

Nehemiah – Leadership Principles

Lesson 2 - Prayer

Leader Notes

Nehemiah was a man of prayer. The following texts teach us about prayer and being a leader.

1. Verses 1:5-11:
 - a. Review the setting for these verses (verses 1-4). Why would this situation suggest a sense of urgency for prayer?

Check the notes from Lesson 1 – Introduction on these verses.

- b. This is the longest of Nehemiah's prayers. Why this length appropriate?

Praying here was done in abject humility. Nehemiah implored God in a prayer similar to Ezra's (Ezra 9:6-15). Though a layperson and not a scribe or priest, he couched his prayer in phrases and sentences from Scripture, particularly from Deuteronomy.

Nehemiah was grief-stricken but he didn't despair. Instead he gave evidence of his character was he turned to the only reliable source of help, the Lord his God.

- c. How does this example of Nehemiah compare to Jesus prayer life?

Jesus was in constant contact with the Father. He also prayed before major ministry events in His life like: Calling of His disciples (Luke 6:12-16); before Passion Week (John 17); before Peter's confession (Luke 9:18-27); before the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36); Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4); Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46)

- d. Verse 1:5 – What element of prayer can be found in verse 5?

The concept of "adoration" is expressed here. The Lord's Prayer's first petition expresses that thought. Some people use the acronym ACTS in their prayer life. The "A" means adoration.

- e. Verse 1:6 – “be attentive.” Why can Nehemiah be confident of his request in this verse? Can you think of some Bible passages that support that kind of confidence?

Nehemiah and we can be confident that God will listen to our prayers because He has promised to do so.

Psalm 50:15, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.

Matthew 7:7-8, ⁷ “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

- f. Verse 1:6 – “day and night.” What Bible passage supports this thought? How can this be done?

1 Thess. 5:17, pray continually.

This does not mean that we must constantly speak or murmur prayers with our mouth, but that in our hearts we should always be in the spirit of prayer, always feeling our dependence upon God and always confident of His help.

Nehemiah’s persistence is noteworthy. He continued in prayer for his people day and night. He might have done what we so often do, namely promise to pray about someone’s need only to forget our commitment as soon as they pass out of our presence.

- g. Verse 1:6 – “for your...” What element of prayer does this point to?

This is intercession for others.

1 Timothy 2:1, I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.

- h. Verse 1:6 – “I confess...” What element of prayer does this point to?

This is about confession. In the Lord's Prayer it is done in the fifth petition. In the ACTS acronym it is "C."

Nehemiah, a high ranking political figure, identified himself with his downtrodden people in confessing his sins and theirs (cf. Ezra 9:7).

- i. Verse 1:7 – What is Nehemiah doing in this verse?

Nehemiah does not exclude himself or members of his own family in his confession of sins. A true sense of the awesomeness of God reveals the depths of our own sinfulness (Isa 6:1–5; Lk 5:8).

Nehemiah's prayer also reveals that he was a student of Scripture. The language of his prayer reflects the history of Israel and the promises of God as they were revealed in Scripture. In the Exodus God redeemed Israel from Egypt with His mighty hand and made them His chosen people. This was the basis for Nehemiah's hope in the present difficulties.

- j. Verse 8-9 – What is Nehemiah doing in these verses?

In verse 8 he is recalling God's words for the unfaithful Israelites. Verse 9 builds on the implications of verse 8. It also calls on God's promises – this time his promise to gather His people and return them to Jerusalem, which He chose as the dwelling place for His name. As the confession ended with a reference to the Law commanded through Moses (1:7), this petition begins with another reference to Moses' words (1:8). In this case Nehemiah summarizes the words of Moses from the Pentateuch. (Lev. 26:40; Deut. 4:27; Deut. 30:2; Deut. 30:4; Deut. 12:11; cf. Deut. 12:5).

- k. Verse 10 – What is Nehemiah doing in this verse? What other Bible leader(s) did this as well?

By quoting from Moses, who foresaw the sin, exile, and return of the people, Nehemiah acknowledged that God has showed grace toward His people and brought them back from captivity to Jerusalem. Moreover, he refers to the exodus redemption of the people of Israel from Egypt by God's "great power and... mighty hand", a reference to Exodus 32:11, where Moses pleaded with God to have mercy on Israel despite their idolatrous worship of the golden calf. So also, Nehemiah pleads for mercy despite Israel's idolatry, which provoked God so

that He let the people be taken out of the land by the Babylonians. By this petition Nehemiah seems to imply that he considers the process of God restoring Israel to the land to be incomplete until the temple – including Jerusalem’s wall – is fully restored. This may hint at Nehemiah’s messianic hope, since God had inspired His prophets to predict that the new covenant, brought by the Messiah, would come only after the restoration of Jerusalem and its temple.

Moses – Exodus 32:32, But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.

Paul – Romans 9:3, For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race.

- I. Verse 11 – What is Nehemiah implying about his and Israel’s status?

In spite of their past sins, they were God’s servants.

- m. Verse 11 – “Give...success...” Why can he confidently ask this?

In his prayer Nehemiah showed that although he was a servant of the king of Persia, he was first of all a servant of God. The king of Persia was a powerful world ruler, but in this matter he was no more than “this man.” For all his power, he was still a man, not a god. Like everything else in this universe he was subject to the God of heaven and earth. Nehemiah put his trust, not in men, but in the one true God who always cares for His people.

By becoming aware of what God wanted done, Nehemiah was led to reorder his priorities.

Prayer not only established Nehemiah’s priorities, it also gave him a sense of purpose.

The success that Nehemiah was asking for was to restore Israel so that God’s promise for the coming Savior could be completed. That would reverse the name of the Lord ultimately in all nations.

- n. Write one or several sentences about what you have learned in this section and when you have or might pray a prayer similar to this. (Sharing optional)

The response to this will be very personal. Don’t force anyone to share their responses.

Read or have someone read the two paragraphs below before going into the discussion questions.

2. 2:4:

Nehemiah was a high-ranking official in the Persian government. He was the king's cupbearer (1:11). As such he was not a mere household servant, but he had a status equal to that of a member of the cabinet in our government. Presenting the king's cup and protecting him against poisoning were a ceremonial part of the Nehemiah's job, but he was also a trusted and influential advisor to the king.

No matter what one's personal problems were, the king's servants were expected to keep their feelings to themselves and to display a cheerful disposition before him.

a. Explain the urgency for prayer in this setting.

If his request were rejected, he could lose status, his job or perhaps even his life.

Nehemiah realized the danger of his situation only after the king mentioned his appearance, indicating that Nehemiah's demeanor was genuine and spontaneous, although the king considered it ill-suited for the occasion.

Nehemiah's fear may have been that the king would suspect that Nehemiah's somberness was related to some plot being planned against the king. Alternately, it may have been a serious breach of royal protocol for Nehemiah to allow his personal concerns to appear more important than his service to the king.

b. How is this very short prayer a great example?

Nehemiah trusted God and as a man of prayer apparently prayed silently even as he made his request to the king. Luther noted that such resorting to prayer in an acute moment of need is God-pleasing and fulfills the Second Commandment:

To pray as the Second Commandment teaches, is to call upon God in every need. This God requires of us; he has not left it to our choice. It is our duty and obligation to obey our fathers and mothers and civil authorities. By invocation and prayer the name of God is glorified and used to good purpose. This you should note above all, so that you may silence and repel

any thoughts that would prevent or deter us from praying... It is not left to my choice here whether to pray or not, but it is my duty and obligation. (LC III 8-9)

c. If or when have you been in a similar situation? (Sharing optional)

The response to this will be very personal. Don't force anyone to share their responses.

d. Is there is possible setting coming up when you might be mindful of this type of prayer? (Sharing optional)

The response to this will be very personal. Don't force anyone to share their responses.

Read or have someone read the paragraphs below before proceeding to the discussion questions.

3. 4:4-5

a. This is a bit like the Imprecatory or Curse Psalms. Imprecatory psalms often contain curses that are often shocking to modern readers, but such prayers are in accordance with God's curse against sin. The Imprecatory psalms put the psalmist squarely on the side of God who hates injustice and who does indeed rescue His abused children. While we leave vengeance to the Lord, and while we yearn for the ungodly to turn from sin to the Savior, we still hate wickedness and evil. To which petition of the Lord's Prayer does this relate? Why is it alright for a Christian to pray a prayer like this?

This relates to the third petition of the Lord's Prayer. The petition and meaning are listed below:

Your will be done on earth as in heaven.

What does this mean?

The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.

How is God's will done?

God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's

name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will.

It is not only alright but should be a part of our regular prayers. For Nehemiah it was appropriate because these people were trying to stop the Jews from ever coming back to Israel. This would have gotten in the way of God fulfilling His promise of the coming Savior.

- b. Read the following verses: Matthew 16:13-28 especially 16-19, 22-23; Ephesians 4:26-27; Ezekiel 33:11; 1 Timothy 2:4; and Matthew 5:43-44. How do these various passages help explain the prayer in verses 4-5 and the Imprecatory psalms?

The Matthew 16 text is about Peter's confession, then scolding Jesus for His passion talk and being rebuked very strongly by Jesus for getting in the way of God's Will. This shows that even those closest to Jesus can get in the way of God's Will. That is why we need to constantly search the Scriptures for God's Will.

The Ephesians verses warn against letting anger turn into hatred and vengeance. In fact we are to deal properly with the even rightful anger we have before it leads to sinful actions. That would be giving the devil an inroad to leading us into temptation.

The Ezekiel and Timothy passages remind us that no matter what evil someone has done we should never give up on the salvation of those who have harmed us.

The Matthew 5 text goes even further in that it asks us to faithfully pray for those who are causing us trouble.

- c. Can you think of situations where people might want to pray like this?

Christians should understand that the violent outbursts in these psalms are not prescriptions for the behavior of God's people but illustrations of emotion that God's people will indeed experience. Christians today who lose loved ones to war or to violent criminals, drunken driving accidents that lead to loss of life, hit and run accidents that kill a loved one, etc. will have these same feelings of anger and revenge. Praying the imprecatory psalms can help God's people express their anguish before God rather than act out their feelings in an unjust way. Imprecatory psalms prayed with psalms of repentance and hope can guide trouble hearts through the feelings they cannot escape.

- d. What have been or might be situations when you might want to pray like this?

The response to this will be very personal. Don't force anyone to share their responses.

4. 4:9
a. Why is this a good prayer?

Prayer and watchfulness blend faith and action, and also emphasize both the divine side and the human side.

- b. What might be something similar in your life?

The response to this will be very personal. Don't force anyone to share their responses.

5. 5:19
a. What do you think Nehemiah meant by this prayer?

The responses may very well vary. Accept them and then share ideas from the following paragraph:

Previously, Nehemiah had called on God to “remember” words He had spoken to Moses (1:8-9), and He had called on the people to “remember” God and His Word (4:14). Now he petitions God to “remember” him and his good works, a kind of prayer he will also include later (13:14, 22, 31). For God to “remember” is the same as for God not to wipe out Nehemiah’s acts of faith and love (13:1). Nehemiah would accompany one of his later prayers for God to “remember” with the request for God to spare him (13:22), which means that God would mercifully forgive his sins. These passages can be compared to the petition of the penitent thief on the cross, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42), a prayer that Christ answered with the promise of paradise (Luke 23:43).

- b. Why is this an okay prayer?

Here Nehemiah offers the good that he did for the people as evidence of “the fear (our) of God” (5:9, 16) that was in his heart. Nehemiah is not claiming to have earned God’s favor – and in fact, he does not pray that he deserves any blessing. Instead he asks God to remember him in light of God’s promise to bless those

who love him, and keep his commandments (Ex. 20:6; Deut. 7:9; Lk. 1:50). Thus it is not trust in his own merits before God, but faith in God's promise that moves Nehemiah to utter these short prayers.

6. 6:9b

- a. "...strengthen my hands" Scan verses 1-9 to get the setting. How must Nehemiah been feeling by now?

This seems like one more attempt to get the Judeans to stop repairing the wall. He seems to be able to see through their plot. However, he may be a bit wearied by now, or at least his opponents may seem to think so. This prayer seeks God's help, knowing that he alone can crown our efforts with success and that His help overcomes all opposition from people and even demonic forces.

- b. Under what circumstances might it be good for you to pray a prayer like this?

Answers will vary. Accept those that share with thanks.

You may want give the class participants some time in class to begin doing some thinking on this matter. If anyone wants to share fine, *BUT remember this is for their personal growth and no sharing is to be expected!*

7. This section has been a study of the prayer life of a leader. The purpose of study is usually to learn something. Serious learning often leads to change. Keeping this line of thought in mind give some thought to the following personal study questions: (Note that is for your personal life only.)
 - a. How is my prayer life at this time? (consider when, where and how you spend time praying)
 - b. What will I change in my prayer life?
 - c. How will I make sure that I will follow through?