

## RESTORATION PRAYER

(2011 Congregational Theme: Daily Disciples: Prayer)

A. **Most of the prayers** in the Bible didn't take place in a group of God's people, but rather were offered in the course of their daily lives.

1. I trust that's the case with us, because praying outside these walls is a large part of what it means to be a daily disciple.

2. To help us do that we're going to look at Nehemiah: the Jewish cupbearer of the Persian King Artaxerxes, & who later became a governor in Jerusalem.

B. **No one**, except Christ, in Scripture is known for their prayers more than Nehemiah.

1. In his book there are 12 prayers, which contain the longest & some of the shortest prayers recorded in Scripture.

2. Remember that Nehemiah's family, & the Jews in Judah, were forced to leave their country by the invading Babylonian army.

3. He lived 800 miles from Israel, & yet he continued to worship the Lord & to be deeply concerned about God's people.

4. So much so that when he heard about the terrible condition of Jerusalem & the distress of God's people who had returned to live there, Nehemiah prayed (1:4-11).

[Many of us love to pray, but we have a difficult time praying.

Perhaps we need to take care of some prerequisites first.]

### I. BEFORE WE PRAY

A. **Care For Others** (1:2-4).

1. Did Nehemiah care? He asked, listened, wept, mourned, fasted & then he prayed. (He also put his prayers into action, a lesson for another time).

2. Jesus lived in a very similar time to that of Nehemiah (**Matt 9:36-38**).

3. Challenge yourself to care about someone enough to pray for them in particular.

## B. Be Confident In God (**1:5-6** “servants”).

1. Nehemiah began with a confident affirmation of the character of God.

2. He was able to look beyond the apparent hopelessness of the situation.

3. Do things seem hopeless for the church?

[If you possess this compassion & confidence then you are already praying as did Jesus & Nehemiah.

But if you are not, then this is where you must begin if you want to be a daily disciple.

Next, Nehemiah gives us some very helpful pointers as to how we should pray.]

## II. HOW WE PRAY

### A. Pray Persistently (**1:4; 2:1**).

1. The word “many” was added by the translators; Nehemiah prayed for “days”.

a. How many days? From Chislev (November) to Nisan (March) was 4 months.

2. Moses prayed **40** days & nights for Israel when she was in rebellion to God, before He extended His mercy (Deut 9:18-29).

3. Nehemiah prayed for 120 days before he even got started in the enormous task he had in mind.
4. So praying for God's will to be done is something we cannot give up on.

#### B. Pray Spontaneously (2:1-4).

1. After four months of praying Nehemiah offered another prayer on the spur of the moment.
2. The opportunities for a spontaneous prayer happen almost every day; do we address God about those things (1 Thess 5:17)?

#### C. Pray Collectively (1:11).

1. There is a hint that Nehemiah teamed together with others to pray about the serious situation.

2. Later, all the Jews came together & prayed what is longest prayer in the Bible (9:1-3).
3. Are there things to pray about for which we should request some help?

### III. REQUIREMENTS OF PRAYER

#### A. Praise To God (1:5-6).

1. Praise Puts His Character In Perspective.
  - a. **Praise:** Hebrew: halal (haw-lal'); to shine; hence, to make a show, to boast; to celebrate.
  - b. When we praise God we are *shining a light* on His character, we are acknowledging God for Who He is.

1) Nehemiah said that God is *great* & *awesome* (1:5). He is *faithful* to His covenant & to His covenant people (1:5). He is *approachable* to His children (1:6).

## 2. Praise Puts His Authority In Perspective.

- a. Nehemiah served the most powerful King on the earth, but compared to God, King Artaxerxes was only “this man” (11).
- b. Yes, the King had power to release Nehemiah from service, but Nehemiah knew that God had power over the King’s life, therefore ONLY God had the power to help Israel.

## B. Confess Personal Sin (1:7).

1. We might assume that Nehemiah would criticize the exiles or even his forefathers.

2. But instead, he was quick to associate *himself* with the sins of his people.

a. As did Daniel (9:5) & Ezra (9:15).

3. These men of faith teach us that a child of God is not fit to pray for anyone or about any problem until he humbles himself before God & confesses his own need for God’s mercy & forgiveness.

4. All intercessory prayer should begin with the confession of personal failings & sins.

## C. Ask For His Promises (1:8-11).

1. Nehemiah is asking God to keep the promises He made (Lev 26; Deut 30).

2. Prayer is based on promises. Prayer takes hold of God’s promises, turns them into petitions, & sends them back to God.

a. That is why Nehemiah had every reason to expect God's favorable reply.

3. That would be a good challenge for us.

a. What promises has God or Christ made to us individually as Christians or to the church? *Those are the matters for which we can effectively pray to God.*

#### D. Commit Yourself Personally (1:11).

1. Nehemiah made himself available to help in the answering of his prayer.

a. It cost him a dignified position, a place of power, the comfort of the palace, all of which were traded for the dust & danger of Jerusalem.

b. As Paul, Nehemiah was willing to count the world as loss for the sake of God's purpose (Phil 3:8).

2. {Handout: James 4:10 is the promise. What commitment is required? Read the chapter.}

[Let's end this lesson by seeing what Nehemiah's kind of prayer accomplishes.]

#### IV. WHAT PRAYER DOES

##### A. Affirms God's Sovereignty (1:5).

1. Prayer, in a sense, is denying the authority of the world, & affirming the complete authority of God (Acts 4:24, 29).

##### B. Establishes Our Identity (1:6-7).

1. Prayer is a reminder that we are the children of God & that we need our Father's constant care & supervision.

### C. Rebukes Impossibility (1:8-11).

1. Nehemiah prayed for God to change something that had been going on for 200 years.
2. Do you think God was honored by that kind of faith?
3. Yes, God is honored when we begin to pray for His will to happen.

### CLOSING

A. **The ruins that exist** all around us: in the world, in our lives & in the church demand that we pray daily.

1. Jesus prayed that the world might be saved through the words of the apostles (**Jn 17**); make that prayer your daily concern.