

The Prayer of a Godly Leader

Nehemiah 1:5-11

In his work, *Quiet Talks on Prayer*, S.D. Gordon stated, “You can do more than pray after you have prayed but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.” In *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers affirms, “Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is the greater work...Prayer is the battle; it is a matter of indifference where you are. Whichever way God engineers circumstances, the duty is to pray.”

Nehemiah was a godly leader; and, Nehemiah was a man of prayer. It has been discovered, that on average, one out of every ten verses in the book of Nehemiah is a reference to prayer. Clearly, prayer was not an afterthought or secondary in the heart and work of Nehemiah – prayer was at the forefront of everything Nehemiah sought to undertake.

One might be a successful leader in society apart from prayer, but prayer is essential for those who aspire to become godly leaders. There is no greater example in Scripture for leadership than the Lord Jesus Christ. It cannot be denied that He was a successful leader. Remember, leaders influence others. Jesus took a group of uneducated men and prepared them to turn the world upside-down with the gospel. However, it is impossible to study the life and ministry of Jesus and miss the premium He placed on prayer. If Nehemiah and Jesus recognized the urgent need for prayer, surely those who aspire to lead within the church ought to be committed to prayer as well.

As we continue our series on godly leadership, I want to examine the [attributes](#) of Nehemiah's prayer within the text as we consider: [The Prayer of a Godly Leader](#).

I. A Prayer of Recognition (5) – [And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments.](#) As Nehemiah began his prayer unto the Lord, he began with recognition of God. He is the LORD, (Yahweh). This is God's personal name, speaking of His sovereign, redemptive nature. Nehemiah recognized the supremacy of the LORD. He is the God of heaven, creator and sustainer of all. None compare to our God or rival His rule and existence.

- Nehemiah recognized the Lord as the great and terrible (awesome) God. He was well aware of the power and majesty of the Lord. This was not a small undertaking that Nehemiah sought to pursue. The work was great and opposition was strong. Nehemiah realized if he was to be successful in this great endeavor, he would need the help and provision of the Lord. Fortunately, he served One who stood above all others; there is no God besides Him. Nehemiah could face the daunting task ahead with confidence – knowing the Lord would guide and equip him.

- As Nehemiah prayed, he was also reminded of the faithfulness of God. He is the God who keeps His covenant and extends mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments. God had proven Himself faithful for generations. He had kept a remnant in Babylon, allowing them to return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah had experienced God's faithfulness and he faced the task before him knowing God would prove faithful in his life as well.

- No doubt you will agree that we need godly leaders in our day. We live in a day with similarities to Nehemiah's day. We do not live within a walled city with the walls in disrepair, but we do live in a day when the walls of faith within our nation are in disrepair. We live in a generation that is experiencing unprecedented opposition to the gospel and the work of the church. The task before us is great. However, we do not walk alone. The Lord is calling those who will rise to the occasion and lead in this difficult time. As He does, those called into leadership can do so with confidence, knowing the LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, the one who abides faithful has called and will equip us for the task ahead. [Phil.4:13 – I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.](#)

II. A Prayer of Confession (6-7) – [Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷ We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.](#) Following recognition of God's nature and power, Nehemiah offered a prayer of confession. This flows naturally from the heart of one who is aware of God's holy and righteous nature. Upon being reminded of the majesty of God, Nehemiah was immediately reminded of their sin and rebellion. He humbly comes before the Lord, pleading for God to be attentive to his prayer.

- One can easily see the humility and sincerity in the heart of Nehemiah. He does not merely pray for the sins of Judah; Nehemiah included himself in this confession of sin. He confessed unto the Lord the "sins of the children of Israel, which **we** have sinned against you." He admits, "Both I and my father's house have sinned." He admitted their rebellion against God and their refusal to keep His commandments. He was aware that they had grieved the Lord and offended Him by their sin. Nehemiah knew God would not bless his endeavors with unconfessed sin in his life or the lives of the people.

- Genuine prayer will lead to confession of sin. Like Nehemiah, when we enter the presence of the holy one, we become aware of His righteousness and our lack thereof. We are humbled before the Lord in genuine prayer. Isaiah declared, "Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips." If we are to become godly leaders, those who positively impact others and experience the power of God, we must be willing to

confess our sin before the Lord. While spoken to Solomon during the dedication of the temple, the words of the Lord reveal mandates regarding His divine nature and provision. [2 Chron.7:14-15 – If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.](#) ¹⁵ [Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.](#) The Lord is aware of the sin within our lives and listens for prayers of confession as we come before Him.

III. A Prayer of Expectation (8-10) – One might consider this portion of Nehemiah's prayer to be a bit arrogant or demanding of the Lord, but I am convinced it reveals the faith he had in the Lord and his expectation for God to hear and answer his prayer. Nehemiah is actually quoting the promises of God recorded in Deuteronomy 28:63-67 and 30:1-5. God knew the people would turn away from Him and judgment would come. However, God promised restoration to those who returned Him and lived according to His commandments. Nehemiah reveals his expectation for God to keep His word and restore His people. Had Nehemiah not been confident in the Lord's promises, trusting Him by faith to provide, he would never have left the palace of the king.

➤ We must be a people of faith, expecting God to keep His word and move in our lives and circumstances. In fact, faith in the Word of God is all we have. If we cannot trust the Lord to keep His Word and meet our needs, our faith is in vain. We are saved by grace through faith. By faith, we trust the Lord for forgiveness of sin and eternal life beyond the grave. Striving to lead others and accomplish the tasks God has given us is no different. Godly leaders must be people of faith, those who pray in faith, fully expecting God to answer our prayers and work in our behalf.

➤ Apart from expectant faith, our prayers are nothing more than mere words spoken. If we cannot believe God to act in our lives as He has promised, then our faith is vain. However, I am thankful we can pray in faith, believing the promises of God and fully expecting Him to provide for our lives and keep us throughout eternity. [Matt.7:7-8 – Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:](#) ⁸ [For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.](#)

IV. A Prayer of Submission (11) – [O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.](#) Nehemiah concluded his prayer with an attitude of submission before the Lord. He was well aware that the success of his endeavor rested in the provision and grace of the Lord. Granted, there would be work Nehemiah would have to perform; much work in fact, but apart from the Lord, his efforts would be futile. Nehemiah had surrendered himself in service to the Lord. He was willing to walk away from the security of the king's palace to take on an enormous effort of uncertainty.

▪ As revealed in the next chapter, Nehemiah was also aware of the potential reluctance of Artaxerxes to allow him to leave for the work he felt burdened to pursue. Not only did Nehemiah need the Lord's help and provision for the work in Jerusalem, he would need the Lord to touch the heart of Artaxerxes to allow Nehemiah the freedom to pursue the work. All of this rested in the provision of the Lord. Nehemiah had surrendered to the Lord, but needed His help to actually engage in the work in Jerusalem.

➤ There is much the Lord desires to accomplish in regard to Kingdom work. He is not dependent upon man to accomplish His divine purposes. However, He delights in and chooses to use humanity to accomplish much of His work here on earth. In order to be effective godly leaders, we must be willing to trust the Lord to provide while fully surrendering our lives to the work He chooses. Many would think Nehemiah had lost his mind stepping away from the position within the palace. Yet Nehemiah understood he was leaving a position with the king to pursue the work of the King of kings. As we submit our lives unto the Lord, in service to Him, we need to be reminded of His sovereign nature and awesome power. Every need, He will supply. We are never more secure than when we are totally surrendered to the will of the Lord. [Heb.10:21-23 – And having an high priest over the house of God; ²² Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; \(for he is faithful that promised.\)](#)

Conclusion: Nehemiah is a great example of a godly leader. He was a man of character, and he was a man of prayer. These attributes allowed him to influence others in positive, effective ways. Has the Lord placed you in a position of influence? I would argue, the majority, if not all believers are within a position of influence. Are you a leader committed to prayer, seeking the Lord from a pure heart and depending solely upon Him? Are you willing to fully surrender your life to Him? If you can't commit to prayer and submission to the Lord, you may lead and influence others, but your leadership will be lacking.

Do you know Jesus as your personal Savior? Is He the sovereign King in your life? If not, I urge you to respond to Him in faith today. He is the Lord, the great and awesome God. He alone can provide forgiveness for your sin and grant eternal life.