

How to Pray (Part 2)

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Last week we covered part one of going back to basics in our prayer life. We spoke about:

- The element of reflection and humility.
- The element of praise.
- The element of petition.
- The element of confession.
- The element of reminding God.

This week, we close the mini-series off.

Scripture Reading Nehemiah 1:4-11 (NIV)

⁴ *“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*

⁵ *Then I said: "LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,*

⁶ *let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you.*

⁷ *We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.*

⁸ *"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,*

⁹ *but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'*

¹⁰ *"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.*

¹¹ *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. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king."*

The Element of Humility

We continue this week by expanding on the element of humility in prayer with this quote from verse 10, *"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand."*

In prayer, we do not meet God as our equal. We serve Him and we are His people. Now in writing this, Nehemiah does refer to the exodus out of Egypt, but because of this, he is confident that God will bring further deliverance.

If the people could help themselves, they would not need God. If we can help ourselves – better than how God can help us, then there is no point in praying. But if we do need God's help; if we need God to lift us up, then we also need to be humble before Him, keeping in mind that pride is the opposite of humility.

If we as a people were able to save ourselves from the problem of sin, then Jesus came for no reason. However, there is nothing in us and nothing that we can do to save ourselves. None of us knows what tomorrow holds. None of us knows everything. None of us can see everything. In fact, God has not yet given us tomorrow. Have you made a mistake or wished for another opportunity? Are you certain that when difficult times come, you will do the right thing and the right time and secure the best possible outcome? Not? Then you need God!

With this in mind, how do you plan on finding your way out of those situations that threaten to overwhelm you? In pride – do it yourself, or in humility – God please help me?

The evidence for God is overwhelmingly abundant and this is what Nehemiah is reminding God about: that You, God, have come through for your people on many occasions and we know that you will come through now, for us. Help!

Nehemiah still has not asked God for anything; he has simply reminded God of something.

The Element of Asking

“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. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”

Nehemiah asks two things of God:

1. Let your ear be attentive to Nehemiah as well as the people.
2. Give your servant success. This ask is done from the important position of humility.

The man in front of whom Nehemiah wants to be successful is king Artaxerxes. Although the king is human, Nehemiah knew that the king’s heart was in the hand of God and God alone could move the king toward compassion for the Jews.

It was not that Nehemiah wanted glory for himself. He had no ambition of being a hero. But he did have compassion for Jerusalem, God’s people, and God’s Laws. Nehemiah had received news from his brother Hanani about the Jewish remnant and Jerusalem and it went like this, “Some of the people who returned are still alive. They are back in the land of Judah. But they are having a hard time. People are making fun of them. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down. Its gates have been burned with fire.”¹

The walls and gates are as Nebuchadnezzar left them, and the remnant could not rebuild matters and they did not, in any case, have permission from the king to do so.

When Nehemiah got this news, he sat down, cried, and fasted. It was then that he prayed to God.

Nehemiah’s prayer originated in the core of His soul.

The king’s servants were expected to keep their problems to themselves and not upset the king. Yet, Nehemiah was so upset, that the king noticed. It was a great risk to approach the king in this way. Nehemiah first prayed and then went to the king; we must not forget this order.

¹ Nehemiah 1:3 (NiRV).

Jerusalem was a hotspot for trouble, the king had not given permission for it to be rebuilt and Nehemiah asks the king if he can rebuild Jerusalem. Then Nehemiah asks the king for letters to various governors for safe travel and for another letter to get wood to build the city's gates.

Quite bold of Nehemiah. But since the king's heart was in God's hands, the king not only gave Nehemiah these letters, but sent with Nehemiah some army officers and cavalry.

God answered Nehemiah's prayer, "*Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.*" And the rest is history.

The Big Finish

Jesus came long after the time of Nehemiah, so his prayer ended in verse 11. He could not close his prayer, "*in Jesus Name, amen.*" We can.

John 14:13 reads, "*You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*" Matthew 21:22 continues, "*If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.*"

Faith is a trust in a holy and sovereign God despite our circumstances. Faith is a gift of God. Faith is never disappointing, and faith never hopes because faith is an assurance. Faith is where the mind and soul join in a deep conviction of the truth, even though, some things may not yet be seen.

We are not God's equals, and we are not mini -or small gods. We are His servants who are proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Like Nehemiah, our prayers are according to the will of God so that God's purposes, not ours, are at the core of our being. This is part of glorifying God with all of who we are and all we do.

Nehemiah prayed many times so that he would not miss the will of God in any given situation.

Perhaps we should re-read John 14:13 and Matthew 21:22, but with the mission and purposes of God in mind, "*You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*" and "*If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.*"

Conclusion

Nehemiah's prayer was simple, but powerful: praise, petition, confession, reminding God, humility, ask and close off. It so often happens that prayers begin with "ask." I am not saying that Nehemiah's prayer is the only "model" (for lack of a better description), but it is a prayer that overflows with relationship and the need to be in right standing with God.

And that brings us back to some of the questions I asked last week:

- What am I going to pray about?
- Who is God when I need His help and what has he already done for me?
- How can we first focus on God before our trouble or request for God's intervention?
- To what degree do you desire the holy life that God is calling you to?
- In my moment of trouble, who is God to me?

And we add the next few questions...

- Is my heart humble or proud?
- Do I discern the will of God and thoroughly discuss things with Him before asking?
- Do I pray according to the will and purposes of God as set out in His Word?

I close with the lyrics of a song by Keith Green; make a point of listening to the song:

Oh Lord, you're beautiful,

Your face is all I seek,

For when your eyes are on this child,

Your grace abounds to me.

Oh Lord, please light the fire,

That once burned bright and clear.

Replace the lamp of my first love,

That burns with Holy fear.

I want to take your word and shine it all around.

But first help me to just, live it Lord.

And when I'm doing well, help me to never seek a crown.

For my reward is giving glory to you.

Oh Lord, you're beautiful,

Your face is all I seek,

For when your eyes are on this child,

Your grace abounds to me.

I want to take your word and shine it all around.

But first help me to just, live it Lord.

And when I'm doing well, help me to never seek a crown.

For my reward is giving glory to you.

Amen.