# Rebuilding the Place of Prayer

**What Prayer Should Look Like**

Nehemiah 1:5-11

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1. **Introduction (1Kings 18:30,31,36,37,38)**
   1. **Most of a person’s life, if we would be very honest, is broken – in rubble, in pieces**
   2. **Especially most every person’s prayer life**
   3. **Nehemiah’s homeland was in such a condition – ruined, covered with rubble**
   4. **When he had the burden to get on a horse, and quickly ride to Jerusalem and start rebuilding the ruined walls and streets and buildings, he knew he needed first to pray**
   5. **And he needed to pray like everything depended upon it!**
      1. Prayer not complicated (don’t need prayer beads, yamaka hats, candles, or special rugs…
      2. But it IS serious business
   6. **False, empty, aimless, repetitious praying does nothing**
   7. **But righteous, fervent, passionate, promise-based praying, accomplishes much!**

1. **Review from Last Week**
   1. The book of Nehemiah begins with **“great affliction”** (Neh. 1:3) in the lives of the people in a far away city called Jerusalem, and the great affliction in the heart of Nehemiah at such news
   2. But before this Book **finishes, there is great jo**y (8:12, 17). Our tears, and burdens and sorrows are often for a greater purpose that we could evert imagine.
   3. **I hope you start to see that…**
      1. **These are not just books that record the rebuilding of ruined walls…**
      2. But are **God’s instructions on how to rebuild and restore ruined lives!**
   4. We are getting a small glimpse into how **God was preparing a man named Nehemiah for an impossibly large task!**
      1. **God prepared Nehemiah by tapping into his heart and pulling him to do something great**
      2. **By waking him up to the straight-up reality of what was going on back in Jerusalem – SOME VERY BAD NEWS!**
         1. The Remnant - Instead of a land inhabited by a thriving nation, only a remnant of people lived there
         2. In Affliction - they were in great affliction (were being hurt by outside enemies) and struggling just to survive in the midst of all the rubble and ruins of the city
         3. And Reproach - Instead of a magnificent city, Jerusalem was STILL in ruins, and where there had once been great glory, there was now nothing but great embarrassment and shame.
   5. **What’s The Right Response to Bad News? (1:4)**
      1. **Stop everything**
         1. He STOPPED everything and just collapsed onto the ground
         2. It was like a kick in the stomach. Tried to take it all in. Didn’t just brush it off, or change the channel or just try and ignore what was happening over in Jerusalem. He let it sink in deep (Cf Luke 9:44)
      2. **And then WEPT** – not just cried, but wept (bewail, moan, lament, be completely broken in defeat).
      3. **He MOURNED!** Was expressing his deep **feelings of sorrow** for the people in Jerusalem. It is a good attitude to have sometimes. Jesus said, “*blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*”
      4. Nehemiah **spent several days FASTING**, weeping, and praying.
      5. **And Then turned to God and prayed – sought God’s help** (1:5-11)
         1. Most of a person’s life is lived with very little need for God – which is why there is so little stability at the grass roots anymore. Everything is taken cared-of by the government. And people are addicted to entertainment, and not prayer!
         2. Nehemiah had nothing better or more pressing or more important to do, than pray
         3. Here is a great truth…
            1. Nehemiah was destined to succeed not because of his position as Cup Bearer, or because of his money that he probably had amassed, or the authority he held as the king’s counsellor, or his popularity amongst all the court…
            2. But only because he totally depended upon God in prayer!
2. **What Does Prayer Look Like? (1:5-11)**
   1. **It Looks Like What a Beggar Looks Like**
      1. How Christians normally pray…
         1. Way too posh! There is way too much formality in our praying – trying to work out all the right words, said the right way. No words straight from the heart!
         2. Way too timid
            1. We talk almost non-stop with just about anyone we meet
            2. But completely claim up when we think of praying!!! “… *uh, I don’t know what to say*…”
         3. Way too little – very rarely – probably fewer than once or twice a week
         4. And way too brief – less than 5 minutes a day! Shame on all of us!
         5. People today don’t really HAVE to pray – not really desperate
      2. Nehemiah here, looked and sounded just like a beggar
         1. Do you know what happens when you are desperate? You do just about anything, and you do not care what you look like
         2. No longer looked like an important king’s counsellor
         3. But like a desperate beggar, on his knees
         4. He was weeping, mourning
         5. He had stopped eating
         6. Because he was ready to beg God for His help – not just ask, but ***pull God to His need!*** “I beseech thee O LORD…” = “I beg of you O LORD…”
         7. Nehemiah looked like quite a desperate beggar – because he was desperate
      3. Nehemiah was used to praying this way
         1. As a matter of fact, this was not a once off event. He prays throughout the Book – records 12 times he prays (2:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 9:5ff; 13:14, 22, 29, 31)
         2. Evidently, PRAYING was quite normal for him
         3. In the midst of his incredibly busy life, and against all obstacles, he made time to pray – just as did Daniel, every day, and in the face of every disaster and trouble!
         4. There never was anything great accomplished in History without prayer
            1. No great revivals
            2. No bringing wayward sons and daughters home
            3. No freeing of slaves
            4. No protection of the vulnerable, weak, or even the unborn
            5. Prayer has brought down wicked empires, and raised up the freest of nations!
            6. That is what real, fervent, righteous, begging prayer has done!
      4. Are you willing and ready to start BEGGING the God of heaven to help you do the impossible, and see the impossible done? THAT is what real praying will look like!
   2. **Prayer Sounds Like Worship** 
      1. Just listen to what Nehemiah is saying when he prayed!
      2. Not constant complaining! Whinging about all our troubles… But worship
         1. Worship has GOT to be part of our prayers!
         2. Yes, there may be many tears, and weeping while praying, but there is ALWAYS worship going on when you are really praying!
      3. What **kind of a God** are WE talking to when we close our eyes and pray?
      4. Nehemiah knows who he is addressing –
         1. Not directed “to whoever is out there” like on a radio - Not to an unknown “force”
         2. ***To the ONLY God of heaven*** – the God who created all that there is – and that is a LOT! (Ps 73:25; Isa 45:5,6)
            1. Psa 73:25 *Whom have I in heaven but thee [O Lord]? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee*.
            2. Isa 45:5,6 *I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else*.
         3. ***The great God*** – means ‘immense, boundless, unlimited, wonderful, amazing’ Not a tiny god, or a man-made kind of god, but the GREAT God of HEAVEN!
            1. Think about it
            2. Nehemiah would look up at all the stars, the sun and the moon, and see comets and plants race across the sky
            3. And he would think, I am talking to the God who made all that up there!
            4. Wow!
            5. If you are experiencing great affliction (v. 3) and are about to begin an impossible task (4:19; 6:3), then you will need the great power, great goodness, and great mercy of our great God!
         4. ***The terrifying God*** (1:5)
            1. Modern versions of the Bible just call God ‘the awesome God’, but shy away from the next word, terrible…
            2. But ‘terrible’ is the old word for ‘terrifying’ – fearful, scary. He is not some “old Man upstairs” that you can just ignore and brush off as a nobody!
            3. And if He really is the only God, and the infinite, almighty, all powerful, all righteous God that He is, then He is terrifying to come before!
         5. ***The promise keeping God*** (1:5; Deut 7:9)
            1. Deut 7:9 *Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which* ***keepeth covenant*** *and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations*.
            2. That is who God is

Is anyone glad God keeps ALL His promises that He makes – covenants?

He cannot break any of them – hallelujah!

* + - * 1. The city of Jerusalem was in ruins, and the nation was broken all because the people had sinned against God for hundreds of years.
        2. Yet, the Lord had made a covenant with His people Israel…

WARNING that He WOULD chasten and even destroy their homes them if they disobeyed His laws and His commands (Lev. 26; Deut. 27—30).

But also PROMISING to bless and protect them if they obeyed His Word

* + - * 1. We will look at His promises in a moment
      1. ***The merciful God*** - The best part
         1. It means, God has kindness, forgiveness, grace for people who don’t deserve it
         2. Don’t take God’s mercy for granted – it is available to everyone, but it is not unconditional
         3. God’s mercy is available to three kinds of people

To those who seek His mercy – who need MERCY instead of only needing money, or a job, or a girlfriend, or happiness

To those that love Him – not use Him, but love God!

And to anyone who decides to do whatever HE says do – His commandments – mercy is so available to anyone who wants to obey Him

* + - * 1. Those kind of people are NOT perfect people, but SINNERS! God’s mercy is available to SINNERS who WANT to be forgiven, and WANT to live right – not for people who think they do not need forgiveness! (Mt 9:10-13)
        2. Hey! There is NO mercy for anyone who does not care about God’s holiness, or His righteousness or His commandments
        3. But there is INFINITE mercy, and forgiveness and second chances for anyone and ANY NATION who will just repent and depend totally on the Lord Jesus
  1. **Prayer is a Lot of Confessing to God (1:6-9)**
     1. Nehemiah desperately needs God to hear his request for help
        1. He has humbled himself to the place of a BEGGAR
        2. He has focused his heart and mind on worshipping God
        3. But he knows he is not finished!
     2. MOST of the rest of Nehemiah’s prayer was devoted to confession of sin. Why?
        1. Because something BIG was between the people and their God!
        2. And it has caused God to go very quiet for a long time
        3. Our sin interrupts and blocks God’s work in our lives
           1. Isa 59:1,2 *Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear*.
           2. Mic 3:4 *Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings*.
        4. The way we live, and the way we treat God affects His closeness to us
           1. Hey! Do people’s rudeness towards you turn YOU off? I bet it does! Well, OUR sins and thoughts and attitudes turn GOD off too!
           2. Our unbelief / independence from God, quiets God’s voice and stops Him for doing much in our lives and homes (Mt 13:58)
           3. Our attitudes, words, actions push God away (Psalm 78:41)

Having ANYTHING in our lives more important than God – idols

Sexual perversions everywhere – on almost every street corner

Actually worshipped sex itself – sounds like TODAY

Worshipped the goddesses of sex – dozens of them

Abandoned God’s culture and rules for life

* + - * 1. They provoked God, pushed God to the point where He had to chasten them (Ps 78:19-22) – SAME IS TRUE WITH US!
      1. Don’t get all upset at God for not answering your prayers. There is always a very good reason why He has gone quiet and is not answering you
    1. So before Nehemiah can head off to clear away all the rubble in Jerusalem, he clears away all the sin in his heart – he attempts to clear away anything that might hinder rebuilding their closeness to their Lord!
    2. How do we clear away sin in us?
       1. By including YOURSELF as part of the problem
          1. Nehemiah said over and over "we” and not "they,” identifying himself with the sins of a generation he didn’t even know.
          2. It would have been easy to look back and blame his ancestors for the reproach of Jerusalem, but Nehemiah looked within and blamed himself!
          3. "We have sinned! We have dealt very corruptly!”
          4. What is happening TODAY here in Ireland, our forefathers have had their part in, but **we too** carry much of the blame…
          5. And BOY do we need to own up to the sins that are rampant today!
       2. By humbling yourself, and being “a servant of God”
          1. Nehemiah was NOT just a servant of king Artaxerxes
          2. He was God’s servant most of all!
          3. So don’t ever be a slave of your friends, your teacher, or employer, or wife or husband, or banker, or tax collector – or of the internet, or any other sinner!
          4. Do all that you do for JESUS alone! Serve Him and Him alone! (Col 3:23, “*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men*.”)
       3. By AGREEING with God’s judgments against you and your nation
          1. There was no argument with God, no excuses made
          2. Just surrendered to God being in the right
          3. Far too much arguing with the God of heaven folks!
          4. It’s just plain simple – HE IS RIGHT in all He does!
       4. By ACCEPTING your troubles as right
          1. Nehemiah did not think what had happened to them was wrong

That their homeland and their nation and their people were living defeated and ruined was THEIR fault, not God’s

He saw all their time in captivity and slavery as just and right - from the very hand of God - God was right to chasten them

* + - * 1. What are you STILL arguing with God about in your life that you think is very unfair and wrong and that He should not be allowing to happen to you?
        2. Step down and say, YOU ARE MY GOD! And you know best! I trust YOU!
        3. It is called OWNING UP, taking responsibility for your actions, for your stubbornness, your pride, your hard heart, your arrogance! And even your NEGLECT of doing RIGHT THINGS

They didn’t seek God’s will

They neglected widows and orphans and the poor

Were not honest to one another

Did not love their neighbours

Didn’t care about praying and depending on God – looked to idols

* + - 1. And then by **believing God can forgive** and save and rebuild every broken thing!
    1. How do we know that God forgives our sins when we repent and confess to Him?
       1. Because He has so promised in His Word (1John 1:9)
       2. Remember Deut 7:9? “*Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God*…”
  1. **Remembering** (1:8) – THIS is the Believing Part!
     1. He tells God to “Try and **Remember** Lord what you have promised us!”
     2. That’s funny!
        1. Nehemiah says this over and over (Neh. 1:8; 4:14; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31).
        2. It’s as if Nehemiah feels like he needs to remind God about the other half of the Scriptures that invite those who have sinned, to repent and return!
        3. God does not need to be reminded
        4. But He doesn’t mind being reminded if it shows that WE are remembering!!!
     3. In reality, it is US who need to be constantly reminded of the open door back to God, of the goodness of God, of the promises of God!
        1. I am so thankful that we still have Christmas, and Easter in our calendars
        2. I am glad Sunday is still CHURCH day
        3. I am glad for RAINBOWS – the real ones, not the queer ones!
        4. They force people to **remember** that there is a GOD who intervenes in our lives
     4. Nehemiah is reminding himself of God’s great invitation to sinful people
        1. That the God who promised chastening… also promised forgiveness if His people would repent and turn back to Him (Deut. 30; 1 Kings 8:31-53).
        2. If ye set out to do things like God wants you to – by His commandments
        3. Then, no matter how far away you have gotten, God will bring you all the way back to where you should be!
        4. THESE are the promises that Nehemiah was claiming as he prayed for himself and the entire nation.
        5. God’s eyes are upon His people and His ears are open to their prayers when they seek to clear away all the prideful sin in their hearts! (1 Kings 8:29; 2 Chron. 7:14).
     5. Nehemiah is clinging to God’s promise that he would restore Jerusalem
        1. Even though in rubble and ruin
        2. Even though almost no one lived there
        3. God had redeemed / FREED His people from Egypt so long ago by His great power (Ex. 14:13-31)
        4. Nehemiah decided to trust that God would help him rebuild Jerusalem NOW!
        5. Nehemiah felt like he needed to remind God to keep His promise (Dt 30:1-5) – which ended up reminding Nehemiah that God ALWAYS keeps His promises!
  2. **Applying that kind of Prayer to YOUR Situation** (1:10,11)
     1. Brief and to the point – usually, this is where we spend the most time – not Nehemiah
     2. He had the authority now, to JUST ASK! John 15:7 “*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*.”
     3. What was Nehemiah’s Impossible Prayer List?
        1. Please hear me - hear our request; see our need – in spite of all our sin!
        2. We need YOU to do the impossible for us – we have no one else to turn to
        3. “I” need you to “Prosper me”
           1. Not make me prosperous, or RICH – what a wicked, selfish, carnal generation who only think prosperity means HEALTH and WEALTH!
           2. But make me successful in my effort to do something for Jerusalem
           3. Strengthen me – enable me as I attempt this great task!
        4. I need you to help me convince the king to:
           1. Let me go from my job. Nehemiah couldn’t simply quit his job and move to Jerusalem. He was an appointee of the king, and he needed the king’s permission for everything he did.
           2. Give me authority in Judah – he could not go just on his own – needed AUTHORITY from his authority!
           3. Provide all that we will need to rebuild our city – it will cost a lot!

Nehemiah needed the king’s provision and protection so he could travel to Jerusalem and remain away from his post until the work was completed. Without official authority to govern, an official guard for the journey, and the right to use materials from the king’s forest, the entire project was destined to fail.

Emperors have usually been absolute despots, and it is not easy to approach them or convince them to do what YOU may want. But Proverbs 21:1 says, “*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will*.”

* + - 1. Nehemiah didn’t need to beat himself, or cut himself, or repeat himself over and over saying the Lord’s Prayer… All he needed to do was just ask in prayer!
    1. I will give you ONE guess whether God is going to answer that prayer!
    2. That is what chapter 2 is all about

1. **Conclusion**
   1. The book of Nehemiah opens and closes with… PRAYER.
      1. Nehemiah was a man who depended completely on the Lord to help him accomplish the work He had called him to do. No matter how small or great!
      2. Nehemiah knew that he was too weak to rebuild Jerusalem, but he had faith that God would work on his behalf.
      3. He knew Philippians 4:13 “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*.”
   2. Nehemiah believed in the power of prayer. He truly believed that God does “*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us*” (Eph. 3:20).
      1. His prayer begins with brokenness – sadness, weeping, defeat
      2. Drives Nehemiah to approach God AS A BEGGAR who reaches out to a passer-by
      3. Then begins to praise and worship of God **out of great love and respect for God**
      4. And then to self examination and confessing of any known sins
      5. And then remembering all the good promises of God
      6. And THEN went boldly before God’s throne and asked the impossible!
   3. Hey, that still works
      1. If you and I will…
         1. Come to God like a Beggar – any other way and you will fail
         2. Worship God as Good
         3. Spend a lot of time doing inventory and Confessing to God where YOU are wrong
         4. And then Remember ALL the promises of God
      2. THEN we can start making our requests of God for the impossible!
   4. Nehemiah sat down and wept, knelt down and prayed, and then he stood up and worked – why? Because he knew he had come to God the right way.
2. **Questions For Personal Reflection**
   1. What do you feel passionately about?
   2. What troubles are you blaming GOD for that you need to own up to yourself?
   3. What needs to be repaired in your home, heart, life, family, nation?
   4. Do you believe GOD could step in and use someone like YOU to make a difference?
   5. Will you believe it?
   6. What sins WON’T you deal with? Those will be your undoing! Get them under the blood of Jesus Christ!