



SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

A Week of Prayer as we begin a New Year

JAN 8-12, 2018

A PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we dedicate this week of prayer, of Solemn Assembly, to You. In a chaotic, noisy world we ask for your help in quieting our hearts and our schedules. We recognize Yours' is the voice we most need to hear as we enter this new year.

Stir our hearts and renew our passion and commitment to your will and your ways so that we will be a church family known by its lavish love for You, for our neighbors and even for our enemies. God may this week set the tone for a year marked by a revival of your Glory and presence in our lives and our church. We pray all this in the powerful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

As a church family we mark our calendars to intentionally begin the new year by doing something counter-cultural. Each year we hear people say...

“Starting the year by intentionally slowing down to be with God, instead of speeding up, has been amazing.”

“I can’t wait for this year’s Solemn Assembly.”

“Each year I’ve had significant interactions with God and others that have changed me.”

Again this year we declare the first importance isn't getting ourselves organized, joining the gym or finding the best investment opportunity. First importance is aligning our hearts with the heart of our Heavenly Father. Hearing the voice of the One who holds the whole world in His hand and who invites us to look ahead to this next year with joy, expectation and calm because we walk hand in hand with Him.

In a world that is a drift in confusion and chaos we have an anchor for our souls, a guide for the journey, a guarantee that, regardless of the circumstances that unfold in 2018, we can live lives of eternal significance. Together, we choose in 2018 to partner with God in bringing His love and light to our world.

Solemn Assembly sets the tone for the year in which we individually and collectively as a church family, experience more of what it means to live our whole lives in a love relationship with God. Out of the overflow of that relationship we will carry out the mission of Jesus, bringing Good News to this world that desperately needs some, by radically loving our neighbors and even our enemies.

Jesus lived every moment of His life in loving relationship to the Father. He showed us how to live a life of complete and joy-filled alignment with God. His prayers illustrate that everything He did flowed out of that relationship. This year our Solemn Assembly will look at Jesus' prayers. As we consider this we also recognize that Jesus is still praying for us today.

Praying with Jesus
IN RESTFUL DEPENDENCE

Monday, January 8
7-9 pm Prayer Gathering

Praying with Jesus
FOR WISDOM AND GUIDANCE

Tuesday, January 9
7-9 pm Prayer Gathering

Praying with Jesus
THROUGH UNANSWERED PRAYER

Wednesday, January 10
7-9 pm Prayer Gathering

Praying with Jesus
FOR HEALING AND WHOLENESS

Thursday, January 11
7-9 pm Prayer Gathering

Praying with Jesus
FOR HIS MISSION

Friday, January 12
5:30–7:30 pm Celebration Gathering and Potluck
(families welcome)

WAYS TO ENGAGE THIS WEEK

For some, coming to the church building for Solemn Assembly won't fit with work and life schedules. However, you can still engage with your church in a number of important ways as you work through this prayer guide. **Here are some options:**

Prayer Drive. Whether you're on your way to work, school, gym or to the store, use this time to intentionally pray for the people or communities represented.

Prayer Walk. Walk through your neighbourhood, apartment building, office building and pray for the individuals and/or businesses.

Over Coffee. Work through the book on your own and arrange to meet with a friend over lunch or coffee to discuss it and spend time praying together.

Small Groups/Table Groups. If you're a part of School of Discipleship, Daybreak or a small group, consider coming to Solemn Assembly together when you would normally meet.

For Families. We've created a kid-friendly resource sheet for the week so you can join in the themes for each day with your family. You can find it on the website.

Resources. For resources and further ideas, please visit the website.

spac.ca/solemnassembly

PRAYING WITH JESUS IN RESTFUL DEPENDENCE

In a complex and often confused world we find simplicity and peace in a short prayer Jesus prayed in Matthew 11:25. Here Jesus thanks His Father for the simplicity of the Gospel message—*“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and have revealed them to little children; yes Father, for such was Your gracious will.”* Who were the “wise and understanding” of Jesus’ day? The Pharisees. They studied the law and believed they could justify themselves before God through their actions. They were self-reliant and self-righteous and put heavy, crippling loads of legalism on those around them. Legalism always leads to pride or fear. In contrast, here in Matthew, Jesus expressed His joy in the fact that God’s gracious way of being made right with Him is simple child-like trust in what God has done for us.

The way is simple but it’s not easy. It goes against everything in our human nature to receive rather than to earn. Receiving is an act of humility. As we receive the love of God through the resurrected life of Jesus, it allows us to leave the burdened weary path of striving and enter the way of rest. This way of rest is to mark our whole journey as followers of Jesus. This is the way Jesus lived, in humble dependence on His Father. In John 5:19 He says, *“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does”*. Jesus invites us to enter the life-giving way of radical dependence on God. His grace. His provision. His enough. He is the Father, the Source, the Provider. Jesus’ invitation to us is that 2018 be a year of delightful dependence and rest.

Rest. Rest. Rest in God’s love. The only work you are required now to do is to give your most intense attention to His still, small voice within.
- Madame Jeanne Guyon

Jesus, I am resting, resting
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.
- Jean Sophia Pigott

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what You were pleased to do. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. 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."

MATTHEW 11:25-30

*You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in You.*

ISAIAH 26:3

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:

*"In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength,
but you would have none of it.*

You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.'

Therefore you will flee!

You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.'

Therefore your pursuers will be swift!

A thousand will flee

at the threat of one;

at the threat of five

you will all flee away,

till you are left

like a flagstaff on a mountaintop,

like a banner on a hill."

*Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you;
therefore He will rise up to show you compassion.*

For the Lord is a God of justice.

Blessed are all who wait for Him!

ISAIAH 30:15-18

PRAYING WITH JESUS FOR WISDOM AND COURAGE

Just like all of us, while He was here on earth Jesus faced many decisions. Decisions that would affect the future of His mission. One example of this was the choosing the Twelve Disciples. Who would He choose to be closest to Him during His ministry? Who would be entrusted with carrying on His mission after He ascended back to His Father? So how did Jesus make this decision? Luke 6:12-13 gives us the answer, *“One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and He prayed to God all night. At daybreak He called together all of His disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles.”*

If Jesus needed to spend time in prayer conversing with His Father then it's certain that we do too. Here's the interesting thing. We often gauge whether we heard God's wisdom correctly by the immediate results of the decisions we made. Think back again to Jesus choice after a night of prayer. Did this intense prayer time mean that things were easy or the disciples He chose were an instant success? Far from it. They were a rag-tag group of guys with a ton to learn who failed miserably many, many times. However, Jesus patiently and confidently worked with them and believed in them. In the end the wisdom of His choice was evident. This same group of courageous apostles planted the early church.

As we read the incredible accounts in the book of Acts we see this same group of transformed disciples now being deeply committed to prayer in the same way their Lord had been. Out of those prayer saturated lives a world changing revolution began and continues to this day...the Church that Jesus Christ is building.

Following Jesus example of prayer for wisdom means we're never left to our own limited perspectives or short-sighted vision. It's not a guarantee of instant success but a confidence that we are aligned with the Father and His kingdom ways. That our lives will have the honor of being part of the kingdom work that Jesus is doing through His church today!

*My child, listen to what I say,
and treasure My commands.
Tune your ears to wisdom,
and concentrate on understanding.
Cry out for insight,
and ask for understanding.
Search for them as you would for silver;
seek them like hidden treasures.
Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord,
and you will gain knowledge of God.
For the Lord grants wisdom!
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.
He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.
He guards the paths of the just
and protects those who are faithful to Him.
Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair,
and you will find the right way to go.
For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will fill you with joy.*

PROVERBS 2:1-10

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:*

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”*

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25

*If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously
to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

JAMES 1:5

As I think about the way I make decisions, am I intentionally setting aside time in prayer to seek God’s wisdom?

When I have done my best to seek God’s wisdom and guidance, do I remain confident even when progress seems slow or things don’t appear to be “successful”?

Think of the areas you need wisdom. Ask God for His help and thank Him with confidence that He hears and gives generously to you.

Learning to discern the voice of the Father isn’t always easy. As we are seeking God’s wisdom some questions we can ask are:

- Does it sound like something God would say?
- Does it align with His character and the Kingdom ways of Jesus?
- Is it consistent with the teaching and message of Scripture?
- Is it affirmed by other believers who know me and are farther along the faith journey?
- Does this wisdom bring a sense of peace and new life to my soul or does it bring fear and doubt?

PRAYING WITH JESUS THROUGH UNANSWERED PRAYERS

Do you ever struggle with unanswered prayer? Most of us do. We wonder if there is something wrong with the way we are praying or if God maybe doesn't care. We just want to figure out why God isn't doing what we asked? At times things seem to be getting worse rather than better.

Jesus prayed eight words that have the power to transform us with regards to unanswered prayer. These words are recorded for us in the Gospels just prior to Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Jesus is praying alone in Gethsemane through anguished tears, *"if there is any other way, let this cup pass"*. Jesus knew the excruciating physical, emotional and spiritual pain He was about to endure. He desperately wanted to avoid it and three times pleaded with His Father for another way. But there was something Jesus wanted even more and it is expressed in these eight words... *"Nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done."* When everything in His mind, body and emotions screamed for a way out, Jesus resolutely chose to surrender to a bigger plan.

What if Jesus had insisted on His own way? Andrew Murray says, "For our sins He suffered beneath the burden of that unanswered prayer." Jesus' unanswered prayer, His surrender to the eternal plan of the Trinity, is the reason that today we can call God our Father. To Jesus, the cost of this unanswered prayer was great but, in the big picture, the reward was even greater! *"For the joy set before Him He endured the cross"* Hebrews 12:2.

Unanswered prayer is a reality for all Christians but peace, and even joy, comes when our goal is not so much to get God to do what we want but rather to offer ourselves completely to Him. Surrendering to His will is sometimes really hard but it is always the path to freedom and joy as we put our full confidence in the loving, eternal plan of God.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

ROMANS 12:1

Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?"

He asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done."

When He came back, He again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So He left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

MATTHEW 26:36-46

**Prayer is the way to die to our own wishes and surrender everything to God.
- Scot McKnight**

Day 4

PRAYING WITH JESUS FOR HEALING AND WHOLENESS

Throughout Scripture God reveals Himself as Healer and Restorer. Near the beginning of the Old Testament God says to the Israelites that He is their Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals (Exodus 15:26). The New Testament ends with a picture of a lush, healthy garden in which there is a river flowing from the tree of life bringing healing to the nations (Revelation 22:2).

No where is the compassionate heart of God towards the broken, seen more clearly than in the life and ministry of Jesus. In the early church, Peter, reflecting back, summarized Jesus' ministry by saying, "*[Jesus] went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*" Acts 10:38. He had seen first hand that Jesus cares deeply about all the pain and brokenness in our lives and in our world. Matthew 14:14 says, "*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick.*"

Although many miracles of healing are recorded in the Gospels we are not privy to the conversations Jesus had about these with His Father. One story, however, clearly tells us that these prayers took place. In John 11 we read that Jesus' good friend, Lazarus, has died. Just before Jesus called Lazarus to come out of the tomb these words are recorded, *Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, thank you for hearing Me. You always hear Me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe You sent Me"* verses 41-42.

Like Jesus, we can have great confidence that our prayers for healing and wholeness are always heard. God cares about broken bodies, minds, emotions, relationship, and communities. Our great hope is that one day He will return and restore everything. Today we are invited to ask for His healing touch in our lives and the lives of those around us and to be confident of His deep compassion.

The Bible tells us that God did not originally make the world to have disease, hunger, and death in it. Jesus has come to redeem where it is wrong and heal the world where it is broken. His miracles are not just proofs that He has power but also wonderful foretastes of what He is going to do with that power. Jesus' miracles are not just a challenge to our minds, but a promise to our hearts, that the world we all want is coming.
- Timothy J. Keller

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

MATTHEW 9:35-37

*Praise the Lord, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise His holy name.
Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits—
who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things,
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

PSALM 103:1-5

He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was His custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because He has anointed me
to proclaim Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

LUKE 4:16-21

What are the specific situations of brokenness in your own life or the lives of those around you? Where are you praying for God's intervention? Pray for those things now.

Sometimes our struggle in praying for healing comes first from the question, "Does God really care about me or those I am praying for? Start by asking God to increase your experience of His love for you and the conviction of His compassion towards every kind of pain.

Ask Jesus to give you a new image or understanding of how He is with you in this circumstance. Rest in His compassionate presence.

PRAYING WITH JESUS
FOR HIS MISSION

Did you know that on the night before Jesus died He prayed for you? In fact, He prayed not just for you but for our church family and for all churches of all times. *“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message”* John 17:20. What did He pray? You might think it would be about the things He wanted us to do...to accomplish. Surprisingly, His prayer wasn't as much about what we as believers would do as how we would do it. His prayer was that our community, the church, would be marked by two qualities---love and unity.

As His church we are part of His continuing mission of redemption and restoration for a broken and hurting world. He invites us to lives of great significance as we embrace the gifts given to each of us by the Holy Spirit and abandon lesser dreams for the sake of His Kingdom work. However, the work of Jesus is only effective when it is done in the way of Jesus - by a community of redeemed ones who make unity and love for each other their first priority. This kind of loving community is irresistible to a world riddled with loneliness and strife. Jesus knew it wouldn't be easy. He prayed that night for His Church and He is still praying for us today. Let's join Him in His prayer that Sherwood Park Alliance Church be a place known for it's love and unity.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and You in Me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

“Father, I want those You have given Me to be with me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world.

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know You, and they know that You have sent Me. I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I Myself may be in them.”

JOHN 17:20-26

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

JOHN 13:34-35

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

EPHESIANS 4:1-7



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