

# Week Nine: Nehemiah - Walking in Prayer

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Do you feel that your prayers are repetitious and not very effective? Is your prayer life up to the challenge of a crisis situation? This week we meet a man who responded to a crisis by calling on the God of heaven. Nehemiah prayed with confidence, humility, and power. Learn from Nehemiah and your prayer life may never be the same!

## Step into the Story

It had been almost one hundred years since the first Jewish exiles returned to their homeland from Babylon. Although the Temple had been rebuilt, the walls were broken down, leaving the people without protection from their enemies. When Nehemiah heard the news, he responded with prayer and action.

### Nehemiah's Prayer

Read [Nehemiah 1](#).

The book of Nehemiah begins between mid-November and mid-December in the twentieth year of the reign of King Artaxerxes (approximately 446 B.C.) in the city of Susa in Persia (modern day Iran). Chapter two takes place several months later in the spring of 445 B.C.<sup>12</sup>

1. What report did Nehemiah receive about Jerusalem? What was his response? (v.3-4)

In the ancient Middle East, a city wall provided protection for the inhabitants. The condition of the city wall was also seen as an indication of the strength of the people's gods. The ruined condition of the wall of Jerusalem reflected badly on God's name.<sup>13</sup>

2. As Nehemiah began his prayer, what words and phrases did he use to praise God? (v.5)

3. Whose sins did Nehemiah confess? Who were these sins against? What were the sins they had committed? (v.7)

4. On what basis did Nehemiah make His appeal in v.10? Did he mention what good people they had been?

5. What was Nehemiah's request? (v.11) What position did Nehemiah hold in the royal court?

6. Have you ever suddenly found yourself in a crisis situation? What was your first response? Did you immediately pray to the God of heaven or did you take matters into your own hands to try to fix the situation? How could Nehemiah's example help you in the future when you face overwhelming circumstances?

## God's Answer.

### [Nehemiah 2](#)

1. When the king asked Nehemiah why he was sad, how did Nehemiah respond? (v.3)
2. After Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah what he was requesting, Nehemiah prayed again. What was Nehemiah's request in verse 6?
3. According to verse 8, why did the king grant Nehemiah's request?
4. Can you recall a time when you made a successful appeal to someone in authority over you? Did you give yourself credit for being persuasive or for making a good case for what you wanted? Did you see God at work in your situation?

Nehemiah was a man of prayer. Ten recorded prayers range from the quick "arrow prayer" (Neh. 2:4) to the Bible's longest prayer (Neh. 9). The walk of faith is a balanced blend of prayer and action. Nehemiah prayed and then put his request before the king (Neh. 2:3,4); he prayed and then "set a watch" (Neh. 4:9). He exhorted the people to "remember the Lord ...and fight" (Neh. 4:14).<sup>14</sup>

## Journey through the Principle

As cupbearer, Nehemiah held an important position in the royal court. His responsibility and position of trust gave him unusual access to the king. After Nehemiah received the report about Jerusalem, he was greatly distressed. Although he was in the king's presence often, Nehemiah did not attempt to persuade the king or to use his position to influence the king until he had prayed. In our context, this would be similar to the White House Chief of Staff's praying for several months about a crisis before going to the President with his request. Nehemiah knew that God was ultimately in charge. Nehemiah's prayer and its results are an illustration of [Proverbs 21:1](#), "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes."

Nehemiah's prayer in chapter one is similar to the PRAY (Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield) format for praying.

Nehemiah approached God in prayer by

- **Praising** Him as the LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God.
- **Repenting** by confessing his sins and the sins of the people.
- **Asking** God to grant him compassion before the king.
- **Yielding** himself to God by repeatedly calling himself God's servant.

As New Testament believers, we can similarly pray by

- **Praising** God for who He is and for what He has done for us in Christ Jesus.
- **Repenting** by confessing our sins and thanking him for cleansing us.

- **Asking** Him for our requests.
- **Yielding** ourselves to Him and to His will for our lives.

What principles of prayer do you learn from the prayer in [Nehemiah 1](#)?

In order for us to take a principle (that we can apply today) from the prayer of Nehemiah, we look at two things. The first is repetition. Repetition of a word, phrase, or idea focuses our attention and emphasizes what is being repeated. In narrative literature, repetition is a key to understanding what the passage is saying. The second thing we examine is harmony or consistency with the rest of Scripture. For a principle to be valid, it must agree with the rest of the Bible. In fact, when we interpret a narrative passage, we should find that principle in other places in Scripture. I want us to look at Nehemiah's prayer to see whether or not the PRAY principle meets these criteria.

**Take each of the four parts of the PRAY format. Look for words or phrases in Nehemiah's prayer that show his praising, repenting, asking, and yielding. Then find another verse in Scripture which encourages or commands us to pray, repent, ask, or yield. I will do the Praise section as an example. (It might be helpful to use a concordance to find the supporting verses or cross references).**

### *PRAISE*

Find examples (words or phrases) from the prayer in [Nehemiah 1](#) that show Nehemiah's praise to God.

v. 4 God of heaven

v. 5 LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God. who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Find examples from the rest of Scripture encouraging or commanding us to praise God.

[Psalm 103:1-2](#) (NASB)

1. Bless the LORD, O my soul,

And all that is within me, bless His holy name.

2. Bless the LORD, O my soul,

And forget none of His benefits;

[Psalm 145](#) (NASB)

1. I will extol You, my God, O King,

And I will bless Your name forever and ever.

2. Every day I will bless You,

And I will praise Your name forever and ever

### ***REPENT***

Find examples (words or phrases) from Nehemiah's prayer in [Nehemiah 1](#) that show his confession of sin.

Find examples from the rest of Scripture that address confession of sin. (This is the hardest category in which to find specific verses. Try [Psalm 51](#) or [1 John 1:9](#)).

### ***ASK***

Find examples from Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1 that show his specific requests.

Find examples from the rest of Scripture that encourage us to ask God for our needs.

(Use your concordance and look at verses under the word "ask".)

### ***YIELD***

Find examples (words or phrases) from Nehemiah's prayer in [Nehemiah 1](#) that show his humble spirit.

Find example from the rest of Scripture encouraging us to yield or submit to God. (Use your concordance to look up verses with the words "submit" or "humble".)

## **Walk It Out in Life**

I want us to practice writing out a prayer in the PRAY format. We will take each section separately and examine it.

### ***PRAISE***

In this study we have seen many names of God and descriptions of God. We have observed that God is the

- God who remembers (Noah)
- God who provides (Abraham)
- God who takes what others meant for evil and uses it for good (Joseph)
- I AM (Moses)
- God under whose wings I can seek refuge (Ruth)
- LORD who would do everything he had promised (Abigail)

- God of lovingkindness and compassion, who blots out my transgressions, washes away my iniquity, and cleanses me from sin (David)
- God who is able to deliver (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego)
- LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God (Nehemiah)

**Choose one of these names or descriptions of God and write several sentences praising God for who He is and thanking Him for what He does.**

### *REPENT*

[1 John 1:9](#) tells us that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

**Write out several sentences confessing (agreeing with God about) specific sins. Remind Him of [1 John 1:9](#) and thank Him for forgiving you.**

### *ASK*

Asking is the part of prayer with which we are most familiar. I grew up praying very general requests such as “Bless all the missionaries” or “Forgive me of all my sins”. Notice that Nehemiah was very specific as he prayed, “Make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man” (Neh 1:11 NASB).

**Write several sentences expressing specific prayer requests to the Lord.**

### *YIELD*

Yielding is probably the hardest part of praying biblically. Our natural tendency is to want God to do things our way. My goals and desires have changed over the years, but even with a spiritual goal in mind, I may have already decided how God could accomplish it.

I think of yielding to God’s will as something similar to writing a blank check. I never liked to send a blank check to school with one of my children because I knew it might not reach its intended destination. When I yield my will to God’s, I imagine that I am giving Him a blank check. He is free to fill in the amount and I trust Him to do what is best for me. However, as I have read through Scripture, I have noticed that the saints had conversations with God. David, in particular, was very honest with God about how he felt. So I express what I want and “make my case” as I am praying. In my check analogy, I am writing my request on the memo line of the check. “Lord, you know my desire in this matter.” However, ultimately I have to leave the decision with God. I may grieve greatly (and I have) when God says no. I may not understand His decision. But in the final analysis, He is God. I have to acknowledge His sovereignty, His wisdom, and His great love.

**Have you yielded yourself to God? Do you give each day to Him? Write several sentences expressing your heart’s desire to God. Ask Him to help you have the attitude that Nehemiah had of being God’s servant.**

## Walk It Out in Parenting

When our children were young, we established a bedtime ritual we called “Pillow Talk.” When everyone was ready for bed, we all went into one bedroom and sat on the beds. Each person could ask a Bible trivia question, name a chorus or song that we would all sing, or give a Bible reference and see if anyone could quote the verse. We did not do this every night, but it was a fun time. After going around with our questions and songs, we “prayed around” with each person praying a sentence prayer.

Are you teaching your children to pray? Do they see you praying about things that are important to you? I would suggest you pray out loud for your children from their earliest days. What could bless your children more than to hear their names spoken before the Father by their own mother?

**Share with your small group any ideas you have about praying with your children and teaching them to pray,**

## Hold His Hand

To whom did Nehemiah pray? He addresses his prayer to the “LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God” (Neh 1:5). You will hear people say that all religions worship the same God, but they call Him by different names. I hope as we have walked through the Old Testament that you have seen that the God of the Bible is unique. He is the one true God and He has revealed Himself to us.

Nehemiah uses the title “God of heaven” four times in the first two chapters of the book. This title is found in the Old Testament mainly in the exilic and post-exilic books.<sup>15</sup> Daniel prays to the God of heaven ([Daniel 2:18-19](#)). Jonah says he fears “the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land” ([Jonah 1:9](#)). Ezra uses this title repeatedly. Why is God called the God of heaven?

Not only did God create heaven but the Bible also says He is in heaven. Furthermore, God is ruling from heaven. [Isaiah 66:1](#) says, ‘Thus says the LORD, ‘Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool.’ ” The God of heaven is a sovereign God and the rulers on earth are under His power and authority. I like the way [2 Chronicles 20](#) expresses this same idea in the prayer of Jehoshaphat.

O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens?

And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations?

Power and might are in Your hand

so that no one can stand against You.

[2 Chronicles 20:6](#) (NASB)

Isn't that a powerful description of God? When everything in the world seems to be out of control, God is still on His throne. He is the ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in His hand.

**Does your life seem out of control? Are you shaken by the events going on in the world? You can call on the God of heaven, the sovereign God of the universe, today. Write out a prayer thanking Him for being not only the God of heaven but also *your* God.**