

## Introduction

Given everything that we have experienced over the past two years, there is no doubt that we are living in unusual times. And everywhere we look we can see evidence of the uncertainty and fragility of life. During such times in human history, the church of Jesus has responded by crying out to God for mercy, using the words of 2 Chronicles 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.”**

No matter what is happening in and around us, in good times and in bad, one of the best things that we can do for ourselves, our family, friends and community is to pray. Holy Saturday presents is with an excellent opportunity to do this.

Holy Saturday, also known as: *Great and Holy Saturday, The Great Sabbath, Hallelujah Saturday, Saturday of the Gloria, Black Saturday, Easter Eve, and Joyous Saturday* is the final day of Holy week, commemorating Jesus’ triumphant descent into Hell, bringing salvation to the righteous souls held captive there since the beginning of the world, while His physical body lay dead in the tomb (1 Peter 3:17-22).

Holy Saturday is a time for us to come into the presence of the Lord, and acknowledge His glorious love for us that He would willingly die on the cross. We pray on Holy Saturday and give thanks for Christ's sacrifice on the cross, redeeming the world from the fall of Adam, and saving the world from death and sin. We pray for God's grace and mercy to cleanse our hearts and minds in genuine communion with Him, as we prepare to celebrate the glory of His resurrection!

Traditionally, as part of this preparation, believers observe a 40-hour-long vigil (the hours between the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday), as a time to intentionally retreat from the distractions of the world to refocus our hearts, minds, and lives on the things of God.

In his book “Essential Spirituality,” 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.”

This booklet is designed to help individuals intentionally enter into a Holy Saturday personal retreat for a more extended time of prayer and preparation, and to guide their intercessions for themselves, the Church, and the world.

This personal retreat is divided into four one-hour periods as follows:

**Hour 1: Rejoicing in Our 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**

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

(Romans 6:4)

## 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 Luke 15:11-32 and journal some of the characteristics of the Father revealed here. Compare this with Galatians 4:4-7 and Romans 8:15-17.

Take your time here. In his book, "Disciplines for the Christian Life," Donald 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."

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 ~ "The Transforming Power of Prayer"

"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."

Spend some time praising God for who He is as Father and thanking Him that He has made you His child. Sing (or listen to) a song or hymn as you praise Him for His Fatherly love. When you have finished, take a few minutes to walk around, journal, or draw.

### NOTES:

**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” (Psalm 24:4; Psalm 15). In his book “Celebration of Discipline,” Richard 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.”

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

- Center your 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 when we feel guilty about not meeting others or even our own expectations.

- Meditate on Psalm 32
- Smith writes, “As Psalm 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.”

Take some time to quietly be in God's presence so that He can convict you of attitudes, thoughts, words or deeds that you need to repent of.

Confession involves several distinct acts:

- We acknowledge our wrong—what we have said or done which is inconsistent with the character and will of God.
- We accept we are responsible and that we cannot blame others or claim extenuating circumstances.

- We humbly ask for mercy.
- We confidently receive the forgiveness of God.

Conclude by reading the story of the crucifixion in Matthew 27:32-56 (or parallels) and remembering that what Jesus endured was for you. As we read in 1 Peter 2:24, “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.” Give thanks for mercy. Sing (or listen to) a hymn or song that helps you do this.

**NOTES:**

**Session #3**  
**Praying for Our Father's People**

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 in 1 Peter 2:9, as he uses the words of Exodus 19:4-6 to describe the Church of Christ: "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." And in Philippians 2:15-16, 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."

Read Colossians 3-4 or Ephesians 4-6. List the qualities that should mark the local church that display the holy love of God. Then pray for your local church (Living Waters) that these characteristics would mark the people there. 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 (Ephesians 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 and 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." (Ephesians 5:27).

Sing (or listen to) a hymn or song of praise that celebrates God's work and through the Body of Christ.

**NOTES:**

**Session #4**  
**Praying for Our Father's World**

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

Begin this session by reading Genesis 18:22-33. Consider Abraham and his relationship with God as it is revealed here. What does God say to Abraham and why?

How does Abraham respond? What do you think may be the reasons for this?

How does God respond to Abraham's petitions?

Do you think Abraham "presses his luck" with God? Would you do this?

What is the outcome? Sodom is not spared but what have we learned about God and about Abraham as God's friend? What do you learn from this?

Now reflect on the world you live in, your community, your city, your country and even internationally. 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.

John 3:16 reminds us that, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." In this Easter season, take time to pray for the spread of the gospel throughout the world. Ask God to use whatever means He will to have it proclaimed in every corner of the globe. Pray for all missionaries—especially those you know and partner with.

Conclude this session by praising God for His presence and purposes for the world—that one day He has promised to make it new!

Sing (or listen to) a hymn or song, praising the hope we have in Jesus.

**NOTES:**

## Conclusion

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

### The collects for Holy Saturday

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O God of the living, on this day your Son our Saviour descended to the place of the dead: Look with kindness on all of us who wait in hope for the liberation from the corruption of sin and death, and give us a share in the glory of the children of God; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

### The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.