

Devotion for Envisioning Sunday 30 June
CHRIST INSPIRED – PRAYERFULLY CONSIDERED

Readings: Nehemiah 1:3-6 and 2:2-8; Joel 2:28; Acts 1:8

Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, as we embark as a community on the envisioning process to seek guidance and discern God's Vision for GWAC for the future, we pray that you would fill us with your Holy Spirit. We pray that you would bring us together as the Body of Christ and enable us to discern what is Christ Inspired and prayerfully considered. I pray that as I talk you would guide my tongue, so I would speak your truth. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Slide 1

When I was asked to chair this taskforce, I was very humbled. I considered it, prayed and I felt that I should be able to do this as it aligns with some of my gifting.

When a little bit later I was asked to share a devotion in front of you all, I felt rather ill equipped to do so, as I have not spoken in such a public way to the GWAC community. I usually don't have a fear of public speaking, particularly if I know the topic well. As such, that aspect of today was not what worried me, but to discern what God might want me to share and then talk about it in this kind of setting is quite a different thing.

I assume that this would resonate with quite a lot of you.

Nevertheless, I felt convicted that God had put me in this place and at this time for a reason. So, the best thing I know to do in that kind of situation is what I hope you all resort to as well, and that is to pray and seek God's guidance. Since I became a Christian 21 years ago, I've learned to listen to God and to look out for the various signposts he puts along my path. In this instance, the biggest signpost came in form of a sermon that Ben Johnson delivered at the end of May, based on passages in Nehemiah. The three points that he highlighted during his sermon have resonated with me and have been brought back again and again.

Slide 2

These three points are to Pray, to Gather and to Equip.

As Ben pointed out during his sermon, Nehemiah wasn't someone particularly special. As I mentioned before, I didn't feel particularly special or particularly equipped to do what I am doing right now, however, as we are told throughout the bible, starting with Genesis, we are made in the likeness of God, so God thinks that each one of us is special – and after all – isn't that the only thing that really counts? So, as we embark on the envisioning process, let us be encouraged that God will guide us and equip us as we assist in building his kingdom on Earth. He thinks that you, all of you are special.

I'm always blown away by that – that's pretty awesome right?

To get back to the three points - Pray, Gather and Equip.

As a taskforce we have gathered once, so we have only just started this process too. We have prayed and we are aiming to equip you all by facilitating engagements that allow God's vision for GWAC's future to be discerned.

In regard to prayer, there were a couple of passages in today's reading from Nehemiah that inspire me to pray ... to pray a lot ... maybe to pray day and night ... maybe to fast and pray.

Slide 3

Neh 1:4 says ... for some days I (mourned and) fasted and prayed before the God of heaven ... followed by

Neh 1:6 - ... hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night

If we pray, God speaks, God acts ...

In my case God pointed me to the other two passages that completed today's readings...

Slide 4

Joel 2:28 says:

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your old men will dream dreams,

your young men (and women) will see visions."

Acts 1:8 says:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;

and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,

and to the ends of the earth."

Slide 5

These passages reflect the central aspect of the brief that the Governance Board has given the taskforce through the terms of reference, stating that the engagement process shall:

"provide appropriate avenues for people of GWAC, to share Christ inspired and prayerfully considered hopes and dreams to develop a shared vision for the future".

Nehemiah gathered people to pray. He gathered people across borders, equipment and resources so they could travel safely and work together. I'm not suggesting that we embark on a building project, as a matter of fact, as the taskforce, we are not suggesting anything. We are tasked to facilitate engagement so that you all can discern what God's vision for GWAC's future is.

The engagement process will facilitate for you all to contribute and we encourage you to pray and make time to gather in at least one of the sessions that will be on offer.

I will talk about the timeline and process a little bit more afterwards.

Finally, Nehemiah equipped his people for the task ahead. Another key role of the taskforce is to provide a framework and process for the engagement to happen in a constructive way that moves GWAC forward and to equip you all to participate and contribute in a fashion that works for you. We need to gather as the Body of Christ to discern God's voice.

Whilst some of us are at ease to speak up in groups, others need a quiet space, some are quick to discern, and others need more time to hear God's voice. We are aware of this and we are keen to provide appropriate avenues for all input to be gathered.

Nehemiah also gathered people into tribes and strategic locations and instructed and equipped them to defend against the enemies that wanted them to fail in their attempt to

rebuild the wall. Since I accepted the position to chair the taskforce, I have encountered increased spiritual opposition and a few obstacles. Whilst these two words sound quite similar, I feel it important to talk about their differences as they apply to the envisioning process.

Opposition or Spiritual Warfare is what we encounter when we do God's work, when we engage in Kingdom Building work. It might be that you don't feel special, that you don't feel equipped to discern God's voice for GWAC. This is the devil at work and the prayer that I pray when I feel like that, is to be covered by the blood of Jesus. Don't be discouraged but engage in prayer, gather with your fellow Christians.

Obstacles are quite a different thing. The simplest of these might be that none of the sessions might be at a time when you have free time. That's not opposition but simply a matter of scheduling. We all live busy lives today and our diaries are pretty full. If time is the obstacle, I would encourage you to make time, to shift another engagement and to come to one of the sessions, maybe as a life group or gospel community, instead of your usual meeting.

Another obstacle might be that you are unable to make it to GWAC on a given day for various reasons such as health, transport etc.

If other things are obstacles for you, please talk to us or to others in the GWAC community. You can do this via the usual channels such as the connect cards, the GWAC app or by talking to a taskforce or staff member.

Finally, an obstacle might be that you are a little unsure if you can contribute, maybe slightly afraid to speak up. Let me point back to these passages from today's reading. I love the description of a practice that Nehemiah seemed to embrace in all he did and that I try to apply but have not perfected:

It states towards the end of verse 2 in Nehemiah chapter 2 ... I was very much afraid, but I said to the king ... there is fear but also bravery as he told him about his concerns. The king responded by asking him what he wanted, and we read in verse 4 - ... then I prayed to the God of heaven ... I love this quick interjection of Nehemiah taking a breath and praying - before he told the king of his hopes and dreams to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. And then God acts ... and God's vision, not Nehemiah's, shines through

... It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

How awesome is that! God steps up, along his faithful, prayerful, special servant.

I am encouraged ... and I hope you feel encouraged and hopeful for the future that God will enable you ... enable each one of us ... to do HIS work in confidence.

So ... a time has been set for us to engage God's Vision for GWAC's future. Vision 2025.

Slide 6

The governance board, the church leadership and the Vision 2025 taskforce are encouraged that we, as the Body of Christ will gather and be equipped so that we can discern the Christ inspired and prayerfully considered vision that God has for GWAC.

Let me pray.

Lord God, you are an awesome God and our Father, and we prayerfully prepare ourselves in anticipation of what you have in store for GWAC.

Lord we pray that you would cover us all with the blood of Jesus to protect us from the schemes of the evil one as we embark on this journey. We pray that you bring us together so we can share in fellowship, encourage each other and celebrate this community.

We pray God, that you would pour out your Spirit on all people, that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them so that your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams and your young men and women will see visions. In the name of Jesus. Amen.