

Re-Build Prayer

Review:

- God's people, the Israelites, are starting to return to Jerusalem after being exiled for years. Ezra led a group of Jews back, rebuilt God's Temple and through his persistent teaching, some of the people living in Jerusalem turned from their sinful lives back to God.
- Nehemiah is a cupbearer for King Artaxerxes in Persia. When he asks how the Jews who survived the exile and returned to Jerusalem were doing, he hears that they are not doing well and that the walls of Jerusalem lie in ruin. Nehemiah's response to the news is to weep, mourn, fast and pray....

Nehemiah 1:5–11 (NIV)

⁵ Then I said: "LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. ⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. ⁸ "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, ⁹ but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' ¹⁰ "They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. ¹¹ Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

Prayer is a theme and practice that we are going to see on display throughout Nehemiah's book. Today we are going to look at Nehemiah's first recorded prayer and see how we can use his example to Re-Build the habit of prayer in our lives.

Nehemiah's Prayer Process:

Concern about the Problem: verses 1-4

- Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted and prayed for approximately 4 months.
- Nehemiah didn't live in Jerusalem, but he cared about what his brothers and sisters were going through and how the condition of the city testified about God though it didn't affect him personally.
- We often pray for God to break our hearts for what breaks His, but do we mean it? How do we know?

John 13:34 (NIV) ³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Galatians 6:2 (NIV) ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Matthew 5:4 (NIV) ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Conviction about God's Character: verses 6-7

- Nehemiah starts His prayer by identifying the one He is praying to, it's obvious that Nehemiah knows who God is.
- He talks about His character, His abilities and His heart toward His people.
- Nehemiah is praying things God says about Himself in Scripture, specifically the book of Deuteronomy.
- Where do you get your knowledge about God? How do you know Him?

Deuteronomy 7:7–9 (NIV)

⁷ The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

Confession of Sin: Verses 6-7

- Nehemiah was born into captivity, and so he didn't participate in the sin that caused God to exile the Israelite people but Nehemiah confesses both his people's sin and his own.
- Nehemiah boldly asks God to hear his prayers which started with confession of sin.
- Three Key ingredients in his confession of sin.
 - *Intensity*; Knowing the character of God, Nehemiah is concerned with his own sin.
 - *Honesty*; Nehemiah didn't try to make any excuses for his sin or the sin of his people.
 - *Urgency*; Nehemiah understands that sin isn't just a mistake you make, he confesses that he and his people have "acted very wickedly" toward God.

Psalm 88:1 (NIV) ¹ LORD, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you.

Psalm 51:1–4 (NIV)

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

Confidence in God's Promises: Verse 8-10

- In this part of the prayer, Nehemiah recalls the words of Moses about the danger of Israel's rebellion and the promise of God's divine mercy.
- As you read through Leviticus, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles and Psalm 130, you'll see the building blocks of Nehemiah's prayer.

Psalm 130:1–2 (NIV) ¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD; ² Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

Deuteronomy 30:4–5 (NIV) ⁴ Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. ⁵ He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.

Commitment to Get Involved: Verse 11

- Nehemiah doesn't ask God to send someone else to fix the situation, as he prayed, it became clear he had a part to play. His prayer echoes Isaiah's statement in Chapter 6 of his book "*Here am I. Send me!*"
- Your involvement or help in a situation might be the answer to someone else's or your own prayer. Be open to God directing your heart and your steps to move to action.
- Last week I asked you what has God put on your heart? What are you praying about? What is your next step?

Matthew 5:14–16 (NIV)

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.