a world-changing prayer warrior—in part because she was a woman in a time when women lived quietly in the background:

Going about their daily lives and tending to the needs of their families.

Birthing babies. Caring for homes. Cooking meals.

Gathering around the well to talk and fill water jugs at the start of each day.

But those mornings at the well revealed another reason why most people wouldn't have chosen her to pray the prayer that changed a nation.

People saw her as a sinner. They treated her like an outcast. Not because of anything she had done but because of something she hadn't done. Couldn't do.

1 Samuel 1:2 shares simply, "Hannah had no children."

In a world where a woman's value was measured by the number of sons she gave her husband, Hannah was barren. Her infertility was seen as a punishment from God. As she trudged past the stalls at the market, drew the day's water at the well, and headed to synagogue on Sabbath, Hannah saw the way people looked at her. Heard the whispering. Noticed the turning away. Her heart ached when former friends no longer looked her in the eye or spoke to her. The loneliness enveloped her like a blanket.

And what if it was true? What if God was punishing her? What had she done? She had tried so hard to live right. She had prayed, but God was silent. She wondered if He, too, had turned away from her and didn't want anything to do with her. Guilt and shame filled her heart.

But nothing was as painful as that first night—the night her husband brought home a new young wife, Peninnah. Overwhelming grief and tears flooded Hannah's heart as she lay alone for the first time, knowing her husband lay in what had been their shared bed with another woman.

As Peninnah's body grew large with the much longed-for child, Hannah experienced a new level of shame. Why not her? What had she done to deserve this barrenness? Why didn't God give her a baby to call her own? But He remained silent. Her friends remained distant. And her husband created a family with his second wife.

Peninnah's family grew as more sons and daughters were born. But something else grew in Peninnah's heart—her own heartache. While God had blessed her with children, she was missing the one thing she wanted most: her husband's love.

The author of 1 Samuel shares the sad battle of these two women simply. “And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the Lord had closed her womb” (1 Samuel 1:4, 5).

Hannah longed for a child. Peninnah had sons and daughters.

Peninnah longed for her husband’s love. But he loved Hannah.

A rivalry grew between the two women who shared a house and husband.

“And [Hannah’s] *rival* also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the Lord had closed her womb” (verse 6, emphasis added). The Bible reveals that Peninnah purposely hurt Hannah in the deepest wound of her heart—her barrenness.

Sadly, the most dreaded moments between the two women were experienced during their trips to the temple in Shiloh to worship God. “So it was, year by year, when [Hannah] went up to the house of the Lord, that [Peninnah] provoked her” (verse 7). A time for worship and celebration became the most miserable time of the year—year after year after year. Instead of worshiping, Hannah wept.

Tucked in the middle of this story, we find what may seem to be an out-of-place piece of information. “Also the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there” (verse 3). Why mention them in the middle of a story about two hurting women battling for their hearts’ desires?

This little tidbit offers a glimpse into the bigger story.

Hophni and Phinehas were priests at the temple. Their task was to lead the Israelites to worship, know, and connect with God. They had just one problem. “Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:12). The priests didn’t know God, nor did they care to know Him or serve Him. They would not obey God’s commands about sacrifice and forced people to disobey. They slept with women who came to the temple. Their father, Eli, knew this. He protested, saying, “You make the Lord’s people transgress” (verse 24). But they refused to listen, and Eli avoided doing anything about it.

Their sin impacted the nation and the church. “And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation” (1 Samuel 3:1). God wasn’t speaking to His people corporately. People weren’t studying and growing. The lamp of God, representing the Holy Spirit, was growing dim in the tabernacle (verse 3), a reminder that the Holy Spirit was slowly pulling away from a people who no longer listened.

Hannah was hurting. The church was dying. But God was watching.

Her heart so broken that she could no longer eat (1 Samuel 1:7), Hannah finally took her sorrow to God. Leaving her family behind, she headed to church. With pain so great she could only weep and pray in her heart, she poured out her heart honestly and completely to God. “And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish”

(verse 10). She promised God that if He heard her prayer and sent her a son, she would give the boy completely back to Him, surrendering her hopes and dreams to God.

Eli passed through the tabernacle as Hannah prayed. It had been so long since he'd seen anyone truly worshiping with all their heart that he assumed Hannah must be drunk. Most others were. He reprimanded her, but that didn't deter her from her mission. "No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now" (verses 15, 16). She was brokenhearted and dejected, but she gave it all to God—honestly, completely, and expecting Him to answer.

"Go in peace," Eli told her, "and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him" (verse 17).

Hannah believed Eli's words. She got up, went home, and trusted that God would show up. "So the woman went her way and ate, and *her face was no longer sad*" (verse 18, emphasis added). She believed. No more reason to grieve. God *would* answer.

We don't know how long it took. The Bible simply says, "in the process of time" (verse 20) Hannah conceived and a son was born. His very name revealed that this child was a gift from the One who listens to prayers: *Samuel*, or "heard by God."

After all the years of waiting and hoping and longing—a son. Many of us would have held onto that child and not let him out of our sight. But Hannah had promised God and committed her son to serve God all his life. So when he was weaned, she took him to Shiloh and left him with Eli. She surrendered the very thing she wanted more than anything else and believed that God would use her son for His service and glory.

And He did.

He called out to the young boy and began a friendship that changed the Israelite nation. "So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord. Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord" (1 Samuel 3:19-21).

God again spoke to His people. Again He revealed Himself. Again He guided and directed.

And it was all the result of an unlikely world-changing prayer warrior.

What does Hannah's story teach us about praying and changing our world?

1. **Fast and pray.** Some things we care about so deeply that we are driven to fast and pray. For Hannah, it was the pain of not having a child. What in our lives creates such an ache that we are moved to fast and pray? Our children? Family and friends who do not know God? Sin or addiction that we long to be rid of? Challenges that

discourage and distract us from the life to which God calls us? Corporately as a church family, what drives us to fast and pray together? Our families, missing members, neighbors who are living without Christ and the peace and joy He brings? Are we driven to fast and pray for the salvation and spiritual growth of God's children? Do challenges within the church need to be prayed about and addressed?

2. **Get real.** We pray together as a church every week. We pray for people's needs (health, jobs, finances). We pray for our church service and speakers. These things matter, but are they the deep longings of our hearts? Hannah prayed beyond the typical prayer requests by admitting her hurt and bitterness, her hopes and dreams. Hannah's prayer reveals our need to go deeper and pray about what's really in our hearts.
 - Do we need to pray about hurts and divisions within the church?
 - Do we need to pray for forgiveness? Healing? Courage?
 - What are the goals, visions, dreams of our church? Are we really praying for these?
 - Do we have individual heartaches that the church could pray about together?
 - Who is missing on Sabbath mornings? How can we pray for them?
3. **Commit it all to God.** Hannah asked for the deep desire of her heart but also promised to give it all back to Him, trusting Him to fulfill His plan. She could have asked God for a child and then clung tightly to him, but she prayerfully committed to allowing God to take her dream and use it the way He saw best. We can take our hopes for people, our church, our ministries, and commit them to God, asking Him to do as He desires.
4. **Expect God to answer.** When Eli spoke, Hannah listened because she believed God would respond. Do we pray expecting God to really hear and answer? Or are we just hoping that He hears and answers? We need to confess our doubt and ask God to deepen our trust. Claim His promises. Thank Him in advance for what He is doing—even when you don't see anything happening.
5. **Stop crying.** Maybe we aren't actually crying like Hannah, but too often we walk away from our prayer time still worrying and trying to figure out the people, needs, and circumstances we've just given to God. Do we keep worrying, or do we live in faith that God is already at work? Hannah walked away and "her face was no longer sad." She believed God heard her and would answer, so she let it go and left it with Him. Every time we find ourselves agonizing over what we've given to God, we need to give it to Him again. Thank Him that He's already working on it.

6. **Wait and work.** Hannah's prayers were answered "in the process of time." While she waited patiently, expecting God to answer, she didn't just sit there. She did her part in enabling the answer to happen. How can we be part of the answer? Can we reveal God's love to those for whom we're praying? If we've asked Him to help us fight a battle against sin, are we doing our part? Have we chosen, in His strength, to walk away, say No, or create new behaviors? Have we asked God what He wants us to do while we wait on Him?

7. **Praise and thank.** As Hannah took Samuel to the house of the Lord, she praised God. "My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn [strength] is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You" (1 Samuel 2:1, 2). We need to praise and thank God for all He has done—not because He needs our praise but because of what it does in *our* hearts and minds. Thanksgiving reminds us of who God is and how He provides for us and gives us courage for the next battle.

We, too, can pray world-changing prayers. Our prayers may not change the entire world, but they will change the world around us—or even just the world of one person—for eternity. And one person can change the life of another, and another, and a ripple effect begins. We may not even realize the impact of our prayers on this side of eternity, but one day—one day soon—Jesus will take us home. We'll have all eternity to hear how God used the prayers of ordinary people like Hannah, like you, like me, to change the world for Him.

Outline for Praying World-Changing Prayers

Opening with commitment: The leader can 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 Him to reveal whom we should pray for and to help us see people the way He does—deepening our love for them and breaking our hearts for the hearts of others.

Really pray. This is how we will spend most of our prayer time—praying for the real needs of our hearts, other people, and the church. This is where we may have moments of silence. As leader, walk people through prayer by asking questions. Remember the questions raised by the story of Hannah’s prayer:

- Do we need to pray about hurts and divisions within the church?
- Do we need to pray for forgiveness? Healing? Courage?
- What are the goals, visions, dreams of our church? Are we really praying for these?
- Do we have individual heartaches that the church could pray about together?
- Who is missing on Sabbath mornings? How can we pray for them?

It may be easiest to begin by praying for people. Invite everyone to lift up those whom they long to see surrender to God. Encourage them just to use first names and not to mention too many details of others’ lives. Focus on praying for their salvation and claiming God’s promises. As people pray, invite others to pray for the names mentioned; for example, *Will anyone else join Alice in praying for this person?*

Let the prayer time flow, but also guide. At some point, ask, *Who is missing on Sabbath mornings? Which church members do we need to pray for?* Again encourage people not to pray specific details of others’ lives but to pray for God’s power. We want to discourage “holy” gossip and pray for people without judgment or criticism.

Next, you may want to move into praying for the church. Begin by praying something such as, *Father, we want our church to be a safe place for people to come and discover You. Please make it a safe place where they can grow and even fail as they begin walking with You. Are there things our church needs to confess and ask forgiveness for?*

Commit it to God. Hannah prayed for Samuel, then gave him back to God wholeheartedly. Take time to surrender the people and situations for which you prayed, giving them completely to God. We give up our “right” to worry or insist that things should work out a certain way, and we give God permission to do as He desires. This is a

time to confess the ways we've doubted God or doubted that He is answering. The leader needs to begin this time by praying by example. Then invite others to offer prayers, completely giving their requests to God and surrendering all worry, doubt, and fear.

Expect God to answer. Spend some time building belief in God and His promised answers. Invite people to claim promises and thank Him for what He is doing—even if we don't see it yet. Thank Him that He loves the people we prayed for even more than we love them. Praise Him that He wants more for these people than we can hope or imagine. Claim the Bible promises that God has plans and dreams for His children and *will* complete the work He has begun.

Be a part of the answer. Ask God to reveal how we can be part of the answer. Ask Him to give us ideas or prompt us to do things or speak words that reveal His love. Pray, too, that He will keep us from doing or saying anything that would do harm or misrepresent Him. This part of the prayer time reminds us that God may have a work for us to do, too.

Before closing, you may want to ask if anyone else has someone they want to pray for. Other people or situations may have come to mind during the prayer time, or introverted people may have not had the courage to speak up before. Pray through the same steps with the new names, but you may go more quickly this time.

Praise and thanksgiving. Close the afternoon with a time of praise and thanksgiving. Invite people just to focus on God now. Praise Him for who He is. Thank Him for what He is doing and will do.

Close the afternoon with a song or two of praise and thanksgiving.