

# How to Pray When the Walls are Down

## **Nehemiah 1:5-11** NASB 2020

I said, “Please, LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps the covenant and faithfulness for those who love Him and keep His commandments: let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open, to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have committed against You; I and my father’s house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, please, the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘*If* you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but *if* you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I have chosen to have My name dwell.’ They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. Please, Lord, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of

Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and please make Your servant successful today and grant him mercy before this man.”

Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

## Intro

Many look at the world today and immediately throw up their hands in a defeatist attitude. Even in the church, some approach our broken world with a “doesn’t matter anyway” attitude. “It’s all going to hell in a hand basket, right?”

In modern Evangelicalism, believers have often had an escapist mentality. We just can’t wait to get to heaven and leave all of this brokenness behind us. The problem is, we serve the kind of King who leaves heaven and comes here because He seeks not merely what is most comfortable for Himself, but He seeks to do what it takes to raise broken people up to Himself.

Jesus hasn’t called us out of this world. In fact, He has called us to be holy and separated from this world only to incarnate into this world just like He has done.

### **John 17:15–19 NASB 2020**

I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them away from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. Just as You sent Me into the

world, I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, so that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

As followers of Jesus, we are here to confront evil and wickedness in this world, not to run from it. We do this by being radically present in the now, by being honest about our sin, by living in repentance, confronting evil in ourselves first, by standing for what is good and true, and by interceding for the people around us in prayer.

There is little in this world that is more powerful than the prayer of righteous people who are repentant of sin, have hearts centered on Christ, and are broken over the plight of the hurting and broken around them.

**James 5:16 NASB 2020**

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. A prayer of a righteous person, when it is brought about, can accomplish much.

What we need today aren't a bunch of escapist Christians, or defeated Christians, or pompous self-righteous Christians, or lazy Christians... we need praying Christians who are living in repentance, full of the Spirit, and walking in God's heart for the world.

## Truth

There are several powerful lessons we can learn about prayer in difficult times by observing Nehemiah's prayer here in this passage.

As we walk through these, notice how Nehemiah's prayer mirrors the Lord's prayer which Christ gave to His disciples as an example.

## **I. We praise God.**

**Nehemiah 1:5 NASB 2020**

I said, "Please, LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps the covenant and faithfulness for those who love Him and keep His commandments:

1. Just as the Lord began with acknowledging the Father's position (our Father), highness (in heaven), and holiness (hallowed by thy name); Nehemiah's prayer acknowledges God's position (Lord God), highness (of heaven), and majesty (great and awesome God).

a. A healthy prayer life will have a lot of praise and adoration towards God built into it.

2. Proper prayer always begins with God and works from God to us.

a. When we start with God, it helps us to keep our eyes on Him.

b. When we start with God, it helps us to be kingdom first rather than self first.

**Matthew 6:33 NASB 2020**

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.

## **II. We appeal to God's character.**

**Nehemiah 1:5 NASB 2020**

I said, "Please, LORD God of heaven, the great and

awesome God, who keeps the covenant and faithfulness for those who love Him and keep His commandments:

1. If we want to see God move in our lives, it helps to know who God is so we can pray accordingly.

a. Nehemiah already knew the sort of person God is.

i. He knew that God was faithful to His people, even when it did not feel like it.

ii. Nehemiah knew that God was keeping his end of the covenant even when he and his people were not.

b. Nehemiah knew God's word, and knew that God had already promised to draw near to His people as soon as they were ready to draw near to Him.

#### **2 Chronicles 7:13–14 NASB 2020**

If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send a plague among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

#### **James 4:8 NASB 2020**

Come close to God and He will come close to you. Cleanse *your* hands, you sinners; and purify *your* hearts, you double-minded.

2. God has revealed Himself to be faithful to us, and to be the sort of God who loves to draw near to His children when we draw near to Him in earnest.

### **III. We own and repent of our own sin.**

#### **Nehemiah 1:6–7 NASB 2020**

let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open, to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have committed against You; I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

1. We have said this before, but we cannot address a problem until we first inherit the problem.
  - a. Nehemiah did not pray over the sins of others alone, but repented of His own sin and sought forgiveness.
  - b. I cannot stress this enough. We will not have power to confront sin in the world until we are willing to confront it in ourselves first.

**Matthew 7:5 NASB 2020**

You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye!

- c. Notice that Jesus never tells us that we aren't to be concerned about the speck in our brother's eye.
  - i. We must be concerned about sin and the eternal state of those around us. However, we aren't supposed to deal with others if we aren't first dealing with our own stuff.
  - ii. To be on mission with Jesus, we need to get broken over sin in our culture, but how could we be moved to grief over sin that we ourselves are willing participants with?
2. If we want to preserve this decaying culture, we must get

serious about our sins and the sins of our fathers.

a. Are you ready to do business with God over your own junk today?

b. I think Jesus gets tired really fast of people who play church without having the substance of His real church.

**Isaiah 58:6-9 NASB 2020**

“Is this not the fast that I choose:

To release the bonds of wickedness,

To undo the ropes of the yoke,

And to let the oppressed go free,

And break every yoke?

“Is it not to break your bread with the hungry

And bring the homeless poor into the house;

When you see the naked, to cover him;

And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

“Then your light will break out like the dawn,

And your recovery will spring up quickly;

And your righteousness will go before you;

The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

“Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;

You will cry for help, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’

If you remove the yoke from your midst,

The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness,

**James 1:27 NASB 2020**

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

#### **IV. We appeal to God’s own word.**

**Nehemiah 1:8–10 NASB 2020**

Remember, please, the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘*If* you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but *if* you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I have chosen to have My name dwell.’ They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.

1. Nehemiah is recalling scripture here, particularly the 2 Chronicles 7 passage.



2. Praying the Scriptures is a great way for us to be sure that we are praying according to God's will.
3. A mark of mature prayer is that we are able to come into agreement with God.
  - a. Our words are most powerful when they are in line with God's words. He will never fail to bring about what He has decreed.

## **V. We make our requests clear and specific.**

### **Nehemiah 1:11 NASB 2020**

Please, Lord, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and please make Your servant successful today and grant him mercy before this man.”

Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

### **What do we want God to do for us today?**

- a. Perhaps one of the reasons why we see so few answered prayers is that we do not ask God to give us anything truly meaningful.
  - i. Sure, we ask Him to bless our food, or keep our kids safe, and to bless us generally... but what have we specifically prayed for which God might be able to clearly and demonstrably answer for us?
  - ii. Nehemiah didn't merely ask God to bless his food, he asked God to grant him favor in doing a very hard and even dangerous thing.
    1. His request to the Lord was immediately testable.
- b. Another reason why many Christians see few prayers

answered is because they pray self-seeking prayers rather than Kingdom-seeking prayers.

**Matthew 6:33 NASB 2020**

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.

i. It is a good thing for us to examine our prayers, asking whether our desires are in sync with God's.

1. Do I want what God wants?
2. Do I actually expect Him to come through for me?

**James 1:6–8 NASB 2020**

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that person ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

ii. Remember, God has only promised to answer our prayers when they are in sync with His heart.

**1 John 5:14–15 NASB 2020**

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

## Gospel Application

**Joel 2:12–13 NASB 2020**

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,

“Return to Me with all your heart,

And with fasting, weeping, and mourning;

And tear your heart and not *merely* your garments.”

Now return to the LORD your God,

For He is gracious and compassionate,

Slow to anger, abounding in mercy

And relenting of catastrophe.

How will we respond to Jesus today? Remember who He is, all He has done for you, who you are in Him, and what the mission of God’s family is.

Are we ready to get serious about being part of His solution to what is broken in this world? Are we ready to let God deal with us inside and not merely put on a good appearance?

I am convinced that there is little in this world more powerful than a church full of holy people who are engaged in prayer, broken over their sins, broken for their neighbors, and who are not okay with the status quo.

I believe that God has called us to be an intercessory body in our city who are taking the rot of sin and death head on and who refuse to back down.

We are to be a people of renewal, the sort of renewal of God’s people which precedes the revival of many around

us.

In Christ, we have been set free from the sin nature, made new, cleansed from sin, immunized to death, and empowered for our new life and the work at hand.

The only question which remains, is how far are we willing to go with God?