

Do you think about Whom you pray to when you pray? Let us learn from Nehemiah in this regard and also praise and exalt God in our prayers. How much in your prayers do you actually praise and adore and exalt the Lord God for Who He is and how He has revealed Himself as Triune God and the Creator of the universe, the Redeemer of sinners, and the God of all providence? Which true believer won't know and confess how much reason to praise and magnify the Lord our God, as revealed ultimately in Jesus Christ the Saviour?

Nehemiah's praise of God for Who He truly and always is leads him also into confession of sin. Nehemiah confesses the sins of His people nationally and includes himself and his father's house in this confession of sin. Nehemiah shows he understands sin to be transgression of God's law and notice how this comes out in verse 7 where he confesses, "*We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, [O God], and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which Thou commandedst Thy servant Moses.*" You see, sin is not simply some mistakes or misjudgments on our part but it is an offense against the holy and righteous good-doing God, and it is breaking His commandments, revolting against His will and law. Nehemiah humbly and heartily confesses their sins and sinfulness. Won't all true prayer always be in this humble mindset and acknowledging time and again, 'Lord, we have sinned against Thee, please be merciful to us, and merciful to me?' Is such prayer and confession of sin something real in your life too?

Notice how Nehemiah moves from confession of sin to pleading God's promises for His mercy and help even when so undeserving of that in themselves. Nehemiah's prayer is full of Scripture. Verse 8 states, "*Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandest Thy servant Moses, saying...*" Nehemiah here brings out while the Lord's Word of judgment against the unbelieving and wicked is sure, so also His Word of mercy and grace is sure for all who repent of sin and return to Him in humble dependency upon Him. God is faithful to His promises, Nehemiah knew, and so He pleaded with the LORD.

True prayer is taking God's Word and bringing it back to Him in request and petition for His help. Next time we will continue our study of this prayer of Nehemiah, showing how blessed to rely on God in prayer, and how true prayer and humble dependence on God is what marks the true believer and brings so much blessing in and through our lives by God's grace and to His glory. Amen.

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BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

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Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



NEHEMIAH'S GOD-HONORING PRAYER [1]

We now turn to Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1:5-11. His God-honouring prayer[s] are so instructive. Before he became the great rebuildier of the walls of Jerusalem and a strong reformer for the people there, we have to realize behind it all was the fact that Nehemiah was a man of prayer. Great things in God's church and kingdom never will happen without prayer to God. It is not human beings or the resources of this world and of ourselves that can bring a turn-around for good in people's lives and in the Christian church ever, but it is always the supernatural transforming power of God that is needed. We should learn just from this prayer at the beginning of the book how important prayer and humble dependence to God is shall we truly prosper in the way of the Lord and be blessed of God and be a blessing too. True Christians are people who know and acknowledge the necessity and importance of prayer to God on a daily and regular basis. Do you know of prayer to God, the God of the Holy Bible, the Triune God as made known in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you a prayer like Nehemiah, who was such a man of prayer, by God's grace?

Let us first read Nehemiah's prayer as found in this chapter in verses 4-11 just after he heard about the devastating and low condition of the city of Jerusalem, especially also with her broken down walls in such ruins still. Hear the Word of the Lord. "*And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, 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. 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. 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. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will*

bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. 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."

What can we learn from Nehemiah's God-honoring prayers? I say 'prayers' because the text passage before us is not only a summary of many prayers over quite some time, but throughout the book of Nehemiah you will find many short spontaneous prayers of this man of God. It is very obvious that Nehemiah by habit was a man of prayer. It is when you regularly take time to pray that you also will often spontaneously pray. Are you too a person of regular and spontaneous prayer to God?

From Nehemiah's God-honoring prayer let us seek to learn from the four following facts: His persistence in prayer, his pattern in prayer, his petition in prayer, and his posture in prayer.

Verse 4 reads, "*And it came to pass, when I heard these words...*" "These words" refer to the report Nehemiah heard of Jerusalem and its broken down walls and overall miserable pitiable condition even long after many exiles had returned and the temple had been rebuilt. Nehemiah is overwhelmed with sorrow and the great need of that city of God in sad condition and in such low morale and the result of the report is that "*I sat down and wept, and mourned*", he says and he breaks out into prayer. "*I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven*". Notice different ways that Nehemiah's persistence in prayer comes out here. The first part of verse 4 suggests Nehemiah was earnestly bringing his burden about Jerusalem and the cause and people of the Lord before God in prayer and he would not let God go, but he prayed fervently and continually for days and even months. Here by the way we see also the importance of the reference to month Chisleu in verse 1 when Nehemiah hears about the bad situation in Jerusalem. In chapter 2:1 the month Nisan is mentioned, which is four months later [mid March and April]. This means that for about four months Nehemiah has been bent on praying to God for help and deliverance from the dismal devastating situation in Jerusalem. The prayer in verses 5-11 is a summary of so much prayer over a four month period for God to help and intervene in His mercy, grace and power.

Nehemiah's persistence in prayer also comes out in his saying that he fasted and prayed. People often ask about this fasting and prayer. Is true persistent prayer only that prayer that includes fasting? Must we fast today? It is better not to see this text as a prescription for fasting for us, but to see it as teaching where there is true and earnest prayer to God, it can and may well include at times periods and different degrees of fasting. Fasting means to withhold yourself from your normal food and drink intake on account of

and in promotion of being concentrated and steadfast in prayer. As one commentator put it so well, "Fasting was added to intercession 'as an effective means of strengthening the force of a prayer.'" The addition of fasting with prayer here tells us of the intensity and fervency of Nehemiah's prayer; his persistence in seeking the Lord and His help in time of need.

Every Christian will know some degree of persistency in prayer; some sense of great need where you appeal to God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. At the same time Nehemiah's example of such persistency in prayer here surely reminds us, doesn't it, how slack we can be in prayer. Do we not realize enough our great needs, our many sins and shortcomings, and the broken down walls of the Christian church today? Let our text encourage and admonish you and me in more urgency and persistence and expectation in prayer before God. Which true Christian won't realize and confess the need to grow in prayer before the Lord?

We move from observing Nehemiah's persistency in prayer to his pattern in prayer. Going through the text you will notice with me in his prayer Nehemiah went from praise to God to pleading before God with confession of sin and holding to the promises of God and His Word, and then Nehemiah moved to personal petition in his situation. "The prayer has a simple structure. It starts with [adoration] of God, proceeds to a confession of sins, then a request to the Lord to remember His people [according to His Word], and concludes with a request for success [in his personal situation and desire to serve God.]"

We can learn from this pattern, which, by the way, is a pattern Jesus also taught us in the Lord's Prayer. Notice Nehemiah beginning with praise. Before he comes with petitions and requests he acknowledges God for Who He is and praises and exalts Him. "*I beseech Thee, LORD God of heaven, O great and terrible* [awesome] God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments: Let Thine ear now be attentive, and Thine eyes open, that Thou mayest hear the prayer of Thy servant....." This elaborate opening is not just vain repetition of words but it brings Nehemiah in spirit right to heaven and reflects on the glorious majestic character of God, and it stresses God's covenant relationship with His people with all the privileges and obligations of that. In Persia, referring to God as the "God of heaven" brought out the LORD God reigns over all the earth, He is the LORD God Supreme, and He is the holy and awe-inspiring God. Exalting the Lord in this way even as you begin prayer is both so honouring to God and can be so encouraging in bringing your petitions and needs before Him. To contemplate first Who we are praying to can inspire fervent prayers to the LORD for Who is a God like unto the God of Israel, the Christian God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all comfort? Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer to begin by saying, "*Our Father Who art in heaven.*" Nehemiah begins in a similar way and it leads him to such humility and boldness and blessing in prayer.