

*Nehemiah's Prayer For Success*  
March 27, 2011  
PSL: Prayer As A Second Language- Part 3

**Introduction:**

*How many of you want to be successful?*

*I'm not necessarily talking about success the way our culture defines it.*

- Many of us want to do well in our jobs...
- Want to be a successful spouse?
- Successful parent?
- Want to connect your giftedness with a need in your church or community and serve God well?
- Want to be an ambassador for Christ?
- Want to be a great coach on your kids team?
- Want to do well in an important conversation this week?
- Planning the best spring break ever on the least amount of money?

What is success? **Being on target with God's plan for my life.**

How is success measured? Ask: ***Am I prayerfully and boldly moving forward in discovering and accomplishing a mission from God?***

**Historical Context:**

God's people had been exiled to Babylon because they had failed to uphold God's covenant. Now, over the last hundred years or so before Nehemiah, Jewish exiles were returning to their homeland from Babylon. In the OT book preceding Nehemiah, Ezra, we see that the Temple had been rebuilt, but the picture in Nehemiah is one where the walls of the city were still broken down, leaving the people without protection from their enemies. In that day, the walls of a city meant security. Nehemiah heard this news, and we are going to see how he responded.

**Nehemiah models success. He models the process for being successful.**

**READ Nehemiah 1**

**1. Make Prayer A Habit**

*<sup>4</sup> When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven...<sup>6</sup> listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel.*

When talking about prayer, a common question is: **WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?** The simple answer is: ***Before I do anything else.***

The early verses of Nehemiah 1 describe men coming back from Jerusalem. They said Jerusalem was in ruins. This is Nehemiah's homeland. This was the land of God's chosen people. The first thing Nehemiah did (v. 4) he wept, he mourned, he fasted, he prayed. Verse 6 says he prayed "night and day for your people Israel."

Surely a person that wants to be used of God does more than pray. ***But a person after God's own heart doesn't do anything else until he or she prays.*** Here's something to remember: *Wise people make prayer a first priority; fools make prayer a last resort.* That's a difference between wisdom and foolishness. Wise leaders, wise spouses, wise parents, wise bosses, wise KidView workers, wise ....whatever you do... make prayer a first priority; foolish people make prayer a last resort.

Our communities are full of what is typically known as personality Type A people -- activists, on the go, prone to heart attacks, want to get the job done, achievement oriented, goal oriented, busy people. *How many of us often find ourselves too busy to pray?* Nehemiah modeled the wisdom of making time to pray before doing anything else.

I'd encourage you to read Nehemiah. When you read this book—the story of a man of God that was used by God for an extraordinary task—you can see how Nehemiah used prayer. There are nine different occasions that he prayed. Prayer was a habit for him.

- In 2:4: Nehemiah did get a meeting with the king. Before he asked the king for permission to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall-- *The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?" With a prayer to the God of heaven,*
- In 4:4-5, Nehemiah and his workers were enduring the criticism of jealous and fearful locals. What was Nehemiah's recourse when facing persecution? He prayed.
- In 4:9, other nations surrounding Jerusalem began to get nervous when they saw the fortifications of the city improving. They threatened Nehemiah and his crews with military action. What was Nehemiah's plan when his life was in danger? *<sup>8</sup> They all made plans to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw us into confusion. <sup>9</sup> But we prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves.*

We could look at other passages as well, but the point is, Nehemiah habitually prayed. He live out Paul's encouragement to believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:17: *Never stop praying.*

Nehemiah was a man of action. Nehemiah was an organizer, a motivator, and a manager. He liked to do things...to get things done. He built the wall around the city in 52 days. *Yet, instead of immediately going out and doing something, when he heard that something was wrong the first thing he did was get alone with God.* He didn't form a committee. He got alone with God and prayed. This was the pattern of his life. He was a man of prayer.

## 2. Use Worship As Your Foundation

What we can learn from Nehemiah is not just that he prayed... we can learn from him in how he prayed. How someone prays tells a lot about a person's heart. You can learn a lot about where a person is on their spiritual journey by how they pray. From his prayer, we can know that Nehemiah knew God intimately. He was a worshipper. He had fostered a deep relationship with God...and it shows in his prayer.

<sup>5</sup> Then I said,

*"O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unending love with those who love him and obey his commands,*

**Here's a principle we learn from Nehemiah: When I pray, I want to use worship as my foundation. Another way of saying this: I want to base my request on God's character.**

What I mean is this. You want to set up your prayer by putting God in His rightful place. Make Him first. Give Him glory. Ascribe to His unique position as Creator and Sustainer and Savior. It's like saying, *"God, I'm expecting You to answer this prayer because of Who You are. You are a faithful God. You are a great God. You are a loving God. You are a wonderful God. You can handle this problem, God!"*

Nehemiah came to God and said three things about God:

- You're great -- that's God's position.
- You're awesome -- that shows His power.
- You keep your promises -- God's covenant.

The first thing Nehemiah did was he worshipped...he acknowledged who God is. That's what praise is. Acknowledge who God is and His greatness. Nehemiah is saying *"God, I know our situation is in a mess, but I'm just reminding myself you're in control. I know that the problems over there in Jerusalem may be great but You are greater, You're bigger, You're bigger than this mess."*

Nehemiah started his prayer with the right perspective...worship.

Here's the challenge of this kind of prayer: *You have to know God. You have to be a worshipper. You have to be willing to take the time to search God out, learn to know His ways, His attributes, His promises, and then you state back to Him His sovereignty, His righteousness, His grace, His mercy, His love, His holiness, His justice, His all-powerfulness, His knowledge of all things, His work as Creator. **How do you get to know God?***

- You invest in time in the Bible.
- You watch Jesus (read the Gospels). Colossians 1:15: *Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.*

### 3. Speak Out Of Humility

(NIV): <sup>6</sup> *let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer **your servant** is praying before you day and night*

<sup>11</sup> *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.*

Nehemiah knew his place before God. He was a servant. He was carrying out his Master's work. He knew he needed the help of his Master to succeed.

One of the reasons we pray is because prayer is a way to demonstrate to God that we know we need him. Praying and asking God for help is a form of worship and demonstrates humility because it shows I'm dependent on God.

*Sometimes the reason why we don't pray more is because we don't think we need to. We think we can handle it by ourselves. We think we can do it on our own. The problem with this kind of self-centered thinking is this: Jesus said in John 15:5: <sup>5</sup> "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. **For apart from me you can do nothing.***

When I have a problem, my natural, human reaction is to think, "Now what am I going to do about this?" Rather, I need to learn to stop and say, "God, what do You want to do about this?" or "God, how are you going to take care of this?" Matthew 5:3 says, <sup>3</sup> "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, **for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.** There is nothing God won't do for the person who is depending on Him. My usefulness as a leader, and your's, begins when I recognize my total dependence upon God. The way I know I'm depending on God is that the first thing I do is pray when a problem comes or an opportunity presents itself.

### 4. Be Sure Sin Is Confessed

<sup>6b</sup> *I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned!* <sup>7</sup> *We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.*

If we divided Nehemiah's prayer into parts-- **Part one** would be worshipping who God is. "God, you're a great God. You're awesome! You keep your promises!" **Part two**, would be Nehemiah expressing humility. *God, I need you and God forgive me and us.* Part one is Nehemiah celebrating who God is. Part two is Nehemiah admitting who he is.

He says, "We've sinned." Look at how many times he uses the word "I" and "we". He says "I confess... we have sinned...my own family...I have sinned...we have sinned..."

Here's what's amazing about Nehemiah's prayer. It wasn't his fault they went into captivity. He wasn't even born when Israel was conquered by Persian empire. He was born in captivity. Yet, he is including himself in the national sins. He says "I've been a part of the problem".

Nehemiah shows us that there is more than one kind of confession. This is a new way of thinking for many of us. Personal confession is important. We spent a whole message talking about that last week when we looked at *David's Prayer Of Repentance* as a model for seeking God's forgiveness and renewal daily.

But, Nehemiah teaches us there is also national confession. I won't spend a lot of time on this here—because we're going to look at this next week in our message *Daniel's Prayer For His Country*. But, here's the point: *We don't think enough about national confession.*

This is something we rarely hear in any church setting. As Americans, we are so individualistic, that we don't have any corporate sense of responsibility. *We're taught to confess my sins. When was the last time you confessed the sins of the nation? or the sins of your family? or your church? or your friends?* Nehemiah says, "Not only do I have personal sin to confess but I have corporate sin. God, I know you have been displeased with me and my people...and I want to ask for forgiveness for all of us."

**That's a leader. That's someone that understands God's heart.** That's someone that is uttering a powerful prayer.

## 5. Count On God's Promises

<sup>8</sup> "Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. <sup>9</sup> But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honored.'

<sup>10</sup> "The people you rescued by your great power and strong hand are your servants.

Two times in his prayer, Nehemiah asks God to act on what God has already promised. Nehemiah is saying, "God you promised that if we disobey, you will scatter us. This has happened as you said. But, you also said, 'If we return to you and obey that you will bring us back.'"

Nehemiah is praying to the Lord and saying, "I want You to remember what You told your servant Moses." **Can you imagine asking God to "remember"?** He's reminding God what He had said in the past. Seems out of line. Yet, all through the Bible you find God's people reminding God about what He said He wants to do. David did it. Abraham did it. Moses did it. All the prophets did it. "God, I want to remind You of one of Your promises..." then they'd share it.

Question: Does God have to be reminded? No. Does He forget what He's promised? No. **Then why do we do this?** *Because it helps us remember what God has promised. Nothing pleases God more than when you remind God of one of His promises.*

Prayer transforms God's promises into performance. Prayer is taking God at His word. It's holding God to His promises. It's asking God to do what He's already promised He wants to do. Nehemiah says *"God, first I'm basing my prayer on Who You are. Then I'm admitting who I am. Then I'm reminding You of what You've said."*

Do you know there are over 7000 promises in the Bible waiting to be claimed?

- Need wisdom? James 1:5: *<sup>5</sup> If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you.*
- Need comfort? Psalm 10:17: *LORD, you know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them.*
- Need help? Psalm 33:20: *We put our hope in the LORD. He is our help and our shield.*
- Need provision? 2 Corinthians 9:10: *<sup>10</sup> For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity<sup>[a]</sup> in you.*
- Need courage? Take to heart Moses' words to Joshua in Joshua 1:9: *This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*
- Need forgiveness? 1 John 1:9: *<sup>9</sup> But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*
- Need salvation? Romans 10:9-10: *<sup>9</sup> If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.*

We could go on and on. I have 6,993 to go. ☺ Notice something here. Don't miss this. **Nehemiah could claim God's promises because he knew them.** The promises he mentions in these verses are Leviticus 26:33 and Deuteronomy 30:4. When was the last time you memorized a promise out of Leviticus or Deuteronomy?

The point is, *the strength of my prayer life is determined by how well I know the promises of God.* The secret of successful praying is pleading the promises of God. *"God, you said it and because of what You said and who You are, I thank You that the answer is on its way. I'm expecting You to accomplish what you've promised."* We need to learn the promises of God.

## 6. Be A Solution To Problems That Move God's Heart

Nehemiah 2:12: *I had not told anyone about the plans God had put in my heart for Jerusalem.*

Nehemiah was moved by what moved God. He was willing to get in the game, take risks, step out in faith, give up personal comfort and security to be a solution to a problem that he knew God cared about—the plight of God's people.

What's important to notice here is that Nehemiah's prayer as recorded here probably evolved over a period of a few months. I can imagine Nehemiah started out praying for this situation something like, *"God, you've got to do something about those people over there. Please help them."* He probably prayed that for a number of weeks. Finally, God probably said, *"Nehemiah, aren't you being hypocritical? If you're so concerned, why don't you get involved?"*

Sometime during this period of praying and mourning and fasting for his people, a little light went on in Nehemiah's mind that said, *"I could be the answer to that prayer. Maybe God could use me to go rebuild the wall. I'll do it! I'm available!"* First he prayed, **"God help them over there,"** then he said, **"Maybe God could use me as an answer to that prayer."** Now he's finally praying, **"Give me success."**

William Carey who founded the modern missionary movement used to say, *"Expect great things from God; do great things for God."* That's a good motto for every Christian.

## 7. Ask God For Success

<sup>11</sup> *O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me.<sup>[b]</sup> Put it into his heart to be kind to me."*

*In those days I was the king's cup-bearer.*

Nehemiah prayed first... before action. Nehemiah worshipped. He laid the foundation of his prayer with praise to God. Then he communicated humility. *God I am your servant. I need your help.* He showed that humility by confessing his sins and the sins of his people. He asked God to be true to His promises. And, he was willing to be the solution to his prayers. He had skin in the game. And, now he asks for God's blessing. He asks for success. He asks to score big. He asks for breakthrough.

I love it that he's not hesitant to pray for success. Nehemiah is very bold in his praying. Have you ever prayed, *"Lord, make me successful!"* If you haven't, **why haven't you?** What is the alternative? A failure? **Here's the point:** *There is nothing wrong with praying for success if what you're doing is ultimately for the glory of God.*

Pray boldly. Pray that God will make you successful in life for the glory of God. That's what Nehemiah did. This is a valid prayer. Give me success!

Point: ***If I can't ask God to bless what I'm doing, then I'd better start doing something else.*** If you can't ask God to make you a success at what you're doing, you should be doing something else. God doesn't want you to waste your life...He's got special tasks that He has planned in advance for you to do.

### **Why this matters:**

Here is a prayer to pray when you want your life to matter. Here is a prayer to pray when you want to make a difference. Here is a prayer to pray when you see something that moves your heart and you want to be a part of the solution. Here is a prayer to pray when you have a dream or a goal that God has placed in your heart that is bigger than yourself.

- Want to live out God's purpose in your work?
- Want to restore your marriage? Improve it? Be the husband or wife you know God wants?
- Are you burdened for your kids and you want to be God's best mom or dad?
- Are you on mission for God? Want success?

Here is a model of a prayer to pray to beg God for success...by His strength, for His glory, to accomplish the mission He has given you.

### **ClearView Challenge:**

- 1. Identify a problem or opportunity in your life.**
- 2. Make specific time to pray about it (before action).**
- 3. Follow the format we have studied: Pray...**
  - **with worship**
  - **with humility**
  - **with confession**
  - **count on God's promises**
  - **be willing to do whatever God asks**
  - **ask for success**
- 4. Share what God is doing with someone else.**