

Fresh Wind



Dear Grace Community,

When there is a fresh wind blowing, it's exciting to be in a sailboat. A few years ago I got to man a sailboat with a few of my friends under the guidance of an expert sailor, the boat's owner. The work of putting up the sails and the skill needed to follow the wind were taxing at times, but the result was an exhilarating ride.

In this time of transition, I invite you to engage in three important spiritual disciplines. These spiritual disciplines aren't work for work's sake (or for earning brownie points with God) but are a means of catching the fresh wind of God's Spirit so that we can go where he wants us to go (John 3:8).

1. Listening prayer is putting up the sails so that we can catch the wind of the Spirit.
2. Confession is getting our bearings: the Greek word translated "confess" means "to say the same thing", i.e., to put aside facades and acknowledge with God our true status.
3. Repentance is the choice to change course so that we are following God's direction.

For the next 40 days (from Aug 4-Sept 12), I invite you to join me and the leadership team in a season of listening, confession, and changing direction. If you can, fast with me each Wednesday. (See below for more instructions on fasting.)

My hope, along with the leadership team, is that we can be more attentive to God as a church community, that we will unfurl our sails and move with the fresh wind of God's Spirit that is blowing in this time of transition. The leadership team would like to hear from you anything that you are hearing as a result of increased attentiveness to God. You can communicate with us through the feedback card on Sundays. Please feel free to take the initiative to contact any of us individually. You can also use the email alias leadershipteam@graceconnections.com to communicate with us as a team.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Steve

Fasting

There are many kinds of fasting. You could skip lunch one or more days a week (the time could be spent in prayer). A 24 hour fast might mean skipping breakfast and lunch. You may limit what you eat during the 40 days (e.g., abstaining from coffee or meat). Or you may fast from an activity such as reading the morning paper, or viewing a particular TV show, or turning off your Blackberry for an hour a day. The point of fasting is not to focus on our sacrifice but to focus our attention on God's voice, to reveal the voices within us that try to drown out God's voice and to create some space in our lives for God. Journal your reaction to the fast and see what God reveals to you.

Prayers

Set aside 15-30 minutes each day for prayer. Each prayer time has these 4 elements.

1. Prayer of presence. Start with a few minutes of focusing yourself, on being present with God.
2. Prayer of examen. Take a few more moments to reflect back on how God has been present with you during the past 24 hours.
3. Praying the Word. Choose one of the Scripture passages. Read it slowly 3 times. The first time, read to become familiar with the passage. Then read it again to see if a word or phrase, an idea or a feeling stands out to you. Finally, read the passage with that impression in the foreground of your thoughts. Take a moment to talk with God about how that word, idea or feeling is to have an impact on you today.
4. Closing prayer. Close your time of prayer by focusing on how God wants you to re-enter your world.

As with any discipline, these spiritual disciplines will take getting used to. The prayers may seem awkward at first or "unnatural". And you will have varying levels of success each day. You may find your mind wandering. There may be days when it's really hard to focus. C. S. Lewis has said, "The prayer preceding all prayers is 'May it be the real I who speaks. May it be the real Thou that I speak to.'" The fact that you are making time for God in your life is the most important step. God will guide you as you get used to being in his presence and attending to him.

First Sunday (week of August 8)

Listening prayer

Listening (or contemplative) prayer is presenting ourselves to God. (Intercessory prayer is presenting our requests to God.) Listening prayer starts with resting in the holy love of God.

Prayer of presence

To be present is to arrive as one is and open up to the other. At this instant, as I arrive here, God is present waiting for me. God always arrives before me, desiring to connect with me even more than my most intimate friend. I take a moment and greet my loving God.

Prayer of examen

How do I find myself today?
Where am I with God? With others?
Do I have something to be grateful for?
Then I give thanks.
Is there something I am sorry for?
Then I ask forgiveness.

Praying the Word

1. Zephaniah 3:17
2. Psalm 23
3. Romans 8:37-39

Closing prayer

Heavenly Father, I can face the activities of this day in the security of your unfailing love for me. Amen.

Notes

40 days of prayer

August 4-September 12, 2010

Second Sunday (week of August 15)

Listening prayer

Listening is a skill. Attending to another person may seem passive, but it requires great effort to shut out both external pressures and our noisy inner voices and to focus our attention on God.

Prayer of presence

I pause for a moment and think of the love and the grace that God showers on me: I am created in the image and likeness of God; I am God's dwelling-place.

Prayer of examen

I ask how I am within myself today?
Am I particularly tired, stressed, or off-form?
If any of these characteristics apply,
can I try to let go of the concerns that disturb me?

Praying the Word

- 1 Kings 19:11-13
- Psalm 63:1-3
- Isaiah 30:15, 18

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace to be free from the excesses of this life.
Keep my heart and mind free to love and serve you.
Amen.

Notes

Third Sunday (week of August 22)

Confession

Confession is simply seeing ourselves in our true state. Confession doesn't mean debasing ourselves, but seeing ourselves in the light of God's holiness, "perfect in power, in love and purity."

Prayer of presence

I pause for a moment, aware that God is here. I think of how everything around me, the air I breathe, my whole body, is tingling with the presence of God.

Prayer of examen

How has God been present in my life over the past 24 hours?
- When did I feel most alive?
- When did I most feel life being drained out of me?

Praying the Word

- Isaiah 6:1-5
- Romans 10:9-10
- 1 John 1:7-9

Closing prayer

Almighty God, I ask for the grace to believe in what I could be and do if I will allow You, my loving Creator, to continue to create me, guide me and shape me.
Amen.

Notes

Fourth Sunday (week of August 29)

Confession

The only one who can truly know us is God. We are too much in the habit of denying our shortcomings and ignoring our need for healing. But there is great freedom in honestly acknowledging our utter dependence on God.

Prayer of presence

God is with me, but more,
God is within me, giving me existence.
Let me dwell for a moment on God's life-giving presence in my body, my mind, my heart and in the whole of my life.

Prayer of examen

In God's loving presence I unwind the past day. I gather in all the goodness and light, in gratitude. I attend to the shadows and what they say to me, seeking healing, courage, forgiveness.

Praying the Word

- Psalm 139:23-24
- Isaiah 6:6-7
- James 5:16

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, bring hope and healing to me and to this world that you love and for which you gave your life. Amen.

Notes

Fifth Sunday (week of September 5)

Repentance

We may equate repentance with tearful, emotional remorse. But Nancy DeMoss reminds us: Brokenness does not mean, as some think, having a sad, gloomy, downcast countenance-never smiling or laughing. It is possible to shed buckets of tears, without ever experiencing a moment of brokenness. Brokenness is not a feeling: it is a choice, an act of will... a lifestyle of unconditional, absolute surrender of my will to the will of God..." (from [Brokenness: the heart God revives](#))

Prayer of presence

"Be still and know that I am God."
Lord, Your words lead us to the vastness and majesty of your presence.

Prayer of examen

I exist in a web of relationships: links to nature, people, God. I trace out these links, giving thanks for the life that flows through them. Some links are twisted or broken: I may feel regret, anger, disappointment. I pray for the gift of acceptance and forgiveness.

Praying the Word

- James 1:22-25
- Isaiah 6:8
- Matthew 4:17-19

Closing prayer

Holy Spirit, I ask for the grace to trust that You know me best and to pursue the opportunities You are presenting to me. Amen.

Notes