



## WEEK 2: REBUILDING THROUGH PRAYER

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Study Notes

### INTRODUCTION:

After a recent school shooting there were some who challenged Christians on social media by posting, "Keep your prayers to yourself. We need action." We get that. There's a lot of cynicism about prayer today. But Nehemiah didn't share that. His first response was to pray. In fact, he prayed and fasted for four months after hearing about what was happening in Israel. Prayer permeates the book of Nehemiah. There are 12 prayers recorded there and it reads like its namesake's prayer journal. A few paragraphs in, he begins...

*"The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:*

*In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.*

*They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."*

*When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*

*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, 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. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.*

*"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 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.'*

*"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. 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." (Nehemiah 1:1-11)*

After all of that prayer, Nehemiah went and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days. His influence moved a king to action and changed the face of a city.

### BECOMING A PERSON OF INFLUENCE

There's a logical progression to a prayerful life of influence through awareness, desperation, and response:

#### Awareness (questions)...

- Awareness is key to prayer.
- You cannot be a person of powerful prayer without being aware.

*"In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and **I questioned them** about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem." (v1-2)*

- Nehemiah asked questions and that involved him in the problem.
- Many of us would prefer not to know...
- When someone is walking with Jesus, with the breath of the Spirit at their back, they ask different questions like: How do we reach those who don't yet know Jesus?
- Effective prayer begins when you perceive a gap between where something is and where God wants it to be.

### Desperation (tears)...

- Your questions reveal your priorities, what you care about. And what you care about, you pray about.
- Nehemiah probably was reading Jeremiah, and his heart was broken by what Israel had endured.
- Desperate circumstances can lead to committed prayer. Jesus wept as he prayed...

*"As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, **he wept over it and said**, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:41-42)*

### Response (prayers) ...

- Consistency in prayer is born of desperation
- But desperation can breed anger at circumstances too

*"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because **human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.**" (James 1:19-20)*

- If we approach social concerns without love, we are vulnerable to human anger.
- Human anger does damage to others
- It makes other people the problem.
- Take that anger to God, and let Him transform it into helpful motivation
- Walk in love and obedience, not anger

## THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN PRAYER, PLANNING, AND HARD WORK.

- Nehemiah exemplifies this synergy
- Prayer precedes action. Prayer's not in place of action, or diminished by it. The two go together.
- There are many things that you can do after you pray, but there is nothing you can do until you pray.

## HOW TO P.R(R). A. Y.

### P - Praise

*"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, 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." (v5-6a)*

- We struggle to learn how to pray because we focus on praying and not on God. Prayer is a preoccupation with God.
- Prayer is not based on my qualifications but on God's character (Who He is and what He has done). We easily exalt the role of people and minimize the role of God.
- Prayer shifts the focus, but praise also shifts the burden (to God, the One who can handle whatever we pray about).
- "If you trust in prayer, you get what God can do."
- If I believe in a little god, I'll pray little prayers. But, when I magnify God, I pray prayers as big as God is!

## R - Repent and Remember

***"I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses." (v6-7)***

- Nehemiah refuses to make it about his "victimization".
- He was born in Babylon, but he begins by identifying with the sin of his people. If it's their issue, it's his issue.

***"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 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. They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.'" (:8-10)***

- Nehemiah prays Scripture (Lev. 26 and Deut. 30), reminding God of all he promised.
- People who pray powerfully, pray God's promises, his Word back to him.

## A - Ask

***"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." (:11)***

- Specific prayers get specific answers.
- So much of prayer is asking, simply asking.

***"The king said to me, "What is it you want?" (Nehemiah 2:4)***

## Y - Yield

***"I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one." (Ezekiel 22:30)***

- The same thing that burdens your soul often reveals your destiny.
- So often the answer to the prayer being prayed is the one who is doing the praying. :-)
- But, do we pray with willingness for God to use us as the answer to our prayers?
- Prayer is a way that we partner with God in His purposes in the world. If we ask, be ready to act.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Who do you feel most comfortable in conversation with?
2. What characteristics about that person makes you feel safe to share?
3. Based on how you answered the first two questions, what thoughts do you have about relating to God in prayer?
4. Nehemiah illustrates the inter-dependent relationship between prayer, planning, and hard work. What comes most natural to you of the three?  
Which of these three challenges you the most?
5. How have you seen God move in response to your prayers?

Cont.

6. If you have been contending in prayer for a long time, what have you learned as you have waited?
7. What prevents you from coming to God in prayer?
8. What do you inquire the most about in prayer?  
As you reflect on what those things are, what do you think God feels about them?
9. If you were to ask the question "God, what do you care about the most?"  
What answers do you think He would give us? How do we have assurance of what He would say?
10. What is a new (or renewed) way you will connect with God in prayer this week?