

**Let us Arise and Build**  
**(Studies in the book of Nehemiah)**  
*Fervent Prayers—Relying upon God*

**Intro:** Last week I pointed out that the story of Nehemiah gives us a wonderful model of how to be builders for the Lord. In reading the account we can see a progression of steps that led to the accomplishment of the one of the great acts of building among the people of God in the ancient world; and it will guide us in our efforts to build up the cause of the Lord in our modern world as well.

When Nehemiah heard about the distress and reproach of his fellow-Jews in Jerusalem he was broken hearted. He “wept and mourned for days.” He really cared about God’s people and you sense immediately that he wanted to do something about it. But it was clearly something bigger than he could handle by himself. It was a God-sized problem that called for God-sized solutions. And so he began to pray about the problem.

All of us could learn a great deal by considering the prayer of Nehemiah and learning from him how to pray in a way that solicits God’s favor. Let’s listen in on the beautiful personal prayer of this man of God (ESV):

*And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. Remember the word that 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 your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” Now I was cupbearer to the king.” (Nehemiah 1:5–11, ESV)*

**Nehemiah here gives a summary of the kind of petitions he made again and again to the Lord.**

**Nehemiah’s prayer was:**  
*Fervent in spirit*

You sense as you read that Nehemiah is not praying casually. In his language we hear one striving in prayer, with earnestness, with intensity.

### ***Reverent in tone***

Nehemiah's prayer shows a keen awareness of God's greatness.

To Nehemiah the Lord was "*the great and awesome God*" (v. 5).

We sense that this prayer goes up with great respect for the Lord.

There is no evidence in the Hebrew text to suggest that he used a special prayer language; but it is clear that he prayed as one who like others "*revered God's name.*" (v. 11)

### ***Honest in content***

Nehemiah doesn't pretend that everything is alright between Israel and God. He makes no attempt to white-wash his or Israel's transgressions. Instead he honestly confesses both: *...confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted corruptly...*

Though Nehemiah had not been among the sinners who brought God's judgment upon Jerusalem, he acknowledged his own faults before the Lord.

### ***Faithful in approach***

Nehemiah's prayer shows great faith in God's character.

*... the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.*

Nehemiah knew that though Israel had been unfaithful to God, the Lord had not been unfaithful to them. He would keep His covenantal promises given through Moses to Israel at Mt. Sinai.

Nehemiah's prayer shows great faith in God's power.

Nehemiah acknowledges that it was by the Lord's great power that Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage and given the land of Canaan as their inheritance.

He acknowledges the Lord's power to scatter His people over the face of the earth in captivity; but He also acknowledges the Lord's power to restore them from wherever they were scattered.

In this case Nehemiah's prayer also involves influencing the greatest human ruler on earth, the king of the Persian Empire. But his prayer indicates that he believed the Lord could grant him a favorable hearing before this powerful man.

Nehemiah prayer shows great faith in God's promises.

He prays in the will of God because he knows the word of God!

*Remember the word that 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 your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of*

*heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ (v. 8-9)*

From time to time I have heard people ridicule the idea of quoting Scripture in prayer. I believe that would depend upon what motivated one to do so. Obviously God knows what He has said in His word; we don't need to tell him what He has said. And yet, sometimes telling God what He has said is simply a matter of affirming our faith in His word. This is what Nehemiah was doing.

### ***Obedient in expression***

Nehemiah refers to the Lord's right to rule by referring to the *“commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded.”*

It is interesting to notice how many times Nehemiah uses the word “servant” to describe himself and God's other people (v. 6, 11). In this he acknowledges the Lord's right to do whatever He wished and for humans to be used in His plans.

Nehemiah called himself the Lord's “servant.” Nehemiah didn't just want “somebody” to do something about the reproach of Jerusalem. He wanted to do something about it. Wouldn't it be wonderful if every child of God was that ready to be used by God to solve the problems of his people?

The prayer was specific! *...give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”* (v. 11) “I want to do something about the desolate condition of Jerusalem!”

What Nehemiah was proposing to do was to ask the king if he could return to Jerusalem personally and lead them in restoring the city.

### ***Hopeful in outlook***

How often do people give in to despair and embrace a hopeless point of view! “Nothing will change; it won't do any good,” we may say. Nehemiah's faith gave him hope that the unacceptable conditions of his brethren in Jerusalem could be changed. Thus he prayed, “Make thy servant successful “today before this man.”

And as we will see, he was willing to risk his own life out of that faith. (2:1-2)

### **Application to us**

***If all great works begin with tears, then secondly those tears lead us to the throne room of God. If the success of the Lord's work first depends upon people to who care, it must be manifested in people who pray! Listen to these verses from the apostle Paul about doing the Lord's work.***

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”*  
(Colossians 4:2-4, ESV)

*“praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”* (Ephesians 6:18–20, ESV)  
*“Brothers, pray for us.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:25, ESV)

**Conclusion: Like Nehemiah, let each of us pray for the Lord to use us as workers in His kingdom. Let us pray fervently, reverently, honestly, faithfully, obediently, and hopefully for the Lord’s help in doing His work.**

**And as you pray, you may discover like Nehemiah, that maybe you are the one to make a bold move to accomplish something great for the Lord.**