

Women's Ministries
International Day of Prayer
March 1, 2014

“He Lifts up my Head”

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SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST
CHURCH

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Dear Sisters:

Matthew writes, "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin" Matthew [6:28](#) (NKJV). What a lesson for us to learn when it comes to material things. I love flowers-their colors, scents, varieties, and beauty. My husband knows that he can give me flowers for my birthday and I will be happy. I love to buy flowers for my home as often as I can. There's something about seeing flowers in the home that brings a smile to my face.

For Day of Prayer, our author has chosen to use the sunflower to teach us some important lessons from God's Word. We know that the sunflower does not grow in every country of the world, but we've added some pictures of this beautiful, tall and majestic flower so that you can enjoy not only the lessons but also see what this flower looks like.

Matthew's words remind us that we can learn many lessons from nature. Ellen G. White affirms this when she writes, "Nature and revelation alike testify of God's love" *Steps to Christ*, p. 9. As the sunflower lifts its face to the sun each day, on this Day of Prayer let us turn our hearts and minds to our God. We pray God bless each of you on this special day as we seek our Father and find Him because He is always willing to be found by the seeking heart.

Love and joy,

Heather-Dawn Small
Director

About the Author

Guadalupe Savariz de Alvarado serves as the Women's Ministries Director for the Southern Union Mission in the Euro-Asia Division. She has shared ministry with her husband, Pastor Freddy Alvarado Pimentel, for 21 years. The last three years they have been missionaries in the Euro-Asia Division. During this time, she has developed professionally as a teacher and a school and family counselor, as well as serving as director of Women's Ministries and Children's Ministries. She has a master's degree in family relationships, and has studied the areas of family therapy and the pathology of emotions.

God has blessed their home with two children, Freddy Jair and Freddy Joarib. Both are medical students who are preparing to serve God as missionaries.

One of the most beautiful experiences for her is to be used by God, to see fulfilled in her life the promise of 2 Cor. 12:9,10: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

She loves counseling couples and also sharing seminars with women, teenagers, and parents. She enjoys traveling, cross-cultural service, writing, reading, and supporting the ministry of her husband.

Featured Divisions

Prayer requests

ECD

1. Pray for women and girls who are victims of violence of all kinds in our countries.
2. Pray for women who struggle to fight poverty in rural areas in West Congo Union.
3. Pray for vulnerable families in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo who long for peace. Pray for peace to enable the Church in the City of Bukavu (North East Congo Attached Territory) to hold evangelistic meetings from July 12 to 26, 2014. Here there are fewer than 1,000 Adventists members in a population of about one million.
4. Pray for Massai women in Kenya that the light of God can reach them so many can join the Women Ministries literacy program in their area.
5. Pray for Women's Ministries initiatives in Tanzania. Strategies are planned to address the challenges facing the department and to increase the number of women lay evangelists.
6. Pray for Uganda Union Women's Ministries that the Lord may empower them to witness for Christ and carry out evangelism to the many people in their country who have not accepted the gospel. Adventists are less than 10 % of the population of about 35 million people.
7. Pray for the women's projects. In order to address the challenges facing women, such as poverty, illiteracy, and low self-esteem, as well as help them support family and church projects, women have set up projects such as cattle raising, health centers, schools, and others. We pray for God's guidance to make these projects grow and enable the women to become self-reliant.

EUD

1. In EUD we pray for each woman to find her personal call and accept it.
2. There are many challenges, poverty in some countries, secularism in others. But we all have one goal, to be ready to meet in heaven.
3. We pray for each country to find a way to proclaim the gospel despite the individual challenges they face.
4. The leadership program is running very successfully in most countries. We pray all Unions will soon get involved, so in all Unions of EUD women will be encouraged and empowered to take an active role in ministering to women in and outside the church.

GENERAL IDEAS FOR THE PROGRAM

The book of nature is the second book of God. During this special day of prayer, the women will discover lessons we can learn from nature, especially sunflowers. Thus, it would be very nice, wherever possible, to use sunflowers as a theme for decoration.

The sunflower is one of the most popular flowers, whether in its natural form, as an artificial flower, or in handcrafted art. Use your creativity to enrich the program with some details alluding to this flower; perhaps you can prepare some bookmarks, magnets, or cards, etc., so that after this program is finished, when the attendees see this little gift, they may remember the inspiring lessons of this day. Remember that the more senses involved in the learning process, the more the lessons will endure in the minds of the participants.

SUGGESTED ORDER OF SERVICE

**Women's Ministries Day of Prayer
March 1, 2014**

Prelude

Platform participants enter

Doxology

Invocation

Offertory

Offering Response

Offertory Prayer

Hymn: _____

Scripture Reading: "But you, Lord, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high." Psalm 3:3 NIV

Intercessory Prayer

Children's Story: "Learning from a Flower"

Special Music

SERMON: He Lifts up my Head

Congregational Hymn

Benediction

Postlude

CHILDREN'S STORY

Learning from a Flower

"I am the vine, you are the branches, if you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5 NIV)

MATERIAL

- Sunflower seeds
- A pot of soil
- A pot with a sunflower

Many years ago, a young man named Salvador Marchisio came from Italy to the United States because he wanted to work and make a lot of money. He did not know Jesus Christ. One day he was very seriously ill and was admitted to the Adventist Hospital in St. Helena, California. The nurses and doctors in this hospital, who loved God, treated him with great kindness and care, praying that he would be healed soon. They talked to him about Jesus, His love and the beautiful place that He is preparing for us in heaven. Salvador Marchisio accepted Jesus into his heart. When he was released from the hospital, what he wanted to do most was to tell others of God's love, so that they too could prepare for heaven.

Salvador Marchisio decided to go to Mexico because many people there knew little about Jesus. He began selling books which told about the love of God and His second coming. He began to study the Bible with many people who wanted to know more about God. Many people gave their lives to Jesus. Because of all his work, the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Mexico was built. Then another church was built, and another. Today there are more than 3,000 churches in Mexico

The missionary work of Salvador, teaching the people about Jesus, bore much fruit!

We can learn many spiritual lessons from nature—from vines that produce fruit, from the stars, and from plants.

Do you know what this is? It is a sunflower seed. *(Show them one sunflower seed.)*

This seed could be called Salvador Marchisio, this one Paul, this one Peter ... etc. *(Say some of the names of children who will receive a seed.)*

What if this little seed is planted in a pot? Then if we water the plant, and place it in the sunshine, what will happen? Yes, the seed will grow. After some time we will have this—a beautiful sunflower! *(Show them the pot with sunflower).*

How many seeds did we sow? Yes, only one.

Look at the center of the sunflower. The center is brown. Those are the sunflower seeds. Did you know that each flower could have a lot of seeds? Some sunflowers can have nearly 2,000 seeds. (If possible, show 2,000 seeds or an approximate amount, so that they can appreciate that it is "a lot") How can this be? From one single seed, there are now many seeds! Look at how God works in nature. One seed can produce many seeds!

The Bible says in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

In this verse, Jesus is using another lesson from nature to tell us something. Have you ever seen a grapevine, or a picture of one, with lots of grapes growing on it? If someone had cut the branch off the vine when it was small, would any grapes grow on that branch? So Jesus says that if we love Him, and learn about Him, and talk with Him, we will be like a branch that is attached to the vine. We will tell people about Jesus, and we will be like a branch that has lots of fruit because we help people learn to about Jesus.

We can learn many good lessons from nature. We learn from the seed of the sunflower that grows and produces many more seeds, and from the grape vine that produces much fruit.

God will do this in your lives too, dear children. If you love God, walk with Him every day, and share His love with others, like a sunflower or the vine, you will produce much fruit.

[Prayer]

SERMON

He Lifts Up My Head!

Scripture Reading: “But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.” (Psalm 3:3)

INTRODUCTION

Can we live without flowers? Flowers are one of the most beautiful things God created. Sometimes we may think He created them just for us. They give us a happy feeling. When we see how simple but yet how fantastic flowers are, we can't help thinking that God is still in control and all is right with the world.

The truth is that in the book of nature we can find beautiful messages that speak to us about God and His love.

Sunflowers are beautiful and popular flowers. It is one of most widely used flowers for decoration, and we can find them decorating plates, tablecloth, paintings, walls, etc. I would like to consider with you three beautiful lessons regarding our prayer life that we can learn from sunflowers.

Lesson # 1. The sunflower keeps its corolla upright.

The pain and suffering present in this world of sin threaten to break our spirit and cause us to sink in despair. But the Lord in His love and mercy supports His children and keeps their heads up in even the most difficult circumstances.

In the Bible we find a beautiful statement of faith in the midst of adversity. “But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my Glory, the One **who lifts my head high.**” (Psalm 3:3)

David wrote this psalm while fleeing from his son Absalom. His son was willing to do anything to get power, and David was betrayed by his most loyal servants. Even the people with him said, “God will not deliver him” (Psalm 3:2). Realizing the danger, David decided to flee (2 Samuel 15:14). Despite the deep spiritual, emotional and physical pain, David expressed His faith in God, saying with conviction, He is “*the One who lifts my head high*”

This is true, not only in the past, not only for David. He lifts up *our* heads! This means that we can move forward with faith, courage, strength and security, because His power sustains us and makes us overcomers.

Sometimes the burdens of life, the pain, the sorrow, the consequences of our past mistakes, become a burden. Circumstances may nearly break our faith. Yet we can say with David, “I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:1, 2 NIV)

Psalm 121 is an encouraging promise. The Almighty is there. When in pain, in anguish, alone, we can lift our eyes and seek Him in confidence because He is ready to answer our cry.

David testifies to the mighty hand of God that rescued him from sinking into despair when he says, “He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.” (Psalm 40:2, 3 NIV)

God held on to David. He lifted up Elijah, Daniel, Joseph, and a sinful woman. He will also hold on to us!

Lesson #2. Sunflowers follow the path of the sun.

Keep your eyes on Jesus (see Hebrews 12:1-3). Jesus said of Himself, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life!” (John 8:12 KJV)

There is power in keeping our eyes on God. Do you remember the story of Peter walking on the water? (See Matthew 14:28-30)

In the midst of the storm, Peter was happy to see his Master coming toward him and the other disciples. With joy, he said to Jesus, “If it’s you, . . . tell me to come to you on the water.” (Matt. 18:28 NIV)

He wanted to be closer to his Master. He recognized Christ’s supernatural power and His power over the waves. Jesus called Peter, and at the height of the storm, with faith he got out of the boat, putting one foot then the other out of the boat. With confidence, he fixed his sight on Jesus and began to walk. He kept his eyes on his Master, and he walked. He was doing something supernatural, something impossible! At that moment he showed great faith! Who of us would have dared to step out of the boat in such a storm?

Peter had faith, and he walked on water. But our human nature is fragile. In our own strength we cannot do the impossible. When we look away from Jesus, like Peter we start to sink.

We should keep this lesson fresh in our minds, because no matter how many years we are in the church, no matter what our position, no matter how victorious we were in the past, every day we must again fasten our eyes on our Savior. We cannot risk looking away from Him and falling.

“Looking unto Jesus, Peter walks securely; but as in self-satisfaction he glances back toward his companions in the boat, his eyes are turned from the Savior. The wind is boisterous. The waves roll high, and come directly between him and the Master; and he is afraid. For a moment Christ is hidden from his view and his faith gives way. He begins to sink. But while the billows talk with death, Peter lifts his eyes from the angry waters and, fixing them upon Jesus, cries, “Lord, save me!” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 381)

The storm symbolizes the troubles, the evil with all its destructive power, all those things that threaten our spiritual, material or emotional life. In difficult times, it is easy to look at our problems, frustrations, pain, and disappointments—to focus on them, sinking into pessimism, negativity, and self-pity.

Perhaps we are like the Children of Israel. We know their story well. God brought them out of Egypt; evidence of His presence was with them day and night, but in the midst of a crisis, they turned their gaze from God and became discouraged. After hearing the reports of the spies, they said, “Let us get organized; we will appoint a captain and return to Egypt!” (See Num. 14:3, 4)

Keeping our eyes on Jesus in the midst of tribulation... requires a great deal of faith, the ability...

- To hold on to the promises even when the future looks uncertain. (Isa. 43:2; Psalm 46:1-3)

- To persevere even if all you see day after day are dark clouds. (Job 1:20-21)
- To remember that God has control of our lives and all things work together for good. (Rom. 8:28)
- To focus day by day on the security of God's love and mercy. (Isa. 55:10; Jer. 31:3)

“We may keep so near to God that in every unexpected trial our thoughts will turn to Him as naturally as the flower turns to the sun.” (*Prayer*, p. 11)

3. Sunflowers resemble the sun

“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” (John 13:15 NIV)

When we look at sunflowers, we notice that they resemble the sun. That should be our goal in our Christian life—to be like Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness. His life was a sublime example of the power of a life of prayer. Consider the following scene from His life.

They [the disciples] found Him absorbed in communion with God. Seeming unconscious of their presence, He continued praying aloud. The Saviour’s face was irradiated with a celestial brightness. He seemed to be in the very presence of the Unseen, and there was a living power in His words as of one who spoke with God... this incessant labor often left Him so utterly wearied that His mother and brothers, and even His disciples, had feared that His life would be sacrificed. But as He returned from the hours of prayer that closed the toilsome day, they marked the look of peace upon His face, the sense of refreshment that seemed to pervade His presence....He came forth, morning by morning, to bring the light of heaven to men. The disciples had come to connect His hours of prayer with the power of His words and works. Now, as they listened to His supplication, their hearts were awed and humbled. As He ceased praying, it was with a conviction of their own deep need that they exclaimed, “Lord, teach us to pray.” (*Prayer*, p. 289)

They understood that true prayer has a life-transforming power. Prayer envelops the soul with power, grace, and peace, and empowers it for service to humanity.

Four characteristics of the prayer life of Jesus

1. Complete dependence: Every moment Christ’s life was connected with His Father. Prayer should be a continuous experience in our lives. In every moment it is proper to pray—in the privacy of our room, on the street, at work, with our eyes closed or open, walking or kneeling, in joy, in trials, in sorrow, or in pain.

Prayer is the breath of the soul that immediately puts us in touch with the infinite Source of Life. No whisper of our soul leaves without being heard by our loving heavenly Father. We must persevere in fervent prayer as Christ did. We should not rise from our knees until our heart is empty before God and His sweet presence has filled our hearts. May He be our role model. “As a man He supplicated the throne of God, till His humanity was charged with a heavenly current that connected humanity with divinity. Receiving life from God, He imparted life to men.” (*Prayer*, p. 173)

2. Aware of His condition: Jesus had accepted humanity with all its frailty. This meant He was subject to passions, temptations and failure. The weight of humanity was on His shoulders. “Christ our Saviour was

tempted in all points like as we are, yet He was without sin. He took human nature, being made in fashion as a man, and His necessities were the necessities of a man. He had bodily wants to be supplied, bodily weariness to be relieved. It was by prayer to His Father that He was braced for duty and for trial.” (*Prayer*, p. 171)

He was in communion with his Father to receive power, wisdom and strength to overcome satanic legions struggling to overthrow Him. How ignorant are we of our condition that we do not realize that Satan is like a roaring lion seeking us, seeking whom he may devour, and that the struggle is not against flesh and blood. We are anesthetized by the pleasures and comforts of this world without realizing that our eternal life is in danger.

“What can the angels of heaven think of poor helpless human beings who are subject to temptation, when God’s heart of infinite love yearns toward them, ready to give them more than they can ask or think, and yet they pray so little and have so little faith? The angels love to bow before God; they love to be near Him.... And yet the children of earth, who need so much the help that God only can give, seem satisfied to walk without the light of His Spirit, the companionship of His presence.” (*Prayer*, p. 25)

We should recognize that we are “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” (Rev. 3:17) We need to go to the feet of God daily to be covered by the righteousness of Christ. We need His Spirit to walk victorious in this world and fulfill our mission. If we prostrate ourselves before Him in sincere humility, acknowledging our weakness, we will be strong in Him. (2 Cor. 12:9)

3. Deep love for humanity: His Heart was full of tenderness and compassion for the lost. He often spent entire nights praying for the tempted. His life alternated between the mountain and the multitude. Prayer and work for souls took His time.

Yet do we show His compassion, or are we unperturbed when we see the pain and suffering of others? How many around us are dying in despair, begging from a dark room to find meaning in their lives, longing to hear words of love and hope, in need of forgiveness and salvation? We must mingle with people, love them and show sympathy in order to discover their needs and bring them in fervent prayer to the Father in heaven.

Jesus prayed for those who felt no need of prayer. He wept for those who felt no need for tears. He prayed for those who had not yet been born. To be like Jesus means to live a life of prayer and work for humanity.

4. Private prayer: Jesus “...had select places of prayer. He loved to hold communion with His Father in the solitude of the mountain.” (*Prayer*, p. 173)

Each of us should have her own mountain, a place to be alone with God, as Jesus did. It may be in nature or any secluded place where we can be free to open our soul to God, to confess our sins and fears, share our joys and most intimate desires, without interruptions. The worries of our heart are a matter of attention for our Father, and we can never wear Him out with our requests. He is waiting with infinite compassion for us to bring Him our burdens. In the quiet and tranquility of our souls, God wants to speak to us.

“Jesus, when preparing for some great trial or some important work, would resort to the solitude of the mountains and spend the night in prayer to His father.” (*Prayer*, p. 173)

Nothing can replace the power of private prayer. “Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, ‘Take me, Oh Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me and let all my work be wrought in Thee.’ This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.” (*Steps to Christ*, pp. 69, 70)

“When this is in truth the experience of the Christian, there is seen in his life simplicity, a humility, meekness and lowliness of heart, that show to all with whom he associates that he has been with Jesus and learned from Him.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 129, 130)

In our prayer life, it is a privilege to receive deep joy and to delight in the Lord's presence.

Conclusion

The story is told that once during wartime a battalion adopted a new battle cry: “Fight with the Light,” because their country had supplied them with powerful searchlights. These searchlights provided a blaze of light during night battles. The presence of the light meant the difference between life and death for the troops. We may do well to adopt this battle cry, “Fight with the Light,” in our Christian life, as we find ourselves in a spiritual warfare, the Great Controversy between good and evil.

God in His love and mercy has given us powerful lights to illuminate our path and help us overcome temptation. The Holy Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and nature show us His will.

This morning we have received messages of light from these three sources. So let us “Fight with the light” that we have received. Let us not forget the three spiritual truths we have learned today.

1. Our Lord will lift up our head. His mighty hand will lift up your head, and by walking forward you will be victorious.
2. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Do not be dismayed. Do not be distracted by the storms, the problems around you. He has power to calm the storms.
3. To be like Jesus should be our goal. Let us determine each day to live as Jesus lived and to pray as Jesus prayed.

Activity #1: “Prayer stations”

Suggestions for using this program

This resource can be used as a night of vigil or in a special program on Sabbath afternoon.

Assign a leader for each station and organize six groups that will visit each one of the stations. At each station, speak about a different stage of growth in the life of a sunflower to illustrate how we experience different kinds of prayer. Alternatively, leaders could move from group to group rather than having the groups move.

Provide paper and a pen for each participant to write their prayers.

From Flower to Fruit

“In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit.” Isa. 27:6.

Nature provides us with many illustrations of spiritual truths. Jesus, the Rose of Sharon, spoke of lilies of the field, the true vine, and sparrows. We seek to have our lives “firmly rooted in God.” We seek to be connected to Christ, the true vine, so that our lives will “bear much fruit.”

The cultivation of sunflowers also provides spiritual lessons that can be applied to our prayer lives.

Let's take a journey through the process of growing sunflowers as we look at ways to cultivate a vigorous prayer life.

1. CLEARING THE GROUND

A general principle for the cultivation of sunflowers is to have clear soil. Before planting, a good strategy is to water the soil daily for one or two weeks in order to germinate any weed seeds that are buried. Then you need to remove the weeds after a week, and repeat the treatment for another week while continuing to water the soil.

Getting rid of weeds is a task that takes time and should be done before and during cultivation of a sunflower, since weeds arrive by wind, birds, and the soil itself. Weed seeds may have accumulated in the soil for years.

It is important to start by getting rid of all the weeds because weeds damage the crop by producing diseases that weaken and can kill our flowers. Or the weeds may grow so strong that they choke out the flowers.

In the same way it is necessary to water our lives by Bible study, prayer, and contemplating the life of Christ, the Water of Life. This will expose things that must be weeded out of our hearts.

But still the weeds will come. We are bombarded by the culture and philosophies of this world; the seeds of selfishness, pride, gossip, greed or a mean spirit, have been allowed to grow in our hearts. These weeds can choke out our spiritual life. It is a lifetime's work to weed out these sins, perhaps especially those we think

of as little sins. We must surrender our lives completely to God for His daily weeding of the gardens of our souls.

“The garden of the heart must be cultivated. The soil must be broken up by deep repentance for sin. Poisonous, Satanic plants must be uprooted. The soil once overgrown by thorns can be reclaimed only by diligent labor. So the evil tendencies of the natural heart can be overcome only by earnest effort in the name and strength of Jesus.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 56)

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20 NIV)

Purpose of prayer: Think of the things you, in God’s strength, need to weed out of the garden of your heart—those things that you need power to overcome. Write a prayer of surrender, praying in a special way about these harmful “weeds.”

2. PLANTING THE SEED

Sunflowers are known for their large size. Most sunflower plants reach a height of 5 to 7 feet (152 cm to 213 cm). The largest sunflower was grown in the Netherlands in 1986, and reached a height of 25.5 feet (762 cm). So before planting a sunflower, select good seeds, and consider where they will be planted.

Ellen White speaks of the one who plants seeds. “The work of the sower is a work of faith. The mystery of germination and growth of the seed he cannot understand. But he has confidence in the agencies by which God causes vegetation to flourish.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 64)

After planting the seed comes the waiting, for we cannot see what is happening under the soil. We must continue watering the soil each day. Soon we will see a sprout coming up. Each plant that germinates is a miracle, because even if there is water, soil, and sunshine, the seed will not grow without the life that the Creator has implanted in it. Each plant, each seed grows by the power of God.

The same is true in our prayer life. We must wait because we will not always receive an answer immediately. Yet we must believe that an answer will come.

We are assured, “To every sincere prayer an answer will come. It may not come just as you desire, or at the time you look for it; but it will come in the way and at the time that will best meet your need. The prayers you offer in loneliness, in weariness, in trial, God answers, not always according to your expectations, but always for your good.” (*Gospel Workers*, p. 258)

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” (Luke 18:1)

Purpose of prayer: Think about all the situations that you have been praying for day after day, week after week or perhaps year after year, without an answer. Write your prayer, knowing that God will answer in the time and way that is best.

3. TAKING ROOT

The sunflower has a deep taproot, which allows the plant to remove moisture to a depth of 6 feet (1.8 m). Normally the length of its root exceeds that of its stem.

Though the root is not visible, there is much we can learn from it. “The plant grows by receiving that which God has provided to sustain its life. It sends down its roots into the earth. It drinks in the sunshine, the dew, and the rain. It receives the life-giving properties from the air. So the Christian is to grow by co-operating with the divine agencies. Feeling our helplessness, we are to improve all the opportunities granted us to gain a fuller experience. As the plant takes root in the soil, so we are to take deep root in Christ. As the plant receives the sunshine, the dew, and the rain, we are to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit. The work is to be done “not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts’ Zechariah 4:6.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 66-67)

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:9-12)

Purpose of prayer: Think of all those tasks for which you feel inadequate, weak, and helpless. How can you take root more deeply in Christ? How can you more fully open your heart to the Holy Spirit? Speak to the Lord in prayer, asking for His help to grow strong in Him.

4. ALL IN DUE PROPORTION

The sunflower, with its huge blooms, splendid height, and bright colors, cannot be overlooked. It is often the favorite flower of cheerful, optimistic people.

This beautiful flower has many uses—for decoration, for production of high quality oil, and for feeding birds, etc. To grow well, they need adequate moisture, and nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus in the soil. It's amazing that the Lord has provided all of these elements in the soil in suitable proportions.

“Christ taught His disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And pointing to the flowers He gave them the assurance, “If God so clothe the grass of the field...shall He not much more clothe you?” Matthew 6:11, 30. Christ is constantly working to answer this prayer, and to make good this assurance. There is an invisible power constantly at work as man’s servant to feed and to clothe him. Many agencies our Lord employs to make the seed, apparently thrown away, a living plant. And He supplies in due proportion all that is required to perfect the harvest.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 81)

“He who causes the seed to spring up, who tends it day and night, who gives it power to develop, is the Author of our being, the King of heaven, and He exercises still greater care and interest in behalf of His children.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 89).

We are much more valuable and bought with His blood. Everything that happens to us He cares about. Every situation that disturbs our mind we can bring to Him confidently. “Every promise in the word of God furnishes us with subject matter for prayer, presenting the pledged word of Jehovah as our assurance.” (*Prayer*, p.15)

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” (Heb. 10:23)

Purpose of prayer: Claim the Lord’s promises, and tell Him what in your life needs to be fulfilled.

5. BLOOMING

There are hundreds of varieties of sunflowers; some are ornamentals, some are for oilseed, and some for foliage. There are little dwarfs, there are giants, and some are completely red. Others have only red centers. Some are multicolored. The most popular sunflowers are bright yellow with dark brown center, and some varieties also have striped petals, with varying shades at their centers. There are many beautiful varieties of sunflowers.

The famous Dutch painter Van Gogh was so amazed by the beauty of sunflowers that he created two series of paintings depicting sunflowers.

A crop of sunflowers in full bloom is a beautiful sight. Such is the wonder of God’s creation that we can only raise our eyes to heaven and recognize His creative power.

“God created the seed, as He created the earth, by His word. By His word He gave it power to grow and multiply. He said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so ... and God saw that it was good” Genesis 1:11, 12. It is that word which still causes the seed to grow. Every seed that sends up its green blade to the sunlight declares the wonder-working power of that word uttered by Him who “spake, and it was”; who “commanded, and it stood fast.” Psalm 33:9. (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 80-81)

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17)

Purpose of prayer: Write this prayer for praise and thanks to God—thanks for being the creator of the universe, for being your creator, your redeemer, your helper, and your sustainer.

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5. REPRODUCTION

The sunflowers are flowers that need external agents for reproduction. They have a floral aroma that humans cannot detect but that insects can smell. Bees are attracted to this scent. Bright colors also play a vital role in the pollination of a sunflower.

Likewise, to gain souls, God uses human agents. We must plant along with Him, and He will perform the miracle in the human heart. We should work hard and intercede fervently in prayer for those who do not know a Savior's love.

“If you have accepted Christ as a personal Savior, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, and tell of His goodness. Do every duty that presents itself. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart, and by every means in your power seek to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces of the Spirit will ripen in your character. Your faith will increase, your convictions deepen, your love be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely.” (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 67)

“For we are co-workers in God's service: you are God's field, God's building.” (1 Cor. 3:9)

Purpose of prayer: Pray for the conversion of specific people. Ask the Lord how you may be an effective instrument in His hands, planting the good seed of the message of salvation.

May God help us to grow in our Christian life to perfectly reflect the beauty of the Sun of Righteousness, the Rose of Sharon.

Activity #2, Promises—Our Strength, Parts A and B

Suggestions for using this activity:

Part A. In the first activity there are seven promises written, but you can use many more, as the Bible is full of them. The goal of this activity is to help each participant think about one promise, or two, (this is up to you), and then rewrite the promise in their own words (paraphrase), as personally as they can.

Part B. In the second activity invite everyone to think about their favorite promise and share why this promise has been significant for them. It is important that everyone share their experience, but depending of the number of the participants and time available, you may want to split up the group, make pairs, or form small groups, etc.

Sunflowers of my Heart

“How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.” (Psalm 119:9 NIV)

A variety of sunflowers were used to clean the areas surrounding the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine after the 1986 nuclear accident. Sunflowers absorbed harmful metals such as lead and cadmium. In Japan they have also sought to clear land to support sunflowers after the radiation generated by a nuclear plant in Fukushima after the tsunami of 2011.

Phytoremediation is the process used to remove the radioactive elements in the soil and water in the production areas of armaments. It can also be used to clean metals, pesticides, solvents, explosives, crude oil and toxins from landfills. The sunflower is responsible for breaking down these toxic elements. Therefore these flowers may be the salvation for the contaminated territories of our planet.

The word of God reveals to our soul the infinite love of God, encouraging us with the infallible promises of our Creator. God has the power to heal, purify, and eliminate the contamination and toxins from our heart. As the psalmist says, “How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.” (Psalm 119:9 NIV)

David cried out, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm. 51:10 NIV)

The word of God contains hundreds of promises that we would do well to keep at the forefront of our minds and in our hearts; these promises can heal our lives of the harmful elements of despair, fear, self-pity, discouragement, anxiety and guilt.

SOME PROMISES

PROMISE	PARAPHRASE
<p>Philippians 4:6,7</p> <p>“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”</p>	
<p>Isaiah 40:29:31</p> <p>“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”</p>	
<p>Matthew 11:28-30</p> <p>“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”</p>	
<p>Jeremiah 17:7-8</p> <p>“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”</p>	

<p>2 Corinthians 12:9-10</p> <p>“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”</p>	
<p>Matthew 21:21-22</p> <p>“Jesus replied, ‘Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer’.”</p>	
<p>Isaiah 41:10</p> <p>“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”</p>	

MY FAVORITE PROMISE

PROMISE	HOW IT HAS SUSTAINED ME

“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:11)