

## March 11, 2022 - Prayer & Fasting to Show Grief

### Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 1: 1-11

Throughout the Scriptures we have examples of prayer and fasting which are often combined in the Old Testament during times of mourning, repentance, and/or deep spiritual need. Today we look at the life of Nehemiah, the Jewish prophet, as he handles the grief that death and destruction brings and how we can go to the Lord for comfort and help through a fast.

The first chapter of Nehemiah describes Nehemiah praying and fasting, because of his deep distress over the news that Jerusalem had been desolated. His many days of prayer were characterized by tears, fasting, confession on behalf of his people, and pleas to God for mercy. So intense was the outpouring of his concerns that it is almost inconceivable that he could “take a break” in the middle of such prayer to eat and drink. The devastation that befell Jerusalem also prompted Daniel to adopt a similar posture: **“So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes” (Daniel 9:3)**. Like Nehemiah, Daniel fasted and prayed that God would have mercy upon the people saying, **“We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws” (v. 5)**.

**Nehemiah 2: 1-3 reads-*In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I (Nehemiah) took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid, but said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruin, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”***

In spite of his grief, Nehemiah went about his daily work. He performed all of the tasks expected of him. But sadness isn’t easy to conceal. The king saw sadness in Nehemiah’s face and correctly named it when he said, “This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”

While we cannot weep through every moment of all of our days, our hearts can still be sad. We can do everything required of us. Daily tasks and routines can distract us from our pain and help us by giving us a sense of purpose. But duties and distractions can be helpful only if we allow time to grieve.

I understand that grieving is a process and that we all go through stages, but the bottom line is “you feel what you feel” and during those times it is often hard to know how to push through. Fasting is letting go of the visible to get in touch with the invisible. It may be food, sleep, or any other enjoyment in life that we deny ourselves. Clearly fasting and petition are closely linked as we see David prayed and fasted over his sick child (**2 Samuel 12:16**), weeping before the Lord in earnest intercession (**vv. 21-22**). Esther urged Mordecai and the Jews to fast for her as she planned to appear before her husband the king (**Esther 4:16**).

As we have discovered together, we see that people fasted to seek and inquire of the Lord; because of extreme sorrow; to appeal to God for answered prayer; or as a simple act of humbling

themselves before the Lord. May this be an encouragement to you as you participate in this period of prayer and fasting and that you may gain the understanding and clarity that you seek from our Lord.

*Dear Heavenly Father, my prayer for us this day is that through our prayers and fasting that more than a personal transformation takes place, but we allow you, Father, to hear from Heaven and to know that you can heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nations, and our world. May we confess Father not only obvious sins, but less obvious ones as well. May we ask the questions: What is standing in our way of our relationship with you? What is holding us back from living and loving like you? It might be self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, an unwillingness to share our faith with others, putting time spent in prayer and study of God's Word low on our priority list, or struggling to love our neighbors and treat them with kindness. Father, we confess our shortcomings and ask you to work in our hearts during this time of prayer and fasting. We offer this prayer in Christ's Most Holy Name, Amen.*

*By: Mitzi Baker*

**Pray the 4 prayer points on page 1 or stop by the war room at the church building for prayer.**

