



Plan for an Intercessory Retreat
Easter Weekend 2020

These are unusual times in which to live. The uncertainties of life are everywhere being emphasized. During such times in human history, the church of Jesus has responded by crying out to God for mercy. Many have cited the words of 2 Chron 7:14, “*if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*” Surely one of the best things that we can do for ourselves, our family, friends and community is to pray. With that in view, I am offering a model of how one might go about a more extended prayer time. This is a program for a half day prayer retreat. And while I know it is short notice, I invite you to find some time this Easter weekend to spend a few hours with our heavenly Father praying for ourselves and our world. If this weekend will not work for you, use the plan as a guide at another time but let's heed the admonition pray.

Gordon Smith writes that “a retreat is merely an extension and expansion of daily prayers. But with more time, you can respond more deliberately to the presence of God and his Word. It is helpful to approach a time of prayer or spiritual retreat well prepared” (*Essential Spirituality*, 12). That is why a plan is so important. So is a purpose. This suggested purpose for this focus is to intercede for ourselves, the church and the world. You will need your Bible, a hymnbook or song resource, and a notebook. Turn off your phones so that you can be present to God alone.

You are encouraged to fast during this period. You may drink for it is important to remain hydrated. You may make a decision to whether to drink juices, coffee , tea or only to drink water. Both are acceptable options.

We will divide our time into four periods of one hour each. The schedule will be as follows:

Hour 1: Rejoice in the Father's presence

Hour 2: Praying for our Father's Forgiveness

Hour 3: Praying for our Father's People

Hour 4: Praying for our Father's World

The following exercises can provide guidance for each session.

Session #1
Rejoicing in our Father's presence

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he had them begin by addressing God as “Our Father in heaven.” Spend some time meditating on what this address means and how it is significant for you as you draw near to God in prayer. Reflect on Lk 15:11-32 and write in your journal some of the characteristics of the Father revealed here. Compare this with Gal 4:4-7 and Rom 8:15-17.

Take your time here. Whitney writes, “The process works like this: After the input of scripture, meditation allows us to take what God has said to us and think deeply on it, digest it and then speak to God about it in meaningful prayer. As a result we pray about what we have encountered in the Bible , now personalized through meditation. And not only do we have something substantial to say in prayer, and the confidence that we are praying God's thoughts after Him but we transition smoothly into prayer with a passion for what we are praying about” (*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 67-68).

Here are a couple of short passages that might encourage your hearts too:

Andrew Murray: (*With Christ in the School of Prayer*)

To appreciate the word of adoration (i.e., Our Father) correctly, remember that none of the saints in Scripture ever ventured to address God as his Father. This invocation places us at once in the center of the wonderful revelation that Jesus came to make: His Father is our Father too. It is the essence of redemption: Christ delivers us from the curse so that we can become the children of God. It explains the miracle of regeneration: The Spirit in the new birth gives us new life. And it reveals the mystery of faith: Before the redemption is accomplished or understood, the disciples speak the word that prepares for them the blessed experience yet to come. The words are key to the whole prayer and to all prayer. It takes time and life to study them; it will take eternity to understand them fully.

The knowledge of God's father-love is the first and simplest, but also the last and highest lesson in the school of prayer. Prayer begins in a personal relationship with the living God as well as a personal, conscious fellowship of love with him. In the knowledge of God 's Fatherliness revealed by the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer will root and grow. The life of prayer has its joy in the infinite tenderness, care, and patience of an infinite Father who is ready to hear and to help. “Our Father which art in Heaven.” Wait until the Spirit has made these words spirit and truth to us, filling our heart and lives. Then we will be indeed within the veil, in the secret place of power where prayer always prevails.

James Houston writes,

*This intimacy with God is also about the life of heaven. To turn to the Father we also turn toward heaven, the place where he lives. We turn away from the attitudes and values of the modern world to God, shedding our earthly ambitions and desires. In fact, once we begin to pray “Our Father in heaven” we become exiles on earth. Adopted by the Father as spiritual children, we can no longer give shelter to impure motives and fleshly lusts (*The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 180-81)*

Now spend some time praising God for who he is as Father and thanking him that he has made you his child. Sing a hymn such as Children of the Heavenly Father or Day by Day as you praise him for his father love. When you have finished, take a few minutes to walk around and stretch.

Session #2

Praying for our Father's Forgiveness

Coming into the Father's presence requires that we be people who have what the psalmist calls “clean hands and pure hearts” (Ps 24:4; Ps15). Foster writes, “To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God, the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33).

Gordon Smith offers the following helpful guide to confessing our own sins as we seek to respond to the convicting ministry of the Spirit. (*Alone with the Lord: A Guide for a Personal Day of Prayer*)

1. Center Thoughts: “O Spirit of Christ, as I turn from any form of burdensome false guilt, grant me this grace: to know the convicting ministry that will lead to freedom and strength.”

As we long for the grace to experience the convicting ministry of the Spirit, the Spirit will not condemn us but will lead us to freedom, so it is essential that we are alert to any experience of false guilt—a burdensome and crippling guilt that does not come from God. Smith goes on to note that false guilt arises when we replay that which we have already confessed or again when we feel guilty about not meeting others or even our own expectations.

2. Meditate on Ps 32.

Smith writes, “As Ps 32 reveals, God is the one who forgives our sins so we can approach him in confidence as the Spirit convicts. The psalm also demonstrates the spiritual practice that enables us to live in this confidence, the discipline of confession.

3. Take some time to quietly be in God's presence so that he can convict you of attitudes, words or deeds that you need to repent of. Smith writes,
“Confession involves several distinct acts.
 1. We acknowledge our wrong—what we have said or done which is inconsistent with the character and will of God.
 2. We accept we are responsible and that we cannot blame others or claim extenuating circumstances.
 3. We humbly ask for mercy: Christ have mercy.
 4. We confidently receive the forgiveness of God.
4. Conclude by reading the story of the crucifixion in Matt 27:32-56 (or parallels) and remembering that what he endured was for you. “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed*” (1 Pet 2:24). Give thanks for mercy. Perhaps sing a hymn or song that helps you do this.

Session #3

Praying for God's church

These are trying times for Jesus' church throughout the world. Jesus reminded us that we are to pray for his kingdom to come and for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. With that in view it is time for us to bring his people before him. It is here that the will of God should be done first. As Israel was to be a paradigm of life lived in the presence of God, so should the church serve its world. That is what Peter reminds us of as he uses the words of Exod 19:4-6 to describe the church of Jesus: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Or again Paul says that we are to be "children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world holding fast to the word of life" (Phil 2:15-16).

Review Col 3-4 or Eph 4-6. Make a list of the qualities that should mark the local church that displays the holy love of God. Then pray for your local church that these characteristics would mark the people who make it up. We are not here to make plans for the church but simply to bring her to God. Remember that Jesus loves the church and has given himself for her (Eph 5:22-32) and therefore we must love the church as well. We must not pray as those who are outside of this community but as those who are part of it. Ask God to forgive us for our failures to represent him well and to renew us in our first love again.

Pray for your local church and leaders.

Pray for the churches of your denomination or community.

Pray for the church in the world.

Conclude by rejoicing that God is building his church and that one day "he will present to himself the church in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Eph 5:27). Sing a hymn or song of praise that celebrates his work in his people.

Take a break.

Session #4

Praying for our Father's World

This is an invitation to pray for our world. The world and all in it are God's and should be living lives of praise to him. But that is not the case. Instead we see brokenness and hurt everywhere. Injustice abounds and sin devastates families, communities and nations everywhere. As God grieved over the sinfulness of the world of Noah's day, so he is grieved by the sinfulness of our world too.

1. Begin this session by reading Gen 18:22-33. Consider Abraham and his relationship with God as it is revealed here.
 1. What does God say to Abraham and why?
 2. How does Abraham respond? What do you think may be the reasons for this?
 3. How does God respond to Abraham's petitions? Do you think Abraham “presses his luck” with God? Would you do this?
 4. What is the outcome? Sodom is not spared but what have we learned about God and about Abraham as God's friend? What do I learn from this?
2. Now reflect on the world you live in, your community, your city, your country and even internationally. Maybe review the headlines of a newspaper (actual or online) and note some of the areas of brokenness that you see. Write them down and then pray for God's mercy in these areas.
3. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” the scriptures remind us. At this Easter season take time to pray for the spread of the gospel in our world. Ask God to use whatever means he will to have it proclaimed in every corner of the globe. Pray for missionaries that you may know.
4. Conclude by praising God for his presence and purposes for this world. One day he has promised to make it new! Perhaps sing a hymn like “Jesus Shall Reign” or something of a similar vein as you complete your time of prayer.

Thank you for taking time to pray in this intentional way. May God reign in our lives and his world!