

International Women's Day of Prayer

March 3, 2018

GOD UNDERSTANDS

By Chantal Klingbeil



Prepared by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Department of Women's Ministries



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST
CHURCH

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Dear Sisters:

Joyful greetings to each of you my sisters. Have you ever experienced a time when you faced a problem so difficult it seemed as if God did not know your distress? You prayed and prayed and yet there was no response. You may have even questioned if God cared about you or even saw your difficulties. At times like this Satan whispers doubt into our ears that can lodge in our heart and mind.

Chantal Klingbeil, our author for this year's International Women's Day of Prayer resource, quotes the following from the book, *Steps to Christ*, "We may have no remarkable evidence at the time that the face of our Redeemer is bending over us in compassion and love, but this is even so. We may not feel His visible touch, but His hand is upon us in love and pitying tenderness" (Ellen G. White, pp. 96, 97).

Over and over in the Bible we read God's promises to be with us—Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; 1 Kings 8:57; Psalm 37:28; Isaiah 42:16; Hebrews 13:5, 6, and many others. Yet at times of great despair, we find our hearts doubting these very promises. Why does this happen? How can we overcome these times of doubt and distress? Our sermon for this special day of prayer will answer those questions and remind us that God does care and He is always, always with us.

Our prayer, in General Conference Women's Ministries, is that this special day will be a time to remember that we serve a God who loves us intensely, feels our pain and hurt deeply, and wants to abide with us eternally.

Blessings and joy to you,

Heather-Dawn Small
Director

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Division Prayer Requests

In an effort to make our prayers more specific, we have designated certain divisions and prayer needs for each year. We hope that you will work these into your program. If you have women in your congregation, or who can visit your church, from these designated divisions, it will add to the enjoyment and education of your day.

Prayer Emphasis for 2018

World-wide concerns to pray for specifically:

- Women living in war zone countries.
- Women reaching out one to one, participating in Total Member Involvement (TMI).
- Women of the church nurturing our sisters who no longer attend church.

Division to be remembered in prayer:

East-Central Africa Division (ECD)

The East-Central Africa Division is comprised of 11 countries: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, and the United Republic of Tanzania. Amid a population of 371 million, the Seventh-day Adventist Church counts more than 3.3 million members worshipping at about 15,000 churches.

Pray for women's spiritual life so that they become strong. Insecurity in territories where war persists makes our work harder and women become weak.

Pray for women and children who are the most vulnerable and very exposed in countries of the division that still have areas occupied by rebels.

Pray for revival among women and their total involvement in the mission. Pray for woman to woman relationships in Islam (and other denominations) that are mission oriented.

Pray for church leadership at local church level to value children, for active involvement of our children in church life and mission; and to give priority to this department in budgeting and choosing right people for leadership.

About the Author

Chantal Klingbeil currently serves as an Associate Director of the Ellen G. White Estate at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A. She earned an M.Phil. degree in linguistics from Stellenbosch University, South Africa, and, over the past two decades, has served as mother, author, homeschool mom, high school teacher, university professor, and television host. Chantal J. Klingbeil was born and raised in South Africa though she lived in several other countries before moving to the United States with her husband, Gerald, and her family. In both academic and popular contexts, her articles have appeared in many journals and magazines.

Chantal is passionate about reaching children, youth, and young adults for Jesus. In her work at the Ellen G. White Estate she develops media and materials to bring Adventist history and the ministry of Ellen G. White to a new generation that is thoroughly at home in the digital age. This multi-lingual author of the 2018 International Women's Day of Prayer emphasis packet believes that God has done amazing things in her life. Her favorite Bible text is Psalm 37:4. "Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (NIV)."

Introduction to Program Materials

We enjoy those seasons in life when all seems to be going well. When we are thriving. Reaching goals. Family members are in good health and getting along. Our daily needs are being met. We feel confident in who we are and where we are headed. Life is good. God is on His throne. And then . . .

The unexpected occurs, sometimes overnight. An automobile accident takes the life of a loved one. Medical test results give a frightening name to symptoms we've been experiencing and then issue a grim prognosis. A marriage breaks up. A child or grandchild disappears into the underworld of drugs. A severe weather event sweeps away our livelihood. Though almost unconscious of the subtle change, we begin focusing more intently on the *struggles* that life throws at us more than we focus on the *Giver* and *Sustainer* of life. So the light in which we thought we were walking now begins to dim.

Yet, as the story of the prophet Elijah reminds us, our loving Savior is never far from us no matter what our distressing situation. Though we cannot personally see Him, Jesus is near just as He promised He would be (John 14:12-18). We are not alone. Even when our prayers grow weak, despite obvious evidence of His blessings in our lives, Jesus still remains by our side. "For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

Though the failure and depression of Elijah's experience reveal the frailty of human resolve, the continuing, unseen presence of God with Elijah reveals God's patient pursuit of our hearts as well. Most of all, His presence *confirms* that whatever befall, each of us is still His beloved daughter—individually unique, deeply valued, highly esteemed, and treasured "abundantly above all" that we could ever imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

General Ideas for the Program

The suggestions in the Prayer Activities Section of this packet all center on the theme of God's presence with us, especially in times of discouragement.

It is important to know who we are, especially when depression wants to set in. Program Idea **Activity #1** will lead participants through the process of discovering who they are. After peeling back the layers of who they *think* they are, participants will discover the secret for knowing who they *really* are. They will also learn to "act" on this secret so it becomes a living reality in their lives.

When we know who we are in Christ, then the Holy Spirit is free to lead us into ministry for those who are dealing with life-changing challenges. The purpose of Program Idea **Activity #2** is to help attendees to be mindful that when discouraged people take their focus off of God, He can continue to pursue their hearts through us. And that God-in-human-touch is often what draws those in darkness back to the light. When brothers and sisters pray and then work together for the salvation of souls, they draw closer to one another in heart and spirit. They are actually answering the prayer Christ prayed for them in the Garden of Gethsemane when He said, ". . . I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you . . ." (John 17:20, 21, NIV).

[**Note to facilitator:** remind participants not to share too much, or inappropriate, information about those whose names they are placing on a church prayer list.]

Church decoration ideas supporting the International Women's Day of Prayer emphasis theme could include artfully-draped see-through fabrics representing the veil that separated the Holy from the Most Holy place in the temple, an incense burner, the faint fragrance of incense or some other appropriate fragrance. The scents represent "the merits and intercession of Christ, His perfect righteousness, which through faith is imputed to His people" as he intercedes for us in the heavenly sanctuary" (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 353).

A Children's Story handout could be one of the suggested drawings at the end of this packet. Another children's resource would be to Google "free Bible coloring pages" online where one can find other artsy prayer resources. The coloring pages under "The Lord's Prayer" at ministry-to-children.com/time-to-pray-coloring-page-for-children are more ethnically diverse in depiction of children than drawings on some of the other sites.

Suggested Order of Divine Service

International Women's Day of Prayer

March 3, 2018

Prelude

Platform participants enter

Doxology

Invocation

Offertory

Offering Response

Offertory Prayer

Hymn: "Anywhere with Jesus" [#508]

Scripture Reading: Psalm 103:11-14, NKJV

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
As a father pities his children,
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.
For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.

Intercessory Prayer

Children's Story: "Lost in the Market"

Special Music

Sermon: *God Understands*

Congregational Hymn: "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go" [#76]

Benediction

Children's Story

Lost in the Market

Written by Carolyn R. Sutton

[**Note to storyteller:** feel free to substitute a boy's name that would be more appropriate for the local culture and to which the children could more easily relate.]

Four-year-old Nina was shopping with her mother. Nina loved to look at the pictures that decorated the cans and boxes of food in the small neighborhood market. Grandmother was babysitting baby brother today so Mother could go grocery shopping before Daddy got home from his day of teaching at the nearby Christian school.

"Nina, dear," said mother from at the far end of the food aisle, "be sure to stay close to me. I don't want you to get lost."

"OK, Mommy," said Nina.

Nina tore her gaze from two friendly-looking cows on a carton of milk. Her short little legs reluctantly carried her past boxes of food to her mother who was checking off items on her shopping list.

"That's a good girl," said Mother smiling down at her. "Now we just have three more things to find and put in our shopping cart. Then we'll be ready to go home."

Nina had an idea. "Mommy, can we have an ice cream cone today while we're in town?"

Mother glanced at her watch and replied, "I think we might have a bit of extra time to do that—if we don't take too long in the store."

"Hello, Mrs. Sanchez," someone called out.

Nina looked up to see an older woman walking toward them. She and Nina's mother hugged each other.

"How delightful to see you again, Rosa!" said Mother. "We have really missed you in our neighborhood since you moved away. How have things been going for you?"

As the conversation continued, Nina's legs got tired of having to stand so long on the hard, cold concrete floor of the market. More and more people were coming in as the afternoon was growing late. She looked for a place to sit. Then she saw it! The bottom shelf of a long display

rack. Evidently people had purchased all the food from that shelf and it had not yet been restocked.

Nina sat down on the low shelf, although she had to lower her head so it wouldn't bump the next shelf up. As Mother and her friend continued to talk . . . and as more and more people walked by . . . Nina became bored. She decided to see what was on the next shelf up, so she crawled off her low shelf. It felt good to stand up straight! Nina spotted a picture of a happy little girl, curls bouncing and she ran through flowers with a box of salt in her hand. Then Nina noticed that, with all the identical boxes in a row, there were many, *many* girls to look at.

It looks like lots and lots of twins! thought Nina. *I wonder how many there are. I think I'll try to count them. One, two, three, four girls . . . five, six, seven, eight, nine girls . . . what comes after nine? Oh, look, there are those cows again that I saw. And over there I see a happy mommy on a box of cereal. Oh . . . many mommies on many boxes! I'll count them too.*

Nina wandered from one aisle to the next, looking at pictures. Seeing yet another cute puppy on a bag of dog food, Nina laughed out loud and said, "Mommy, look at that little puppy!"

When Mother did not answer her, Nina looked up. All she could see were people around her. People that she had never seen before! Strangers! Mother was nowhere in sight.

Suddenly, a great terror froze Nina. She was all alone! Where was Mother! She tried to call for her mommy, but she couldn't make even a tiny sound with her voice she was so terrified. She started to run down an aisle but her legs didn't work right. She bumped into a stranger's shopping cart. When she tried to go the other direction, another stranger had rolled a cart into that same aisle.

Without any warning, great sobs exploded from Nina's throat, and she finally found her voice. "Mommy! Mommy! I want my Mommy!" Shoppers stopped to look at her. "Mommy, where are you?" Nina was now trembling as she screamed. She had never felt so alone or abandoned in her whole life. What would happen to her? Would these strangers hurt her? Would one of them take her away?

Then through the concerned conversation around her, Nina heard the sweetest sound ever. Mother's voice!

"Nina! Nina! I've been looking everywhere for you!" And there was Mother, sweeping up Nina in her arms. All the little girl could do was bury her head in Mother's shoulder and sob. When her sobbing subsided, she managed to say, "Mommy, I felt all alone in here. Where did you go?"

Mommy smiled and said, "I'm not the one who wandered away, child. *You* did." Suddenly Nina was afraid that Mother would punish her. Instead Mother hugged her again and said, "Let's not get separated again, OK?"

Over ice cream a few minutes later, Mother said, “Nina, you told me that you felt all alone in the market when you couldn’t see or hear me. But you weren’t all alone because I was in the store looking for you.

Nina’s eyes were on Mother’s face though she continued licking at her vanilla ice cream cone. “But here’s something very important,” Mother continued, “that you must always remember. Even if I hadn’t been in that store looking for you, you still were *not* alone. Jesus was with us in that store too—just as He is with us right now as we’re eating this ice cream. We can *always* trust Him to be with us and hear our prayers when we call to Him for help. Remember, Nina—you are *never, ever* alone.”

Children, aren’t you glad that we can talk to Jesus about anything? Aren’t you glad that He never leaves us by ourselves? We want to be careful that we never wander away from Him either.

Let’s talk to Jesus right now. Would one of you boys or girls like to pray for all of us as we finish this story time together?

[Note to storyteller: If no child volunteers, say a special blessing over the children in prayer and dismiss them to return to their seats.]

—END—

Sermon: God Understands

Written by Chantal Klingbeil

Introduction

Today, we focus particularly on prayer. The Bible is full of examples of great and powerful prayers and wonderful answers to prayer. This morning, let's take a brief look at one of the most powerful prayers in history. Let's turn to 1 Kings 18. We begin in verse 30.

³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD *that was* broken down.

³¹And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name."

³²Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed.

³³And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid *it* on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour *it* on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood."

³⁴Then he said, "Do *it* a second time," and they did *it* a second time; and he said, "Do *it* a third time," and they did *it* a third time.

³⁵So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.

³⁶And it came to pass, at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You *are* God in Israel and I *am* Your servant, and *that* I have done all these things at Your word.

³⁷Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You *are* the LORD God, and *that* You have turned their hearts back *to You* again."

³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that *was* in the trench.

³⁹Now when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He *is* God! The LORD, He *is* God!" (NKJV)

It wasn't a very long prayer or particularly elegant, but God heard Elijah's prayer and sent fire down from heaven—a very real and very visible answer to prayer.

And that was not the end of powerful answers to prayer. In verse 42 Elijah again goes to the top of Mount Carmel. This time he bows low and prays silently for rain, because Israel has suffered a three-year drought. This time, however, the answer to his prayer doesn't come immediately. Elijah must wait and persist.

The prophet prays seven times before he sees the first sign that his prayer for rain has been heard. It may only be a little cloud about the size of a man's hand rising out of the sea, but it is

enough—Elijah knows that his prayer had been answered. Within minutes, the skies seem to open and there is a heavy downpour of rain.

Elijah knew about prayer. He knew how to ask, he knew how to persist, and he knew how to wait.

Perhaps you too have had moments in life when you can identify with Elijah. Times when you prayed for something or someone and you saw God answer in a mighty and wonderful way.

Then again, perhaps you struggle to remember some big answer to a prayer. Perhaps the person you were praying for didn't get better. Perhaps you didn't get the job. Perhaps you are still childless.

Perhaps we cannot all identify with Elijah, the great prayer warrior, but I think that—at some time in our lives—we can all identify ourselves with Elijah *after* the great day on Mount Carmel.

Onset of depression

Elijah was completely drained, emotionally and physically, after the Mount Carmel experience. He had already fallen into a deep sleep when the messenger from Queen Jezebel finds him. This rude awakening—with a death threat from the queen—serves as the trigger for Elijah. The trigger for a sudden descent into a deep, dark depression.

Sometimes a depression strikes quickly after a particularly draining emotional or physical event. At other times, we don't even notice it happening but after weeks, months, or even years of a seemingly dry spiritual time, depression can slowly and quietly take hold of us. We recognize it only when it tightens its grip.

Let's see how Elijah, this great man of God, reacts. In 1 Kings 19, we learn that Elijah begins to run. The first step, when depression begins to creep in, is always the inevitable running. Sometimes we run to the refrigerator and try to eat ourselves happy again. Sometimes we try to sleep our emotional exhaustion away. Sometimes we look for a new relationship, job, or location in our quest to run away. And sometimes we bury ourselves in more work, more deadlines, and appointments as we try harder to run away from the nameless something that is draining away our joy and hope.

So Elijah runs. He runs and he runs—long and hard! He runs 90 miles (150 kilometers), all the way to Beersheba and then a day's journey beyond that into the desert. But finally, as with us sometimes, Elijah gets to the place where he just can't run anymore. He finds his breaking point under a broom tree. Now guilt comes crushing in on him. He realizes that his lack of trust in God has hijacked what could have been a great opportunity for reformation in Israel. He realizes that he has disappointed those who needed him. And now he is powerless to do anything about it.

It's all too much for Elijah. He says, "I have had enough," and then the great prayer warrior prays again. This time it is a very different prayer. Let's read it in 1 Kings 19:4, "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!'"

Elijah, our great prayer warrior, prays to die! He is so remorseful about his failure that he is ready to give up.

Can you identify?

Can you identify with Elijah's prayer of desperation? Have you ever felt like giving up spiritually or even physically? Have you ever felt that you have messed up so badly that there is no point in trying again? Have you ever felt so tired—so trapped and out of options—that you didn't want to go on?

If so, you are in good company. Many spiritual giants—and even great prayer warriors—have felt this way too. Yet there is good news! God knew just how to deal with Elijah and God knows just how to deal with you.

God's understands

Despite how the prophet feels, God has not rejected him. God does not condemn. He sends Elijah an angel messenger to show God's empathy. In verse 7, the messenger gently states that "the journey is too much for you." God doesn't condemn His prophet, and He doesn't condemn us. He understands so much better than we do what we are up against. He understands what has brought us to this point.

When we are at our lowest God is really the closest to us.

Listen to this wonderful quote. "We may have no remarkable evidence at the time that the face of our Redeemer is bending over us in compassion and love, but this is even so. We may not feel His visible touch, but His hand is upon us in love and pitying tenderness" (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 96, 97).

God also does more than just empathize. He provides practical short-term help. In Elijah's case this is the heavenly messenger preparing "a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water" (v. 6). God will also provide help for me and you. The help could be a friend, a counselor, or a family member—someone whose words and actions show you that God cares about you.

God also provides rest. He knows that all the running has made Elijah tired. God also knows that more than being physically tired, his prophet is emotionally tired and carrying a tremendous load of guilt. God wipes the slate clean and provides rest for Elijah—he can finally really sleep and be refreshed.

When we truly accept that God has forgiven us and that we don't have to drag around a load of guilt—for God has lifted it, we can begin to find rest.

Healing takes time

Even after angel food, Elijah isn't instantly back to normal. God remembers that we are “dust” (Psalm 103:14, NKJV). He does not rush healing. God gives Elijah time to recover. Recovery takes time. We need those quiet moments alone with God. We need time with His Word. We need to take the time to speak to God even if, in doing so, we don't feel immediate changes for the better.

God understands that life in this sinful world can and will cause depression. He understands our impulse to run from its pain. Yet He wants to *redirect* our running. Instead of our running to self-destructive coping mechanisms, God wants us to run to Him. And there, in His presence, He wants to teach us to listen for His “gentle whisper” (v. 12, NIV).

The rest of the story

But let's go back to Elijah. He is still under his broom tree. From verse 6, we learn that Elijah eats angel food and then goes back to sleep. How long he sleeps we don't know. Then the angel awakens him and serves him yet another meal. This time something special happens. “And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, “Arise *and* eat, because the journey *is* too great for you.”⁸ So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God” (vv. 7, 8, NKJV).

Elijah had no energy to lift himself up and make the journey to meet God. When the moment was right, however, it was *God* that provided the energy for this crucial meeting.

When Elijah arrived at his divine appointment place he still had to patiently wait and relearn what prayer is all about. God isn't always in the big events. He doesn't always provide spectacular answers to our prayers. There won't always be a bright flash and fire raining down from heaven. As Elijah waited, “a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake;¹² and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice” (vv. 11, 12, NKJV).

And this is what all prayer warriors must learn to tune their ears to hear—that still small voice.

As Elijah lay under his broom tree and wished to die, he truly believed that his best days were over. God saw things differently. He knew that better days lay ahead for Elijah. There were still kings to be anointed and a prophetic successor to be chosen. God already knew about Elisha, the successor, who would become as close to Elijah as a son. God knew that, in faith, Elijah

would again call down fire from heaven. For Elijah there would be no desperate death under a broom tree but rather a fiery chariot ride to heaven—and without experiencing death. Yet let us remember this.

“It is at the time of greatest weakness that Satan assails the soul with the fiercest temptations. It was thus that he hoped to prevail over the Son of God; for by this policy he has gained many victories over man. . . . So with Elijah. . . .

“And so it is today. When we are encompassed with doubt, perplexed by circumstances, or afflicted by poverty or distress, Satan seeks to shake our confidence in Jehovah. It is then that he arrays before us our mistakes and tempts us to distrust God, to question His love. He hopes to discourage the soul and break our hold on God. . . .

“Despondency may shake the most heroic faith and weaken the most steadfast will. But God understands, and He still pities and loves. He reads the motives and the purposes of the heart. To wait patiently, to trust when everything looks dark, is the lesson [we] need to learn. Heaven will not fail [us] in [our] day of adversity. Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on God” (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 174, 175).

Where are you today? If you are Elijah on Mount Carmel calling fire down from heaven, praise the Lord! But please remember there won't always be mountain top experiences. Don't lose the sound of God's still small voice. If you are Elijah running away or doing things that you know don't solve the underlying problems, or Elijah lying under a broom tree feeling like a failure, there is hope.

God sees things differently. God understands. God wants to free you from guilt. He wants to work through others to provide practical help for you. And He will not fail to give you the energy to meet with Him again. Your best days are yet to come as you listen to, and follow, that still Small Voice. God understands and He is ready to bless you today. Are you ready?

—END—

Bulletin Ideas

Prayer Request Tear-off Slip

To coordinate with the theme, plan to dedicate some space in the bulletin for people to write in their prayer needs—especially their prayers of intercession, both for themselves and for others. You can put this “prayer space” at the bottom of a bulletin page so it can be detached easily.

Perhaps the Women’s Ministries leader could stand up in front before the congregational prayer and invite the petitioners to come forward and put their prayer requests in her open Bible. She could assure the congregation that the church’s Women’s Ministries (and Prayer Ministries, if applicable) will daily lift up each request for the next month.

Prayer Quotes

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. (James 5:17, NKJV).

It came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened (Luke 3:21, NKJV).

And the LORD restored Job’s losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed, the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10, NKJV).

God’s plans are bigger than your mistakes. Pray for wisdom and new direction.*

Prayer changes everything because it releases God’s wisdom into your circumstances.

I choose not to be a product of my circumstances. I choose to be a product of my prayers. God is bigger than my circumstances.

Dear God, help me to have words that are uplifting and encouraging to others.

If we do not allow prayer to drive sin out of our lives, then sin will drive pray out of our lives.

Prayer is the key that unlocks doors. God does not always move based on need; He moves based on prayer.

Mold me. Shape me. Change me—until I am like You, Lord.

God is never blind to tears, deaf to prayers, or silent to pain. He sees, hears, and delivers.

Lord, help me daily seek your wisdom, your will, and your strength.

God's delays aren't necessarily God's denials.

Sorrow looks back. Worry looks around. Faith looks up.

The church may be composed of those who are poor and uneducated; but if they have learned of Christ the science of prayer, the church will have power to move the arm of Omnipotence (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, September 11, 1893).

Unceasing prayer is the unbroken union of the soul with God, so that life from God flows into our life; and from our life, purity and holiness flow back to God (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 98).

The Lord has heard my supplication; The Lord will receive my prayer (Psalm 6:9, NKJV).

We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4, NKJV).

*All quotations not from the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White are from PositivePrayers.com and sdadivinelerts.com.

—END—

Children's Story handout options





Activity #1: *Who Am I?*

Written by Chantal Klingbeil

Materials needed: a mirror large enough for everyone to see, two sheets of paper for each participant, and writing implements for those who don't have any

Welcome

Good afternoon/evening. Welcome to the "Who Am I?" seminar. Before we begin, let's ask that the Holy Spirit be in our midst as we discuss this very important topic.

Opening Prayer

Warm-up activity

Let's do a little warm-up activity as we begin. I am going to give you three minutes to jot down on a sheet of paper the answer to this question. Is everyone ready to answer the question? Good! All right, here is the question: "Who am I?" Please answer this question as completely as possible. "Who am I?"

[Allow three minutes for activity]

Now that you have answered the question, "Who am I?" here is what I would like for you to do next. I will go slowly and give you enough time to follow the directions.

First, cross out your name.

Second, cross off any reference to nationality, place or origin, or location (such as, "I'm from Canada" or "I have lived here all my life." Or, I'm originally from London)

Third, cross off any reference to functions or work you do (such as, "I work at a daycare center" or "I'm an office assistant," or "I'm a stay-at-home mom)

Fourth, cross off any reference to a job, profession, or relationship (such as, I'm a nuclear scientist or "I'm a mom/aunt/grandmother" or "I'm single)

Now look closely at your sheet of paper. What is left of your identity? I hope you're not having an identity crisis! Sometimes, even, when we pass through different seasons of our lives, we are challenged to look again at who we are.

Do you remember your adolescence years?

Some of us might have already gone through our mid-life crisis.

What about the empty nest syndrome?

And retirement can precipitate an identity crisis.

Dangers during identity crises

When we go from one season or period in our lives to another, we can become vulnerable. It is all too easy to lose ourselves because we are no longer operating in our previous roles or responsibilities.

How do we react to these identity crises? Well, some individuals work themselves to the point of burnout in an attempt to prove or re-establish their worth. Others may have become so attached to their roles that they refuse to change them for fear that they will no longer have value. Some people refuse to retire because their identity is so wrapped up in their professional life or job that they fear not having an identity outside of that venue.

Other dangers exist when we are transitioning through life's "identity crises." When we are suddenly not sure of who we are any more, we may . . .

- Lose sight of God
- Lose our most important family relationship
- Lose ourselves even

Other dangers may from not really knowing who we are can result in behavioral changes. We may become frustrated and disillusioned. And what a tragedy if we enter our senior years with confusion about our true identity! God wants us to be joyful and productive in our later years. In Psalm 92:13, 14, we read that "Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing" (NKJV).

If we aren't sure if we're planted in the "house of the LORD," we run some other dangers:

- We may become strangers to our children.
- We may live parallel lives as spouses.
- We may begin to ask, "Who am I? What have I done with my life? What am I doing with it now?"

Biblical advice

If any of us is going through any one of these identity crisis seasons in our lives, God has some sound advice for us. We find it in a prayer from the Psalms: "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12, NKJV).

True wisdom begins with the knowledge of who we really are. It is very important to understand that we are not a role and we are not a function. We are so much more—we are beings created by the Master of the universe. In fact, we were created in His image!

Case study

Let's take a few minutes to look at a case study. Let me start by asking you to imagine something.

- Imagine being a beloved and even spoiled child.
[**Note to facilitator:** Pause briefly to give participants a moment to think]
- Now imagine how it would feel to be a slave.
- Now imagine how it would feel to be the object of not just sexual desire but inappropriate sexual desire.
- Finally, imagine how it would feel to be the prime minister of the most powerful country of the world.

Someone actually *did* live through all of these very conflicting roles and identities. His name was Joseph. Let's take a moment now to read about the roles and crises through which he had to negotiate.

- First of all, in Genesis 37:2-5
- Now let's read Genesis 37:23-28.
- Now Genesis 39:1, 7-11, 20
- Finally, Genesis 41:39-43

How on earth could he—or anyone—have survived all the dramatic identity and role changes that Joseph did?

Here's a bit of insight from the Spirit of Prophecy. Joseph's survival secret was that he made a decision at the beginning of his unexpected and traumatic journey to Egypt after his brothers sold him to slave traders. Ellen G. White wrote, [Joseph's] soul thrilled with the high resolve to prove himself true to God—*under all circumstances to act as became a subject of the King of heaven*. He would serve the Lord with undivided heart; he would meet the trials of his lot with fortitude and perform every duty with fidelity" (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 214).

Joseph grew in his commitment to God. Acting as "a subject of the King of heaven," Joseph successfully passed from one "identity" to the next. The Joseph (the beloved and spoiled child) who was sold in Canaan was not the same young man of spiritual fortitude who replied, "How can I do this?" to the open sexual invitation of Potiphar's wife. Living as a subject of the King of heaven, Joseph responded, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and *sin against God*?" (Genesis 39:9, NKJV, italics supplied).

The Spirit of Prophecy shares that "If we were to cherish an habitual impression that God sees and hears all that we do and say and keeps a faithful record of our words and actions, and that

we must meet it all, we would fear to sin” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 217). In other words, we should practice the presence of God in our everyday lives.

Applying the survival secret to our own crises

So how can this concept, practicing the presence of God, help me to know who we are? We can personally affirm the following truths in our lives, using “I” statements.

Since I have chosen to be a child of God, I belong to Him, never mind the function or identity role that I am currently living out.

At any given time, I can personally “claim” the divine love of God—Jesus died for me *personally*

Christ’s love for me is not something that happened a long time ago. It is fresh and new every day. The apostle Paul write, “I affirm, by the boasting in which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31, NKJV).

Furthermore, we can keep three spiritual realities firmly in mind, again phrasing them in “I” statements where appropriate.

“There are few who realize the influence of the little things of life upon the development of character. Nothing with which we have to do is really small. The varied circumstances that we meet day by day are designed to test our faithfulness and to qualify us for greater trusts” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 222, 223). I will pay attention to the details in my life.

Every morning that I look at myself in the mirror, I can have the assurance that my sins of yesterday have been forgiven because “my life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3, NKJV).

I have value because I am a child of God.

[Note to facilitator: At this point, you might want to actually model these truth-empowered behaviors for the attendees or ask for volunteers.
Hold up a mirror and affirm some of the main points discussed.
For example, you could reference some or all of the following:

- The details in my life are important to God.
- I am more than just some little old lady/single mom/disabled widow.
- I am more than just what I do to make a living or raise children or care fir my elderly parents.
- I am a beautiful daughter of God. I am aware that He is with me and wants me to “claim” His love for me. Knowing this makes me courageous.
- Now I don’t have to be afraid of my workload or of what others might say about me.

- I was created in the image of God for companionship with Him.
- When I die daily and am hidden in Him throughout the day, I am confident that He will guide my steps and decision-making.”

Dear Mirror (closing activity)

Before we close our seminar, I’d like to request that you do one more activity. On your second sheet of paper, I am asking you to write a letter to yourself to tape or hang on your mirror at home. Thinking about what you have learned here in our time together, I would like for you to write down who you really are in God’s sight. I just did a little modeling of that for you. Now it is your turn to start with the words, “Dear Mirror, I am”

We will take about five minutes for you to start on this. However, I am sure that when you get home—and as you spend time with God throughout the day—you will be able to add to this letter. Let’s do some letter-writing now for a few minutes.

[Allow five minutes for written activity]

[**Note to facilitator:** If there is time at the end of the activity and it seems appropriate, you might ask for some volunteers to read what they wrote as this may help others better process who they are in Christ. Be sure to affirm them wherever you can.]

Closing

I want to thank you for taking time to participate in this seminar. My prayer is that, as a result of our time together, you have a clearer picture of who you are in Christ. We have peeled away the layers of who we *thought* we were and discovered—through Joseph’s story—the secret for knowing who we *really* are. Going forward, let’s continue to encourage one another to apply Joseph’s secret for successful life transitions in our own lives. And let us always remember God never leaves us alone to make the journey home. He is always by our sides.

May God strengthen and give you courage. May you always walk in the assurance and peace of knowing who you are in Him. God bless you.

Closing prayer

—END—

Activity #2: Prayer for the Discouraged

Written by Carolyn R. Sutton

Song Service

Scripture Reading

"Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. James 5:16 (NKJV)

Opening Prayer

Welcome and Program Introduction

Program facilitator: Good afternoon/evening. The purpose of our gathering is to come together as a body of believers and, right now, as intercessors. Many people that we know are struggling with depression and darkness in their hearts. Often they openly masque it by long hours of work or such a full personal schedule that no time is left for thinking about their issues. Others secretly masque full-blown depression by giving into addictive behaviors whether that be misuse of medication, overeating, binge television viewing, or sleeping away much of their days.

It is easy for those of us who are enjoying our current life seasons to wonder why "they" just can't "snap out it." Or we quietly judge them, thinking they just "don't have enough faith." Yet chronic discouragement and depression can have roots in life experiences and struggles of which we know nothing about. Only God can truly understand a person's pain because "the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, NKJV).

One woman's journey

When despondency or depression has overcome someone we know, God call us to reach out to them. When a depressed person cannot see God at work in her life, she can still see our smiles of acceptance and empathy. She can feel our hugs and answer our question, "How can I help?" When one struggling in pain begins to see God in us, she can eventually see God in her life once again.

As I read you this brief testimony by Erica Jones, soon to be published in the upcoming 2019 General Conference Women's Ministries devotional book, think about someone you know who is going through a depressing period in life. Prayerfully listen to Erica's story, "A Light in the Darkness," and ask God how you might best show His love to your friend.

Erica begins her story by quoting John 8:12. “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (NIV). Erica writes . . .

“Think about the darkest place you’ve ever been. Spelunking in a cave? Diving in the deep ocean? Hiding in a closet? As a child, darkness is often associated with being frightened—we are afraid of what we cannot see. As we mature into adulthood, darkness often becomes less about our environment and more about our inner self.

“Two years ago, I found myself in darkness—not in a cave or a closet—but in a state of being. I had been struggling with anxiety and panic attacks without even knowing it. I have always been a happy, upbeat person who handles stress well. Unbeknownst to me, I was struggling with a disorder and coping by ignoring the symptoms.

“As my anxiety grew and my panic attacks happened more frequently, I slowly slipped into the abyss of depression. To my friends and family, I seemed like a completely changed person—the joy in my heart had disappeared and they felt helpless as nothing they did brought comfort to me. In those weeks, I truly felt as if life would never be the same. I desperately hoped that I would feel happiness again.

“Covered in a dark cloud, I finally confessed to a friend that I couldn’t find the words to pray. She gently placed her hand on my arm and assured me, ‘God understands. You have friends and family who are continually praying for you.’ I thank God for hearing and answering those prayers of petition. When I couldn’t find my voice, He heard theirs and, I believe, the silent prayers of my heart.

“Over the course of several weeks, the dark cloud began to lift and I slowly began to feel like myself again. My prayers were often short and conversational: ‘I can’t do this without You. Walk with me today.

“And He did. The clouds parted and the sun shone through.

“I am forever grateful for the prayers of those who asked for my healing when I could not and for my Father whose love for me shone like a light in a time of darkness.”

This is a very courageous testimony and a testament to the power of prayer. However, this author is not alone in having gone through a time of darkness in her life. Some of us can probably relate to her experience. Ellen White wrote, “Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion . . . ; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. . . . Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God’s providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon the foundation more firm than the everlasting hills” (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, 162).

And one of the most important ways God seeks to save individuals from their depression and loss of focus on Him is through us—when we reach out with thoughtfulness and kind words. The Bible tells us that “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24, NKJV). Another version puts it like this: “Gracious words are . . . healing to the bones” (NIV).

Whom do you need to phone or e-mail or visit? Who needs to hear you reassure them that they are still “beloved of God” (Romans 1:7, NKJV)? Who needs to be reminded that God promises in Romans 8:28 to use all things for good—even pain, loss, and bouts of deep discouragement. God was with Joseph, and He is with you and me. According to this promise, God doesn’t waste any of our life experiences—even the painful and challenging ones. He has a redemptive use for them, and He longs to redeem us from our despondency. He wants to remind us that we are His children. Our joy and our value lie in our relationship with Him—because of His great sacrificial—and ever-present—love for us.

Small group prayer

At this time we will divide up into small groups for a season of prayer. In particular, we will life up those who are going through difficult times and who need to be reminded of God’s great love for them and purpose for their lives. Despite divorce, illness, chemical imbalance, changing seasons/fortunes in life, empty nest syndrome, excessive caregiving or stress.

I will signal the end of our corporate prayer time with a brief public prayer.

Closing song “To God Be the Glory, Great Things He Hath Done”

Benediction

—END—