

Welcome to  
the Week of

Prayer &  
Fasting

Sept 11th - Sept 17th

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SZN-03 || 2022 || *Viva*

# Prayer & Fasting

Dear VIVA Family,

What a great year so far. Thank you so much for participating in our Week of Prayer and Fasting. Our desire is that this week you will find yourself closer to God, and filled with His presence.

I want to remind you about the word for this year which is GROW, taken from Colossians 2:6-7: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness."

In 2022, our focus is to Grow Inward (ROOTS), Grow in Community/Body (BUILT) and Grow Outward (OVERFLOW). The way we grow is by what we read in v6, "so walk in Him," and we start this journey by seeking Him in prayer and fasting. The purpose of this week is to seek God's face together, listen to his voice, and ask that He empower our efforts to expand His Kingdom.

The daily devotions for this week will be based on chapters 8-10 of the book of Nehemiah. The devotions for the week are a compilation of a several commentaries on these chapters from the Logos application (Warren Wiersbe, Steven E. Runge, Matthew Henry, Ricky Brannon), and some of my own comments. Each day you will have a portion of the scripture to read, a short comment, a prayer and a reflection. This is meant to guide and support you for this week, but please feel free to use whatever material you desire during your devotional time. We would like you to take some time this week to fast and use a daily time to seek the Lord.

Friday, September 16th we will have a Churchwide Worship Night at 7pm, and Saturday, September 17th the church will be open for prayer from 9am to 6pm. You are invited to come at any time during the day and stay as long as you want. If you have any specific words, pictures, verses, or thoughts that come during your times of prayer, please e-mail them to [frank@vivachurch.ca](mailto:frank@vivachurch.ca). I hope this devotional guide will help you to grow in Him.

Sincerely,

  
Pastors Frank & Chris

# Prayer & Fasting

## Sunday September 11th

### DAY 1 -- Hunger for the Word (Nehemiah 8:1-8)

*“And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel.”*

**Nehemiah 8:1**

It is not surprising that chapter 8 opens with a manifestation of a great hunger for the Word among these people in Jerusalem. Notice that this seems to be a spontaneous gathering. No invitations were sent out. No public notice was given. People were hungry for answers to their problems and for guidelines from the Word of God, and with one accord they gathered in this great square before the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the priest to bring the Law of the Lord and to read it to them. This would undoubtedly be the entire Pentateuch--the first five books of the Bible. This indicates the tremendous desire of these people for truth. They listened, while standing, from daybreak until noon! Certainly this long attention indicates how deeply they were aware of their ignorance about life and how much they needed answers from God. They were simply crying out for the Word.

Ezra, the priest, the author of the book of Ezra, appears for the first time in the book of Nehemiah. Thirteen years earlier he had led a return from Persia to rebuild the temple and to teach the Law of God. Apparently he had been occupied in that task all through the time of the rebuilding of the wall. But when the people had finished their work, they were desperate to hear from the Word of God, so they sent for Ezra to lead them.

It seems to me that we have come to such a time as this again. The prophet Amos predicted that there would come a famine in the world for the Word of God. People would actually be starving for answers to the problems of life. I find in many places a deep hunger among non-churched people to hear the Word of God. Wherever it is taught with any degree of understanding, they are immediately attracted to it.

Several years ago a friend of mine who was a mayor invited me to speak to a group of young professionals in a little city in Brazil called Cascavel. There were several doctors, lawyers, engineers, politicians, business people and others. As I opened up the Bible to them, I was surprised by how interested they were to hear it. Their comments and their questions came as a shock to me - I wasn't expecting it. They were hungry for the word.

When the Word is opened up, people begin to understand themselves. When you know God you begin to understand yourself, because you are made in the image of God. These people in Jerusalem were growing in self-knowledge as they began to hunger for the Word of God.

#### **Prayer:**

Lord, create in me a hunger for Your Word. Forgive me for so often taking it for granted.

#### **Reflect:**

When our souls are undernourished and we suffer spiritual indigestion, do we turn to the Word of God to feed and restore us to wholeness?

# Prayer & Fasting

## Monday September 12th

### DAY 2 -- The Joy of the Lord (Nehemiah 8:9-12)

*“Then he said to them, ‘Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.’”*

**Nehemiah 8:10**

Though weeping is necessary, it is not the final message God has for us. To show this, Nehemiah and Ezra speak up and correct the people. What a powerful statement of the effect of the Word of God! When people understand it, it brings joy. “The joy of the LORD is your strength.” What a great word for grieving people who see the evil in their lives and the lives of those around them and mourn over what it has produced! The word that brings joy is that of forgiveness. God can forgive! He does, and He will restore. That is what Jesus meant when He said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). I don't think you will ever be comforted until you learn to mourn. When you see the hurt, pain, and despair that sin can produce and you grieve over it, then you are ready for the comfort of forgiveness.

What does “the joy of the LORD” mean? It is that God has found a solution to these problems of sin. He has provided a way back to sensible, sober, wise, helpful, wholesome living. How? By learning to think like He thinks. Begin to see the world from His point of view. Listen no longer to the clamouring voices of the media. Do not take your philosophy of life from what people are saying or the advice others are giving. Listen to the Word of God.

That is the answer. It will heal your life. “He sent forth his word and healed them,” writes the psalmist (Psalm 107:20). The ministry of the Word of God is to heal us and create in us a desire to share that healing with others. Nehemiah urges the people to send portions of food to those who had nothing prepared. This is invariably the result in those who find their lives beginning to be healed by the Word of God. They start thinking of others who are hurting and want to share with them what they have learned.

#### **Prayer:**

Thank you, Lord, for the joy of forgiveness and restoration. Thank you for paying for this gift with the precious blood of Your Son.

#### **Reflect:**

What does 'the joy of the Lord' mean? What can heal our life? Do we actively celebrate and share with others the joy which is our heritage?

# Prayer & Fasting

## Tuesday September 13th

### DAY 3 -- The Way of Health (Nehemiah 8:13-18)

*“And they found it written in the Law that the Lord had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month.”*

**Nehemiah 8:14**

The way of health is dramatically demonstrated for us in the closing verses of this chapter. God had anticipated the needs of these people. Centuries before, He had provided a most remarkable visual aid to remind them of the truth that would keep them from further destruction. This is the Feast of Tabernacles, a reminder that they were called as a people out of Egypt. Their departure was sudden and precipitous. They were not even to sit down when they ate the Passover meal. They had to eat it standing, with their staffs in their hands, dressed in traveling clothes, ready to leave. They went out at a word of command and left Egypt in one night. When they got into the desert, one day's journey out, and night fell, where were they to find shelter? Moses had been told by God that they were to collect boughs and tree limbs and build booths for shelter. Then God ordained that they were to do this once every year. Even though later they had homes to dwell in, they were to build these booths and live in them for seven days. This was to teach them that they were always pilgrims and strangers on the earth. This world was not their home. All the great blessings of life would not necessarily be found in this present time but were waiting for them in glory. Therefore, they did not need to be distressed if they did not have everything that those around them were trying to get in this life.

That is the truth that will deliver us from the pressures of the times. We must hold things lightly. We must not think that houses, cars, money, and material gain are all that important. Even if we lack these things, the great treasures of our life remain untouched. To strive constantly to gain what everyone else has is a mistake. God teaches us to hold these things lightly. We must never forget that we are in the world but not of it. We are never to settle down here for good. I love the way C. S. Lewis has put it: “Our kind heavenly Father has provided many wonderful inns for us along our journey, but he takes special care to see that we never mistake any of them for home.” We are pilgrims and strangers, passing through this world. We are involved in it, deeply sometimes, but we are never to see ourselves as a part of it.

What will enable us to remember that? Verse 18 gives us the answer. Every day they read the scripture. Every day they saturated themselves in the thinking of God. That is what makes for realism: When you think like God thinks, you are thinking realistically. You are beginning to see yourself the way you really are. You are seeing your children, your home, and your nation the way they really are. For the first time you are able to divest yourself of the illusions and delusions of a mistaken, confused world. You are beginning to work toward wholeness, healing, and strengthening of the things that abide.

#### **Prayer:**

What a wonderful picture this is, Lord, of the fact that I am a stranger on this earth. Far too often I have lived as if this were my home. Renew my mind with Your truth that there is so much more to live for than what this world offers.

#### **Reflect:**

Are we owned by our earthly possessions? Are we learning to hold them lightly? How can we recognize the unhealthy delusions of a mistaken and confused world?

# Prayer & Fasting

## Wednesday September 14th

### DAY 4 -- Where to Begin (Nehemiah 9:1-15)

*“Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, ‘Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.’”*

**Nehemiah 9:5**

This prayer in the book of Nehemiah is a great model that will teach us much for our own prayer life. It begins with a great section of praise. First, God is praised as the Creator and Maker of everything. Beginning with the life He gave you is a great place to start when you are praising God. It seems strange to me that people who are dependent every moment on God to give them life allow themselves so easily to forget that fact. God sustains us moment by moment. We ought to be grateful for that. Let us never forget that our very breath comes from Him.

The next section praises God as the caller and chooser of people. He is the one who gives undeserved blessings to those He chooses. God is the keeper of promises. Not one of us would be here today if it were not for that merciful, sovereign call of God. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (- John 6:44). We are here today because the Spirit of God in wondrous grace has drawn us to Himself.

Then the people praise God as the deliverer from sin and its enslavement. They retell the history of this nation, beginning with the call of Abraham and their deliverance from Egypt. Some of us have forgotten the lessons God has taught us and have returned to the same sins, plunging ourselves once more into rebellion and slavery. Let us never forget that we have been wonderfully, even miraculously, delivered by the great hand of God.

Praise for God as the great provider of wisdom and the necessities of life follows. Here is God's providential care of His own. He taught this people how to live in the midst of great wickedness. He knew he was sending them into a land inhabited by tribes who were morally degraded to a degree that is appalling to us today. They offered their children to the god Molech by throwing them alive into a furnace of fire. It was among these people that the Israelites had to live. Yet God taught them how to avoid defilement from those things. He taught them how to be friends with these people but not be destroyed by their immorality. It is exactly the situation we are called to live in today. God has given us this wonderful book that teaches us the rules of life, health, salvation, and deliverance and the inner strength that can resist the temptations that abound all around us. To neglect it is folly.

God also supplied their needs. He gave them bread to eat when there was none. He gave them water from the rock in the middle of the desert. That is not only an account of meeting physical needs, but it describes the meeting of spiritual needs as well. The New Testament tells us these are pictures of Christ: He is the bread of life; He is the water of life. As the Israelites learned the meaning of these symbols, they began to understand that there was One coming who would fully meet the need of the human heart.

#### **Prayer:**

Father, I praise and worship You as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, as the One who has chosen me and drawn me to Yourself and the One who provides all that I need.

#### **Reflect:**

As we understand God's attributes we are better able to know and worship Him. Are our hearts tuned to praise God as the One from whom all blessings flow?

# Prayer & Fasting

## Thursday September 15th

### DAY 5 -- Time After Time (Nehemiah 9:16-37)

*“But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies.”*

**Nehemiah 9:28**

*“Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day.”*

**Nehemiah 9:32**

What a marvellous picture of the patience of God! He lets us taste the results of our evil. He gets our attention sometimes by letting disaster strike. But it is only in order that we might hear what He is saying and be delivered. He warns us in order to keep us free.

The closing paragraph, beginning with verse 32, connects the history of earlier generations with the present generation. Here we find a change of pronouns from they and them to we and our as the Israelites begin to look at their own generation.

This is where we find ourselves today. Our cities are torn with violence and strife of such intensity that people hardly dare to go outside their homes. The only recovery is to do as these people did--confess our wrongdoing to God and praise Him for His compassionate mercy.

Notice how specific the Israelites are. “You have acted faithfully, but we did wrong.” There is no “if” in true confession. You say, “Lord, I did it. I walked in my own willful way.” Then God hears, forgives, and restores.

#### **Prayer:**

Lord, thank you for Your promise that as I confess my sin, You are faithful and righteous to forgive and restore.

#### **Reflect:**

How do we respond to God's tough love in others' lives as well as our own? Are we able to recognize and be thankful for the tough love of God?



# Prayer & Fasting

## Friday September 16th

### DAY 6 --The Oath (Nehemiah 9:38 -- 10:29)

*“Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.”*

*Nehemiah 9:38*

This verse includes a list of what might be termed the company of the committed. These people see a need for preserving and perpetuating the changes in their lifestyles so as to keep in step with God; thus, they sign this agreement to bind themselves to that end. This agreement represents a kind of universal urge found among humans to publicly pledge themselves to be loyal to a cause they feel is right.

When the Pilgrims were about to get into a new land they would make an agreement. They would draw up rules for living in the new land, and they all signed it as an agreement to live by these principles and laws.

Probably the most famous document in our Canadian history is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. Regarding the Fundamental Freedoms we find Fundamental freedoms (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association. People in history have given up their lives so we could enjoy these freedoms today which we are in dangers to lose it. Perhaps you have done something like that in your own life. There came a time when you realized you needed to make some changes in your behaviour. Some of the greatest saints of the past did this. They drew up rules for their own conduct that they felt would help them to walk with God and to grow in grace and favour before Him.

But there is one other very important point here. Ultimately these people failed to follow through with their commitment. Subsequent history reveals that all the old habits returned. The nation once again lost the blessing of God upon it. Why? We discover the key in Nehemiah 10:29. They said, “All these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses.” They were depending on their own efforts to obey. They bound themselves with a curse and an oath. They were saying, “We will do this or else.” They were relying upon their own will power. They were gritting their teeth and swearing to perform. There is no expression of any need of help from God or of any provision for failure and return.

That is what the New Testament adds. It is right to vow. It is right to write it down for your own benefit and remind yourself frequently of your goal. But we must always add the words that Paul uses of himself, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). That is what makes the difference.

#### **Prayer:**

Lord, I can do nothing apart from You. I commit myself to You and what You desire for me, but I realize that even the desire to do that comes from You.

#### **Reflect:**

How fully set apart and committed are we to knowing Jesus Christ? When we consent to God's will, do we fully count on His power to keep us faithful and fruitful?



# Prayer & Fasting

## Saturday September 17th

### DAY 7 -- You are not alone in your suffering (Nehemiah 10:30-33)

*“We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.”*

*Nehemiah 10:32-33*

The people recognized the need for offerings and sacrifices. The history of Israel clearly reveals that this nation emphasized shedding the blood of animals and offering up their crops and grain to God. By so doing they were never allowed to forget the cost of redemption. Blood shed means a death has occurred. God is teaching His people that their problem with sin within is of such a serious nature it cannot be solved by merely instructing the mind. Only death can cure it.

These bloody offerings prepared the way for the death of Jesus and even our remembrance of that death at the Lord's table. We ought to meditate on this every day. We should never allow ourselves to forget the cost of our redemption. It took all that God had to open a door that we might return to Him. As Peter put it, “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Very closely related to the blood offerings was the promise of these people to bring the first fruits of their crops, herds, flocks, and even their sons to God. What they were doing was recognizing the ownership and rights of God in their lives. A corresponding truth for us today is, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a). God owns us. We do not own ourselves. The world says, “You are your own. If you are pregnant and you do not want the baby, you can kill it, because you have a right to do what you please with your own body.” But the Bible says, “No, you are not your own. You do not have a right to do anything you like with the body God gave you.”

This is true in other aspects of life as well. We are not our own. We have no right to determine what we are going to do with our lives or even whom we are going to marry, apart from God's limitations. We have certain choices granted to us, but not all choices. One of the important aspects of becoming a Christian is to recognize the rights of God and to live our lives within the limits He establishes. This is what this great passage is teaching. It is the way by which Israel recognized frequently and continually that their lives were not their own. They too “were bought with a price.” They belonged to God. He has the right to direct their affairs and make many choices for them.

#### **Prayer:**

Thank you, Lord, for this reminder that I am not my own; I have been bought with a price. I surrender my life to You, knowing that You have redeemed me with the precious blood of Christ.

#### **Reflect:**

Can we daily and joyfully choose to sacrifice our will for His will? Do all of our choices reflect the ownership rights of the Lord Jesus who bought us at infinite cost?