



PRAY
FIRST

A PERSONAL PRAYER GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vision 2025	5
A Prayer Guide to follow	7
Starting the day with the Serenity prayer	9
Day 1 Monday Take a Step	13
Day 2 Tuesday Identify Distractions	15
Day 3 Wednesday Clarify Focus	17
Day 4 Thursday Participate	19
Day 5 Friday Pray	21
Day 6 Saturday Reflect	23
Day 7 Sunday Celebrate	25

Vision

Dear Follower of The Way (John 14:6, Acts 9:2),

God has given our leadership a clear vision: to build a people who belong. We want to achieve this by working together, using our time, talents, and resources to allow God to do what only He can.

This vision has four key parts:

- A Rally Cry: God's call to me, what am I called to do in this season of my life.
- Focus: God's invitation to us to participate as His body together as a church to build God's community.
- Measurable Goals: Making a meaningful impact with our time treasure and talent to create space as a community for God to work.
- Dreams of a preferred future: Continuing to trust God for more.

We're inspired by Nehemiah's story. Just as he led the Israelites to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, we want to rebuild our community.

We recognise God still has more for us as a church community, and we, like Nehemiah, feel a holy discontent at simply remaining where we've been. We are building a people who belong and leaving a legacy to God's glory.

Like the Apostle Paul, we want to forget the past and focus on what lies ahead in Christ (Philippians 3:13-14). We invite you to join us on this journey.

Nehemiah's call, "Come, let us rebuild the wall" (Nehemiah 2:17), was met with an enthusiastic response: "We're with you! Let's get started" (Nehemiah 2:17-19, MSG).

Now is the time to act. We begin by preparing our hearts to receive God's promises of healing and restoration.

Remember, "You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything" (1 Corinthians 12:27-31, MSG).

As you accept the call to embrace our vision for the year as part of Christ's body, you don't only prepare yourself to embrace God's promises but you align your life to make a difference as we, together, build a people who belong. As our Vision Month ends, we move forward to our week of prayer and fasting, focused on preparing our hearts for what God wants to do in and through us.

As Nehemiah 4:6 (MSG) says, "the people had a heart for the work." Let's have that same heart!

Lifestyle Prayer

How can we most effectively engage in this week's prayer and fasting?

Firstly, we can learn from **three** things that Jesus did ...

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed (**Mark 1:35**).*

Consider:

1. A CERTAIN TIME

Jesus got up very early in the morning to spend time with his heavenly Father. Choose a certain time in which, guided by your booklet, you commit to prayer this week.

2. A CERTAIN PLACE

Jesus had a prayer place. Your prayer place needs to be in a distraction-free environment where you can pray out loud and, perhaps, have some worship music playing in the background.

3. A CERTAIN PLAN

Go into your prayer time with a plan. Use this prayer guide and engage with its content. As part of preparing your plan, read our suggestion for starting each day with the serenity prayer and our explanation of fasting so that you can include it in your week of prayer.

Understanding fasting as a follower of Jesus:

Jesus was our great example of fasting – Matthew 4: 1-4 says:

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Jesus’ response to the devil was that he would not rely solely on human sustenance for fullness of life, but beyond the provision of the flesh, place his trust in God first, even if it meant sacrificing his own will. This is what fasting communicates, and placing our trust in God as we fast makes room for His presence in our hearts.

Ephesians 3:17 (NLT) says:

“Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong.”

Fasting is a form of giving up to go up

What sustains your flesh is rooted in spiritual provision. Fasting makes us focus on the spiritual provision of God over the sustenance received by the flesh.

Fasting removes “static” from the line of our busy lives, guiding us, and aligning our focus toward God (see Acts 13:2; Daniel 9:3-23; Joel 2:12).

In Mark 2:18–20 it tells us:

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast."

Jesus was referring to the time of his crucifixion, then His resurrection that gave way to the great commission that could only be achieved through prayer and fasting.

Prayer and fasting keeps us close to the one who has commissioned us.

Pastor, author and speaker, John Mark Comer, explains:

"In fasting, you are literally praying with your body, offering all that you are to God in worship. As you yield your body to God, you are breaking the power of the flesh to control you and opening up to the power of the Spirit in its place."

You may choose to fast food or screen time. The key is that you give up something that usually feeds your flesh and use that time to focus on God in prayer. This would be part of your plan as you find a certain place and time for prayer this week. As you make room, may God lead you into the fullness of resurrection life. (See John 10:10.)

Starting Each Day with the Serenity Prayer

Reinhold Niebuhr, an American theologian, penned the original Serenity Prayer in the early 1930s or 1940s. Its simple yet profound message quickly resonated, especially after it was published in a 1943 booklet for military chaplains.

Later, the 12-step recovery movement adopted a modified version, and over time, the prayer has been expanded by various authors. This powerful prayer guides us toward surrendering to God's sovereignty in all aspects of life. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, embodied these principles, aligning his leadership and personal struggles with the prayer's core message.

This week, as you engage in your daily devotional during this time of prayer and fasting, I encourage you to begin each day by slowly reciting the Serenity Prayer.

To help you truly experience its meaning, we've added suggested pauses. After you pray, take a minute of quiet reflection before you begin your devotional reading.

Here is the prayer, with pauses indicated:

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, (PAUSE)

The courage to change the things I can, (PAUSE)

and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, (PAUSE)

accepting hardship as a pathway to peace, taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it, (PAUSE)

trusting that you will make all things right if I surrender to your will, so that I may know peace in this life now and wholeness forever in the next, (PAUSE)

in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

Amen

DAY 1 | MONDAY | Take a Step

“Walk with me and work with me - watch how I do it.”

Matt 11:29 MSG

To work with God in our lives, we need to walk with him, and to walk with him, we need to be taking one step at a time.

- If you keep taking next steps, you don't get spiritually stuck.
- If you keep taking steps, you grow through life instead of just going through life. Bishop and theologian Gregory of Nyssa said, “Sin happens whenever we refuse to keep growing.”

That means:

- If you keep taking next steps, sin cannot ensnare you and you are protecting your spiritual progress.

In Philippians 3:16 (NLT) Paul the Apostle writes,
But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.
Our spiritual walk with God is measured by our progress, not by our perfection, so we need to protect our progress by continually taking the next step, not by perfecting a once-off move.

Paul the Apostle writes to the church in Galatia from the NT book of
Galatians 5:25 (NIV)

“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

If I was to keep in step with the Spirit today, what step could I take?

This is God's invitation to us personally in our vision, the question:

“What step can I take?”

Whether it's:

- as you're about to react to something your spouse said,
- or while facing a familiar temptation,
- or deciding whether to participate in an activity with friends,
- or processing someone's criticism,
- or choosing whether to give the car guard the ten rand note in your pocket after shopping.

Every day you and I can take one step somewhere in our lives that aligns with God's Spirit. What I am called to do within God's purposes in this season of my life is to intentionally keep taking next steps in becoming everything my Lord has for me.

Those daily steps may seem insignificant, silly or small, but -

God can do a lot with one small step that others don't see so don't stop walking.

My prayer response:

- Share with God your desire to keep in step with the Spirit.
- Confess the areas of your life in which you feel you have been walking in the flesh rather than His Spirit.

- Ask God to help you recognize where in your life you could take a next step today.
- Commit yourself and your day to Gods care as you walk into the new day.

My daily practice:

- Intentionally move through the day seeking the place and space in which you could take a practical next step in alignment with the Spirit.
- At the end of today, make a note describing the step you chose to take. Use the below guide to complete your reflection and pray it back to God in commitment.

Reflection on my step today.

The step I took today was:

Taking that step required me intentionally:

My desire in taking that step in the Spirit is to:

DAY 2 | TUESDAY | Identify your distractions

When we start intentionally taking steps in the Spirit, the enemy takes note. With every level there's another devil.

And as we explore this truth, we see an example of it in the Book of Nehemiah, where this man, inspired with a vision from God, chose to lead God's people to take steps to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah experienced opposition from three men attempting to stop his steps as he rebuilt the walls. The names of those opposing him were Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, and each one of them had a different tactic.

1. Sanballat mocked Nehemiah's attempts at rebuilding and tried to distract him.
 - Don't let the enemy's mockery of the size of your step stop you from walking.
2. Tobiah attempted to sabotage Nehemiah's progress.
 - Protect your progress by taking a step even when you haven't perfected things.
3. Geshem falsely accused Nehemiah and intimidated him.
 - Don't let the enemy's accusations convince you that you can't get back up because God's grace has run out.

In [Nehemiah 6:3 \(NIV\)](#) Nehemiah responds to those trying to distract him from his walk in a war of words by saying, "Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"

The work God was doing would only stop if Nehemiah stopped walking. Nehemiah's response to the enemy was, "You won't stop me from taking my next step in God's purpose!" and because of that, the walls were completed, God's people could belong in the safety of the city and a legacy was left for generations.

My prayer response:

Share with God where in your personal life you feel the enemy is seeking to distract and discourage you from walking with Him, the way these men did to Nehemiah.

- The enemy may mock the size of your step stop you from walking.
- The enemy may attempt to sabotage your progress by making you feel you're not perfect.
- The enemy might try and intimidate you with false accusations.

Invite Jesus to come into those areas of your life in which you are struggling to walk in the Spirit or feeling the enemy's opposition against you.

Pray back to God, a declaration of faith based on the following scriptures:

- Isaiah 54:17 (NLT) "no weapon turned against you will succeed."
- Romans 8:31 (NLT)
- "If God is for us, who can ever be against us?"
- Romans 8:37 (NLT)
- "despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us."

My daily practice:

Be mindful today of the moments, spaces and places in which you feel most distracted or discouraged from walking in the spirit. In those moments allow

yourself to pause and remember the verses you declared in your prayer for the day:

- “no weapon turned against me will succeed.”
- “If God is for me, who can ever be against me?”
- “despite all these things, overwhelming victory is mine through Christ, who loves me.”

Then make a conscious decision to keep in step with the Spirit instead of allowing the distractions to derail you.

DAY 3 | WEDNESDAY | Clarify your Focus

An area of focus is about where God is inviting us to participate as a body with Him as He builds His church now. Just as a builder would focus on certain areas of a structure in completing it, so too does God call us to areas of focus in His work of building the church in certain seasons.

At one point in Jesus' mission, for example, he called his disciples to specifically focus on evangelism in Luke 10:1-2. That was a specific area of focus for a specific time in Jesus preparation of his people.

We believe that God has called us, in this season of our journey as a church to a specific focus.

We believe that focus is - building a people who belong. Belonging to God's Kingdom and His church means we are fully known, fully loved, and never alone. It's an identity, a mission, and a family.

AND

Where we belong, we are able to build and live out a life which leaves a legacy.

It was in their belonging as God's people that the Israelites, working under Nehemiah's vision, rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem together, leaving a legacy for others. And their legacy protected the "belonging" of future generations.

My personal legacy is lived out through the kingdom community I belong to.

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

Helen Keller

Consider the significance of belonging to a church community and how important it is in your personal life and the legacy you will leave for others. Consider how Jesus described the father's embrace of the prodigal son in belonging (Luke.15: 11 – 28), even when he had been so rebellious and sinful.

Are we allowing ourselves to belong within our church community and are we building safe spaces for prodigal sons and daughters to “come home” because our focus is building a people who belong.

My prayer response:

Share with God your gratitude for belonging to Him as His child in His Kingdom.

Confess to your Heavenly Father the things that make you feel unworthy of belonging to Him.

Ask God to help you to accept your belonging and live from His love and not for His approval.

Ask God to help you in building a people who belong with your church community and commit yourself to Him in this journey.

My daily practice:

As someone who belongs to Gods kingdom and is part of our church, think about an individual in our congregation you appreciate.

Pray for them and then send them a message sharing your appreciation for them and encouraging them with a scripture verse or kind words.

Recognize that you are part of something precious.

Remember that your legacy is lived out through this kingdom community you are part of.

DAY 4 | THURSDAY | Participate with People

What we prioritise in our lives is expressed through our practical living.

This means our vision needs to move from our hearts and toward our hands where we can work toward achieving measurable goals.

Nehemiah's vision of a secure and thriving community was expressed through his practical act of rebuilding the city walls together with God's people. So, how can we express the priority of building a people who belong in a practical way?

By building a space in which God can work with us so that we become a more connected community of people who belong, just as the restored walls of Jerusalem created a safe space in which the Israelites could belong and thrive for generations.



This is our wall of Jerusalem to rebuild in this season of our journey together, and it will involve partnering in the work together with our time, talents and treasure.

In **Philippians 1:3-8 (AMP)** Paul the apostle thanks the church for their “participation *and* partnership [both your comforting fellowship and gracious contributions] in [advancing] the good news”

The word partnership here is a Greek word, *koinonia*, often translated ‘fellowship’. It means a sharing in something, participating in something divine and eternal.

This partnership could be seen through the way the Israelites rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem together.

Nehemiah 3:1-4 (NIV) describes people partnering when,

- Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate.
- The men of Jericho built the adjoining section,
- Zakkur son of Imri built next to them.
- The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah.
- Meremoth, repaired the next section.
- Next to him Meshullam, made repairs, and next to him
- Zadok also made repairs.

If you and I were to partner in building together, what next step could I take? The answer is: bring your brick! That's how the Israelites did it in alignment with their vision.

Like Eliashib, Hananel and Zadok each contributed to rebuilding the walls as we read earlier in Nehemiah 3, so too you and I bring our brick to contribute to building the space God has given us a vision for. And that brick is represented by your financial

contribution over and above your tithe toward achieving the total sum of R300 000 to complete the work.

My prayer response:

Ask God to guide you in preparing your contribution toward building the walls as a partner in Southside Church.

Pray for our miracle offering services on Sunday the 4th of May and Gods provision of more than we could ask or imagine in resources.

Acknowledge that all provision comes from God and surrender your trust to Him for the areas in your life in which you need provision.

My daily practice:

Adopt an attitude of gratitude.

As you go through your day recognize the many blessings Gods given you that you may usually overlook. Think about your job, or your health.

As you come to the end of your day pray back to God with gratitude for the many blessings you recognized he bestows upon your life.

Gratitude makes what we have enough and helps us see Gods provision in our personal lives. "I am blessed to be a blessing." (Genesis.12:2)

Because I am blessed, I can bring my brick in being a blessing to others.

DAY 5 | FRIDAY | Pray to the Promise Keeper

Consider Nehemiah's first response to the news of the ruined walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah writes in Nehemiah 1:4 (NLT)

“In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.”

Nehemiah was stirred with a vision to rebuild the walls when he heard about their condition and prayed.

In his prayer Nehemiah:

- Confessed the sins of Israel, including his own. (Nehemiah.1:6-7).
- He asked God to show favor to His people (Nehemiah 1:8-10).
- He prayed for success as he planned to approach King Artaxerxes for permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:11).

Following Nehemiah's prayer as a guide, you can come before God in prayer for our vision to build a people who belong. Start with the serenity prayer on page..... and then follow the guide below.

A Prayer Guide:

Confession and repentance: (Nehemiah.1:6-7).

1 John 1:9 (NIV) - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Mercy: (Nehemiah 1:8-10).

Psalm 51: 1 (NIV) - Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love

Gods' mercy is an active, faithful commitment to love, forgive and restore His people.

Pray for Gods mercy to cover our church.

His favour upon our leadership and our journey building a people who belong.

Pray His protection over our unity and His wisdom in our decision making as we navigate the vision.

Surrendered plans: (Nehemiah 1:11).

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV) - Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Nehemiah prayed for success as he planned to approach King Artaxerxes for permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He was surrendering his plan to God and asking God to make the path straight by giving him favor with the king.

Submit our vision to God in prayer and ask Him to go before us, making the path straight.

Ask God for His favor upon us with the people involved in resourcing our vision.

Confess your trust in God over everything else and share with God the specific things in your life that you are surrendering to Him in this season.

DAY 6 | SATURDAY | Reflect on your race

Paul the Apostle, writing to the church at Phillipi, encouraged them to continue growing in Christlikeness through every season of their lives. He uses the image of an athlete in a race:

Philippians 3:13-15 (NIV)

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

We are all running our own spiritual long-distance race and it's important that we regularly reflect on where we've been and where we are going.

First, reflect on your own personal journey of following Jesus. Our stories are all unique because each one of us is unique, bearing the image of God.

His Goodness

How and where have I been aware of his goodness?

His Faithfulness

How did God show up in times of trial or suffering?

My Gratitude

How have I responded to God on my journey?

My Worship

In what ways has my life been an expression of worship?

My Service

How have I contributed to His work in practical ways?

And then transition to this past week and the themes of our devotions and prayers.

What do they mean for us in our personal lives and the race we are running?

What do they mean for us individually as we find ourselves in a community of people – His church?

What do they mean for us as a community as we live out our lives together?

What's your next step?

Bring your brick.

Identify distractions.

Don't stop walking.

Clarify your focus.

Build a people who belong.

Participate with people.

Live your legacy through a Kingdom community.

Pray to the promise keeper.

Surrender your life to God's sovereignty.

DAY 7 | SUNDAY | Celebration

As our week of prayer comes to an end, we want to celebrate together and demonstrate what it means to be a people who belong.

Jesus spent much of his time sharing a meal with people from all walks of life.

Lk 19: 1-10 Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house, a tax collector

Lk 10: 38-42 A woman named Martha opened her home to Jesus

Lk 7: 36-50 A Pharisee invited Jesus to have dinner with him

There are many more stories in gospels like this.

Sharing meals creates a space for people to feel loved and accepted, heard and connected. We can encounter God and one another and demonstrate hospitality in a tangible way.

As we begin our journey together, creating a community of people who belong, let's celebrate the end of our prayer journey around a table and share a meal together.

My Prayer Response:

Ask God to show you who you can invite to the table

Ask God to show you who to pray with

Ask God to make you a listening presence for someone

My Daily Response:

Have fun

Laugh together

Make time for connection

Have communion together

Build relationships with someone new

