

REBUILD

SEEKING RESTORATION

a season of prayer & fasting for 2021



REBUILD

A SEASON OF PRAYER AND FASTING FOR MORGANTOWN CHURCH

Morgantown Church Family!

We dedicated a month at the beginning of 2020 to pray and fast together. It was a powerful time of spiritual renewal! We did not know then what was on the horizon for the rest of the year, but I'm convinced those 30 days of seeking God together gave us the strength to walk through a tumultuous year with faithfulness. We are not on the other side just yet, and many of us are walking with a limp as we continue to navigate this season, but that time together was vital preparation.

And now as we look ahead to the future that God has for us, there are many question marks and uncertainties that define 2021. As a church family we want to face them together, as the people of God, striving to live the purpose of God in a broken world. Praying and fasting together will help us to step into that calling. We are being invited, during this tumultuous season of transition, to seek after God whole-heartedly for the renewal of our hearts, to help us reconnect to meaningful discipleship community, and the restoration of a broken world. The book of Nehemiah will be our guide. It is a story of physical rebuilding and spiritual restoration that seem appropriate for our broken world.

In our broken world, there is a longing. It's a longing to know and experience more of God. And I think that lies at the center of what God wants to do in our midst. Yes, God is calling us to dig in deep together in relational disciple-making. Yes, God is calling us to whole-heartedly worship him for his glory and goodness. Yes, God is calling us to love our neighbors on our street and in our lives. But it begins with our desire to be with him, to know him, to experience his presence, and to walk in step with his Spirit. He is calling us to seek him. To pursue him. To follow hard after him. To seek first the King and his Kingdom. That's exactly what we are being invited into—a full-throttled pursuit of the presence and power of God in our midst!

This month of prayer and fasting is not a means to manipulate God to do our bidding. It's not a way to make God love us more. It's not religious obligation, or a way to show off our spirituality. It's about humbling ourselves, confessing our desperate need for him, and learning to let go of anything that keeps us from his presence.

As we pray and fast together, my encouragement is to focus less on what we are letting go of and focus more on what we are taking hold of—the promised presence of God! Each of us will be letting go of different things, but we are all seeking to grab hold of God, and I believe God wants to grab hold of us.

We are praying that the hunger pangs we feel will draw us more deeply into relationship with him. We are chasing after him, together. We are asking him to do what only he can do.

I wrote those words last year as we kicked off our fast, and I still believe them today. I'm ready to go, hopeful for the future, and excited to see God at work among us!

I love you all so much! Let's get to work!

Peace,

Brad Schrum

LET'S GET STARTED!

From Sunday, **March 7** through Sunday, **April 4 (Easter)** we are committing to two things.

PRAYER

First, we are asking that everyone who considers Morgantown Church their home to commit to set aside time to **pray everyday**, intentionally and fervently. We will be providing a month-long prayer guide centered on the story of Nehemiah to help jump start your time in prayer. Inspired by that revival story of Nehemiah rebuilding a nation, we are seeking God in three areas of rebuilding and restoration:

1. **RENEWAL** of our hearts to seek him first
2. **RECONNECTION** to deep spiritual community
3. **REENGAGEMENT** in the disciple-making mission

We have provided this short prayer guide to help jump start your prayer time each day.

FASTING

Second, we are asking that each of you take **your next step in fasting**.

We encourage you to read a short primer on fasting called **Revival Starts Here** that provides a practical overview of fasting. You can find links to audio and e-book versions, plus several other resources on our website at **morgantowncoc.org/fasting**.

BEFORE THE FAST

1 CHOOSE YOUR FAST

Start by deciding how you will fast during this prayer journey. Take time to let God prepare your heart by reading *Revival Starts Here*. See pages 45-49 for practical ways to choose your fast, and explore the other resources at morgantowncoc.org/fasting.

- Read pages 45-49 of *Revival Starts Here*

2 PREPARE

Next set aside some time to prepare your mind, body, heart, and community for this journey. See pages 49-51 of *Revival Starts Here* for helpful tips. You can also go to morgantowncoc.org/fasting for links to other resources.

- Read pages 49-51 of *Revival Starts Here*

FILL OUT YOUR PRAYER CARD

3 During this season of prayer, we want to take time to specifically pray for our neighbors, coworkers, classmates, family members, friends, and MCOC family members.

- Write one name or family in each of the squares on the back of the prayer guide.

DURING THE FAST

1 SET YOUR HEART ON GOD EACH DAY

Use this prayer guide to help you set your heart on God each day. Grab a Bible, a journal, and spend time talking with God each day. Begin each prayer time in quietness.

2 PRAY AND FAST FOR RECONNECTION AND RESTORATION

Use the prayer points in the guide to help you begin praying for the people around you each day, as well as areas of brokenness in your life. Pray for spiritual community.

3 WORK TO REBUILD A BROKEN WORLD

As you pray for your own heart and the people in your life, God will open up doors for you to show love and share Jesus with others. When God opens a door, walk through it obediently! Let's work toward the rebuilding of world together!

Nehemiah 1v3-4

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

TODAY'S PRAYER THOUGHT

We used to sing a song at church camp that always struck me as being a bit odd. I was new to faith, and had only just begun to trust and follow Jesus. The lyrics started like this: "Break my heart, dear Lord..." The melody was moving, but even with poetic license, I had a hard time with those lyrics. Why would we want God to break our hearts? Wouldn't we rather have God *heal* our hearts, instead of break them?

As we begin this journey of prayer and fasting, let's consider a few important questions.

What moves you? What makes your heart beat with purpose? What makes your heart break? What are the passions of your life? What stirs your soul?

These questions set the stage for God to work in and through us. We are reflecting on the way God was at work through Nehemiah and Ezra to rebuild the strength of God's people following a time of intense national crisis. As our own community begins to emerge from the COVID crisis and the other hardships that have marked this season, there are many parallels between the story of rebuilding in Nehemiah and our own story.

The people of Israel had been exiled—living in a foreign land, ruled by other kings, restricted in their ability to worship. Their temple, their city, and much of their identity had been destroyed. We haven't had a city or temple destroyed and we haven't been exiled, but so many of the routines, rhythms, and relationships that constitute our day-to-day lives have been significantly impacted. There's no question that our church family, our community, our nation, and our individual lives have been radically altered. Our external circumstances may be different than those Nehemiah encountered, but we have felt a collective brokenness. I do not think that devastation is too dramatic a word.

When Nehemiah was confronted with the news of the devastation of the people of God, he was moved to tears. Confronted with that pain and brokenness, Nehemiah recognizes the enormity of the rebuilding project, while also discerning the opportunity to bring spiritual renewal and restoration to the hearts of the people. Moved by these realities, Nehemiah dedicates himself to prayer and fasting.

There are moments in life when we are brought to a realization that we have nowhere to turn but to God. Perhaps you have had those moments, maybe even in the midst of this season of devastation. This was Nehemiah's experience. His broken heart led him to seek God in prayer and fasting. Still reeling from his new awareness of the devastation experienced by God's people, Nehemiah recognized that God alone was able to bring about restoration.

Sometimes, in order for God to bring restoration and renewal in our hearts (and through our lives, for the world), *he must first break our hearts*. This is not an insignificant thing. A heart that has been broken by God is a heart that experiences brokenness, loss, and pain in tangible ways. It is a painful experience.

Nehemiah 1v5-6

“LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel...”

TODAY’S PRAYER THOUGHT

The story begins as Nehemiah hears about the destruction of Jerusalem and the brokenness of the people of God. He dedicates himself to pray and fast in order that he might seek God for the restoration of the city and the renewal of the hearts of the people. Our text today is the beginning of his prayer.

Nehemiah begins to pray with an awareness of who God is. He is Yahweh—the LORD—the God who makes covenant with his people, who revealed his name to Moses in the burning bush, and who has committed himself in faithful covenant love to his people. He is the God of heaven, who reigns supreme over all the cosmos (including exile, pandemic, job loss, disease, addiction, and all!). In short, the God to whom Nehemiah prays is “great and awesome.”

And perhaps most significantly of all (at least for our context), this awesome God who rules from heaven and loves his people *is a God who listens*. This is the grounding theology of prayer. *God loves and God listens*.

“*Are you listening?*” In my family, we have to frequently ask our little girls this question... and the answer is almost always a resounding “No!”. With Yahweh, however, we never have to ask this question! When his people pray, God listens!

As we begin this fasting journey, it is important that we understand this truth. We are not praying and fasting in order to get God to listen to us. This isn’t a vain attempt to get God’s attention. We have his attention! He is already listening! Instead, *we are praying and fasting in order that we might give our full attention to God*.

In our fast, we are letting go of physical things in order to better pay attention to the spiritual realities of God. As we start this season, does God have your full attention?

PRAYER POINTS

- God, thank you for revealing your name, your character, and your nature to us through you Scriptures. Help us to know you more!
- God, thank you for being king over the universe and yet taking time to listen to me!
- God, as we pray and fast in this season, help us give you our full attention. Please remove any distractions from my life!
- God, I lift up the concerns of my heart to you. (Spend time praying through prayer needs in and around your life.)

Additional Reading: Psalm 116v1-7

Nehemiah 1v6-7

“I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.”

TODAY'S PRAYER THOUGHT

Not long ago, our house grew eerily quiet for a few short moments. As I searched for our youngest daughter, I found her hiding underneath her little activity table—covered in chocolate and cookie crumbs. It was her vain attempt to hide the evidence of the cookie she had stolen off the counter and devoured before dinner.

As Nehemiah continues his prayer, he moves from acknowledging the power and reign and faithful love of God to confessing sin. You are probably familiar with practice of worship and praise, but confession may be a different story. Confessing sin is not usually commonplace in our culture. In fact, there is a strong pull in our hearts toward *hiding* our sin rather than *confessing* it. We would rather be caught hiding under the table than bringing our sin into the open. And yet confession plays a crucial role in revival, renewal, and in the restoring of our hearts. There can be no revival or renewal without confession. In this time of prayer and fasting, we are calling on God to move in power to rebuild our lives and community, but we also must own our sinful participation in the brokenness of our world. If we are going to rebuild and restore, we must grow comfortable in the practice of confession.

When Nehemiah's prayer in context, there is something striking in it. Nehemiah played no tangible role in the sin that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. It happened a generation earlier! He simply wasn't around! Nehemiah understands, though, that the same disobedience at the root of Israel's idolatry also lived in his heart. As part of the universal family of God, he owned that sin in his confession. He confessed his own sin, and the sin of his “father's family.”

As we begin this season of fasting, spend time today confessing your sin. Ask God to reveal in you the places of sin in your own life that you have kept in hiding. Turn over your shame and guilt to God. Consider your family, our culture, even our church. Confess any sin that the Holy Spirit reveals.

We confess our sins, because as 1 John 1v9 reminds us, when “we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” We remember “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” (Romans 8v1).

PRAYER POINTS

- ▶ God, would you reveal in me the sins of my heart?
- ▶ God, I confess my sin to you. Have mercy on me!
- ▶ God, I thank you for the forgiveness Jesus brings!
- ▶ God, please help me to walk in greater obedience to you!

Additional Reading: 1 John 1v5 - 2v2

Nehemiah 3v19-21

Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section, from a point facing the ascent to the armory as far as the angle of the wall. Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest. Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib's house to the end of it.

TODAY'S PRAYER THOUGHT

When you read through this section of Nehemiah, it may be easy to gloss over it. There's not much action, plus a lot of weird names. But don't get hung up on the names, and don't miss the significance of what's happening. Now that the work on the wall has officially begun, the writer begins to chronicle how it was accomplished: through the people of God — individuals working together, for a common purpose and goal.

Nehemiah could not do the work alone. Yes, God had inspired him, called him, and was at work through him. He had the gift of leadership. But the rebuilding work would require all the people of God to come together to play their part, and do the work in front of them. Each person was responsible for their work, and not the work of anyone else.

As we grow forward, we can only do the work of rebuilding and restoration *together*.

Before moving on today, don't miss what the Scripture says about Baruch. He not only repaired his section of the wall, but he did it "zealously."

Can it be said of you that you have been zealously doing the work that God has laid out for you to do?

Take a moment today to do an honest assessment of yourself, and your work of disciple-making for the kingdom of God. Have you left the work for someone else? Are you putting your hand to the task with zeal and passion?

PRAYER POINTS

- ▶ God, thank you for calling me to be part of your people and giving me a crucial role in your disciple-making mission for the world.
- ▶ God, I admit that it is often easy to get distracted from the work of disciple-making. Please help me to do my part!
- ▶ God, please help our church continue to grow in our commitment to work together for the mission you've given us!
- ▶ God, give us success as we give ourselves to the work of rebuilding and renewal!

Additional Reading: Romans 12v4-8

Nehemiah 4v1-2

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?"

TODAY'S PRAYER THOUGHT

Early in the story of Nehemiah, we reflected on the inevitability of opposition to the mission of God. Satan has been doing battle against God and God's people from the beginning of time. It continues in the story of Nehemiah and in our journey of prayer and fasting too.

This time the opposition comes as ridicule. "How can these feeble people bring life back from death?" The resistance is not unexpected, but it is still a stinging rebuke because—objectively speaking—it is actually a valid point! The task does seem to be insurmountable! The city is in ruins, a devastation wrought by the world's most vicious empire! The rumble seems impossible to build.

When you think about your life, our world, and the journey ahead, do you ever get discouraged? Do you ever feel like it may be too much? Does the rubble feel too overwhelming?

Nehemiah and the people heard the ridicule, and they saw the rubble, but they also knew something that the opposition did not. They knew that the God of heaven could bring beauty out of the rubble and ruins. As the taunts from the enemy echoed through the ruins, the people of God moved with confident assurance knowing that (as we sometimes sing) "up from the ashes, hope will arise."

What are the ashes in your life? What are the ruins that remind you of the way things used to be? Are there areas of your life that seem hopeless? Do you hear the taunts of the enemy echoing in the rubble?

As we continue our season of fasting, we are making our way toward Easter Sunday, when we will break our fast and celebrate the power of the resurrection of the son of God. We commit to the work of God, even when all seems hopeless, because we know that God can bring life where death seems to have conquered. He can bring hope out of ashes, life out of ruins, worship out of the rubble, and life out of death.

Where in your life do you need to experience resurrection power today?

PRAYER POINTS

- ▶ God, thank you for the resurrection of Jesus that brings me life, salvation and hope! Help me to hope in Jesus' resurrection!
- ▶ God, help me to experience the power of the resurrection! Bring life out of the brokenness (pray for specific areas of your life).
- ▶ God, help our church to participate in the power of resurrection in our mission to make disciples of Jesus.
- ▶ God, may your resurrection power be at work in our culture and our community to bring renewal and restoration.

Additional Reading: John 11v25-26, Ephesians 1v19-23

Nehemiah 4v13-14

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

TODAY'S PRAYER THOUGHT

When I was kid, I would galavant around my house in a superhero costume, pretending to be "Super Brad," (so much for a secret identity, right?) and reducing the world. I used to love watching war movies with my dad. Epics like *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars* have always been my favorite stories. It is not the violence, but the heroism and valor and adventure that stir something deep inside of me. I don't think it is just a masculine phenomenon, either. My two girls, decked out in pink and purple dresses (with "twirl-ability" of course!) will imagine tales of rescue and courage as they dart throughout the house.

We are so often captivated by stories of heroism and battle and the struggle between good and evil *because we are living that story*. The spiritual war rages all around us. We were born into a world at war. We are not bystanders, but active participants in the struggle for the heart and soul of the world. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood; we do not fight with lightsabers or rings of power. The heroes in the battle are not Jedi, hobbits, or princes in shining armor, *but the battle is real all the same*.

You were not made to shrink back in fear or to passively sit by while war rages. You are called to fight in spiritual combat. As we pray and fast, we are joining this spiritual war!

Nehemiah calls the people to "Remember the Lord...and fight for your families..." What in your life is worth fighting for? Where do you need to see God's transformative power? Who do you need to pray for today? Devotion, fasting, and a relentless dedication to intercessory prayer are some of our weapons for the spiritual battle. Let's use them bravely!

We are called to to fight, but we fight this battle on our knees.

PRAYER POINTS

- ▶ God, the battle rages around me, and sometimes I feel like I can't fight any longer. Help me to remember your awesome power!
- ▶ God, will you give me the courage and strength to keep going, to keep seeking you, and to keep fighting for the people I love?
- ▶ God, will you help us be on the offensive to combat the forces of darkness around us through prayer? Will you give us insight to know where and how to fight for you?

Additional Reading: Ephesians 6v12, 18-20

Nehemiah 8v9-11,17-18 *[Read chapter 8 for full context]*

“This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. . . Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” . . . “Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.” . . . From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great. Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

TODAY’S PRAYER THOUGHT

Our time of joy and celebration and feasting at the conclusion of our fast is still several days away. Don’t let the celebration in our text today tempt you! It’s actually a powerful testament to what we are chasing after together.

As the spiritual revival continues to sweep through the hearts of the people of God, they are moved to grieve and weep. The power of the Word of God has revealed the depth of their sin. The people have been cut to the heart and are brought to repentance. This is a great thing! Remember from the beginning of our journey that often *God will break a heart before he restores it*. That is what is happening in the story, and hopefully you have experienced similar moments in our journey together!

Ezra and Nehemiah understand that confession, repentance, and spiritual grieving are necessary in order to experience full revival. However, they also recognize that God has been at work drawing the hearts of the people to himself, and that is something to celebrate! So in this moment, the people are called to feast, rejoice, and celebrate together.

During our time of separation in this pandemic, we have been desperately longing for the time when we can come together as a family to feast, worship, and celebrate. Let this passage inspire hope that the day for celebrating together will come! In the meantime, we continue to cry out to God in our prayer and fasting with joyful anticipation of the celebration that is to come. We look forward, not just to the time of breaking our fast, but to the time sharing in the wedding feast of the Lamb at the renewal of all things!

PRAYER POINTS

- ▶ God, even as I celebrate your goodness, help me to be still before you, with a full awareness of your holiness and my own sin.
- ▶ God, we continue to pray for the day when our church can be back together to celebrate you as a family! Bring that day quickly! In the meantime, strengthen our resolve and commitment to each other while we are separated.
- ▶ God, thank you for giving me reasons to celebrate, even in times of struggle. Will you help me to reflect on those today?
- ▶ God, Jesus said that he came that we might experience his complete joy. I admit that I do not always feel complete joy. I pray that his joy would overflow in me!
- ▶ **Additional Reading:** Revelation 19v4-9

Nehemiah 9v4-6

They cried out with loud voices to the LORD their God. And the Levites...said "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you..."

TODAY'S PRAYER THOUGHT

The worship and praise continues! As it does, the people turn their attention from themselves and their sin to the character and glory of God. This Godward shift is important in the movement of spiritual rebuilding and restoration! If we focus only on ourselves and our sin, it always leads to hopelessness and despair. But when we can make the shift from self-focus to a God-focus, it will fill us with renewed hope and purpose.

In this prayer, God is revealed as the everlasting God and the creator of the ends of the earth. He is exalted above all things. No matter what we go through, God reigns above it all! May that thought fill us with hope today!

This reflection leads to an important question for us: *Is God above all things in your life?*

As we approach the end of our time of prayer and fasting, begin to consider if God really is over all and above all in your life. Has your time in fasting revealed any other "lords" in your life? Are there things you have placed on the throne of your heart? Where do you turn in times of stress and anxiety, or fear and doubt? What is your comfort and security?

The physical work of rebuilding in Nehemiah's story has been important. It was a major accomplishment! But a work greater than the rebuilding of the walls was taking place: the work of rebuilding a posture of worship in the hearts of the people. Idolatry (worship of something other than God) has been at the root of the problems the people of God experienced throughout history. Ezra and Nehemiah knew that without surgically removing the cancer of idolatry from their hearts, the people of God would end up right back in the mess and brokenness.

Use your prayer time today to take an inventory of your heart. What is on the throne? Do you have idols that need to be knocked down? Are there things you need to do to ensure that God will reign on that throne today and every day moving forward?

PRAYER POINTS

- ▶ God, you are from everlasting to everlasting! You made the heavens. You give life to everything, including me! I praise you for who you are and what you have done! (Think about specific areas in which you have seen God bring life and restoration.)
- ▶ God, would you reign as King of my heart? Would you help me to remove any idols that I have placed on the throne of my life?
- ▶ God, thank you for reigning over the chaos of my life. Help me to trust you more!
- ▶ **Additional Reading:** Isaiah 40v21-31

Nehemiah 9v9-12

“You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take....”

TODAY’S PRAYER THOUGHT

Yesterday, we reflected on God’s covenant faithfulness—how he has proven his love and faithfulness to us in countless ways. Today, our prayer helps us reflect on that faithfulness in a very tangible way by remembering the Exodus story from Scripture. When God powerfully rescued his people from Egyptian captivity and led them into the wilderness, he did so with “a pillar of cloud” and “a pillar of fire.” The people were in the wilderness, but God had not abandoned them. The pillars of fire and cloud were tangible reminders of God’s presence. He was with them, even in the wilderness.

While we have not been in literal wilderness, we have certainly been on a spiritual wilderness journey. *May we be reminded today that God has been with us every step of the way.*

God has been with you in your fast. God was with you long before, too. He has been with you in the wilderness. God will continue to be with you as we move into the next season. He will be with you as you emerge from wilderness to the promised land.

Have you seen and experienced God’s presence in your life? If you have, thank him for it and celebrate it! Maybe you have struggled to see God’s presence. Be honest with God about that struggle. Ask God to help you become more aware of his presence. The Scriptures promise us that he is with us, even when we do not see him. Ask God to help you see him.

PRAYER POINTS

- God, thank you for being with your people in the wilderness. Thank you for being *with us*, in our wilderness!
- God, thank you for all ways your people have experienced your presence throughout history. Thank you for the ways I have experienced your presence.
- God, I want to experience more of your presence! Give me eyes to see you and ears to hear your voice in my life!
- God, help me to follow wherever your presence leads me!

Additional Reading: Psalm 23

Nehemiah 9v38

“In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.”

Nehemiah 10v39

“We will not neglect the house of our God.”

TODAY’S PRAYER THOUGHT

At the end of my eighth-grade school year, our high school’s new football coach called a meeting of all the students and parents who were considering playing football the following year. He told stories of the “glory days” of our football program and cast a vision for the future. He made clear the kind of commitment and work ethic required to be part of the team. This would not be for the faint of heart. By the end of the meeting, I was both intimidated and inspired. That night, he sent us home with a paper—a commitment to the team, a covenant. If we decided to play, we were expected to sign our name and make a whole-hearted commitment to the team. Our coach was asking us to take ownership of our role on the team. It was intense, to be sure. But the thing is, it worked! Our team was smaller over the next few years, but it was the beginning of a movement that led to some of the best football teams in school history.

It is a powerful thing to give ourselves to be part of a people and a movement, to take ownership of our role in the movement, to draw a line in the sand and commit.

That is what the people of God do in our Scripture today. They make a binding agreement and they commit. They covenant themselves to God, reflecting the covenant he has made with them. Through the course of this story, the people had taken up axes and hammers and swords together to rebuild the walls and fight for their families. They had feasted on the word of God, worshiped him passionately, and prayed relentlessly. God had been working among them to cultivate physical and spiritual restoration. And now—on the other side of spiritual revival—they were committing themselves to God and to each other, committing to obediently walk with God into the future. They were owning the movement that God began, and committing themselves to be a part of it.

God has a plan and purpose for our church family! There is work to do in the house of God! But we can only fulfill that purpose and do that work when we each own our role, commit to be a part of the movement of God, and faithfully walk in obedience together!

Are you ready to be part of what God wants to do through us, his church, in Morgantown and beyond? Are you ready to join in? We have a rich past and a promising future, and you have a role to play! Will you own it?

PRAYER POINTS

- God, thank you for what you have been doing in our hearts during this season.
- God, help me to see and own my role in the work you will continue to do in our midst for renewal and restoration!
- God, help me to have a greater commitment to love and care for my brothers and sisters in our church family!
- God, I give myself fully to you and to your mission. I surrender to you! I want to walk obediently with you!

Additional Reading: Joshua 24v14-15

Nehemiah 12v27-31

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem.... I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks.

Nehemiah 12v40-43

The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God...on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.

[Read chapter 12v27-47 for the full context]

TODAY'S PRAYER THOUGHT

Here we are, at the end of the story! The wall has been rebuilt and the temple restored. The people have returned to the city. Enemies have been pushed back. The peace and security of the city has been secured. Revival has swept the nation. Hearts have been renewed, the people reconnected, and the mission reengaged. It has been a glorious story of faithfulness, grit, and determination! God has fulfilled the work of restoration he placed on Nehemiah's heart.

And here we are, at the end of our fast! We have seen God move in some big and some small ways. We have experienced renewal and recommitment to him. We have worshipped. We have repented. We have experienced God's grace, forgiveness, and faithfulness. It has been a journey of faithfulness, grit, and determination.

We break our fast tomorrow! Today is our last full day of fasting! Use your time in prayer today to prepare to celebrate and worship God for all that he has done.

As a response to the work of God, the people of God sing and rejoice in worship. The text says in verse 43 that the sound of rejoicing could be heard far away. As we gather to worship tomorrow, let's worship so boldly that the hills resound with sounds of God's praise!

Reflect over the past month. What do you have to celebrate? What have been the victories? Have you seen God at work in your struggles?

PRAYER POINTS

- God, thank you for this season of fasting and prayer! Thank you for hearing our prayer, and for drawing us closer to you.
- God, your church prepares to join together in worship tomorrow, would you cause joy to rise in my heart? Would you help me to rejoice in you and your goodness?
- God, even in our struggle, you are good. Help me to believe that more deeply and celebrate it more fully today and for the rest of my walk with you.

Additional Reading: Psalm 98

Nehemiah 13v27

[Read chapter 13 for the full context]

“Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God...?”

TODAY’S PRAYER THOUGHT

We break our fast today! Has it been a success? What defines success?

Was the rebuilding of Jerusalem a success? It depends on how you define it. On the surface, the work of Ezra and Nehemiah was actually a colossal failure. Chapter 13 chronicles a series of Torah violations that Nehemiah finds on his return to Jerusalem several years after the walls were rebuilt. The people had promised to faithfully follow the law, but that commitment soon waned, the fire died, and they drifted back in the same cycles of sin that marked their lives before their revival and restoration.

Countless hours and substantial financial resources were spent over the course of decades to rebuild the city and the temple—all so that the people of God would give themselves fully to the worship of God. This story has been about rebuilding the walls, yes. But more than rebuilding walls, *it was about restoring a heart of worship and faithfulness to God!* Spiritual restoration was always the point of the physical labor.

In a depressing shift at the end of the story, the people have turned on God, abandoned the revival movement, and returned to their idolatrous ways. *It is almost like nothing changed.*

Not exactly an encouraging way to end a month of prayer and fasting, is it?

Have things changed in our community? Our church? Our nation? Has a revival broken out? Have we experienced a miraculous outpouring of God’s power? Have we rebuilt what has been torn down over the past year? Have we seen an answer for all our prayers? If all this has been left unfulfilled, does that mean our fast was unsuccessful? A failure?

The ending of the story of Ezra-Nehemiah is troubling. All that work for restoration...and the revival fires burned out in the end. Nothing seems to have ultimately changed, at least not where it mattered most. And yet, if you look beneath the surface, there are two things that have been *eternally* changed.

Nehemiah, having joined God in this mission, has been changed. He is no longer the same man! When you faithfully follow God, he begins to work within your heart to change you, even when you can’t see it. The Holy Spirit works in partnership with our obedience to transform us from the inside out.

How have you been transformed during the course of our fast? What work has God done in your own life and heart? Is that transformation going to last? Or will you end up like the people in Nehemiah’s day who returned to their old way of life as soon as the spiritual intensity waned?

Our month of prayer and fasting has been intense. We have chased after God hard together! It has been a season marked by an acute passion. This kind of frenetic pace likely isn’t sustainable for the long-term in your spiritual life, and that’s ok. What kind of changes do you need to make so that the transformative work of God can continue? What do you need to do in your life to ensure that you do not immediately fall back into old patterns and sins?



Not only was Nehemiah changed, but the religious and spiritual foundations of Israel were transformed as well. The revival written about in this story did not last, but it set the stage for Jesus' arrival into the world centuries later. *This* generation did not see lasting revival, but *generations to come* would eventually be shaped deeply by these events. They would look back on this moment of history, and—inspired by Ezra and Nehemiah's faithfulness and leadership—would resurrect these revival fires. In doing so, they created a spiritual fervor, an anticipation for the Kingdom of God and a deep faithfulness to the Scriptures that prepared the way for Jesus.

When Jesus proclaimed and embodied the good news of the Kingdom, called disciples, suffered on the cross, and walked out of his tomb, he did it amongst a people who were waiting and longing for God's kingdom to come...*all because they had been shaped by the story of Ezra and Nehemiah.*

Though the ending to this story is bleak, Nehemiah's revival was a seed that took root centuries later and is still bearing fruit today. It may have seemed to Nehemiah like it was all for nothing. But like a seed that falls to the ground dies only to eventually produce lasting fruit, the restoration to which Nehemiah had dedicated himself would be resurrected into a movement that would bring eternal life to all the world through Jesus!

As we conclude our fast, I don't know if you have seen the "results" you've been looking for in the season. But I do know this: even if a revival hasn't broken out or if you are still waiting for your prayers to be answered, this season of prayer and fasting has been an important building block in the work that God will do through us—right now in 2021, and in the generations to come.

We break our fast today on Easter Sunday, a day in which the world is reminded of the empty tomb of Jesus. Today, we move forward into what lies ahead, knowing that even out of ashes and ruins of a broken world, hope will arise! We have confidence to continue the work of rebuilding and restoration because Jesus is alive, he has defeated death, and one day is returning to make all things new!

PRAYER POINTS

- God, thank you for the way you have worked in my life, especially in this season of fasting.
- God, thank you for the hope of the renewal of all things. Even in the pain and struggle of this world, strengthen my heart in that hope!
- God, keep us from falling back into old patterns of sin, idolatry, and distraction. Help us to always keep you as first place in our lives.
- God, may the work you began in us this season be the building blocks of the work you will do through us for generations to come, until Jesus returns!

Additional Reading: 1 Corinthians 15v58

Nehemiah 13v31

“Remember me with favor, my God.”

TODAY’S PRAYER THOUGHT

We have completed our fast! Praise God! Celebrate with someone!

As we close this time of prayer today, we reflect on the last, *haunting*, words of the book of Nehemiah. In these 6 words, you can almost hear Nehemiah’s dejection and heartbreak. The project he began with passion and prayer has been completed, but the greater purpose appears to be unfulfilled. The walls now stand, but the people have walked away.

A pastor has said, “Revival fires always begin in the heart of God and are extinguished in the hands of the people.”

As we have prayed, maybe you have seen God move in exactly the way you had hoped. Maybe you have seen God do “exceedingly, abundantly more than you can ask or imagine.” Maybe God has surprised you by his power...*Or perhaps you are still waiting, hoping, longing for God to move in your life.*

The question I wrestle with as I reflect on these haunting lines from Nehemiah and the conclusion of our fast is this: Who was this fast for? Why did we do it? What was the point? Was it for the external effects? The results? So we could feel good about what we accomplished?

As Nehemiah closes this book, he looks at his passion-project and sees an unfulfilled purpose. In that tension, Nehemiah ends as he started—by praying. His first prayer was long and eloquent. This time his prayer is short: *“Remember me with favor, my God.”* Nehemiah is simply asking that God be pleased with him. Nehemiah has done all he could. And his desire now is simply for God to look on him with delight.

Wherever you find yourself at the conclusion of this fast, may you rest in knowing that God *is* pleased with you. His delight in you is not a result of your success or failure in fasting and prayer. It doesn’t matter if you nailed every single day of the fast or if every single day was a struggle. God is pleased with you, *because you are his*. When God remembers you, he remembers you with favor, with delight, and with love.

As we move forward into this next season together, may we do so with a confident assurance of God’s loving purpose for us! May we move forward together, as the people of God! And may we move forward in faithfulness to see God bring about the restoration of a broken world.

Our fast is over, but the journey is just beginning! God is calling us forward! There is work left to do. Let’s go!

PRAYER POINTS

- God, thank you for looking on me with favor and delight. Help me to know that I am loved by you and saved by your grace.
- God, please continue the work that you have started, both in me and our church.
- God, even though our fast has drawn to a close, please continue to renew our hearts, connect us to deep spiritual community, and help us to reengage in your mission to restore our broken world!

PRAYER CARD

The diagram consists of a central circle containing the word "ME" in red, bold, uppercase letters. Six rectangular boxes are arranged around the circle, connected to it by dashed white lines. The boxes are positioned as follows: one at the top, one at the bottom, one on the left, one on the right, one at the top-left, and one at the top-right. The background of the entire page is a textured, stone-like surface.

**Write one name (or a family's last name)
in each of the blocks above.**

You can pray for any of your neighbors, coworkers, classmates, family members, Morgantown Church family or friends who need to experience the spiritual restoring power of God.