

PP **Nehemiah: Wall-Builders Lead from their Knees**

Text **Nehemiah 1:5-11**

Part 3-5/12-13

Illus I cannot remember his name, yet I have many of his books on my shelf. They were his when he was the preaching pastor of his church. Their mine now because one Sunday in Marietta, Ga., he came to me after church and said ‘I have something to give you’. It turned out to be a small collection of commentaries, some which have turned out to be my favorites. He had no more use for them since his life, ministry and marriage fell apart from his drinking.

Friends, broken walls and ruined lives are all around us, people are in ***great trouble and shame***
What are we doing about it?

Nehemiah asked how God’s people were doing, listened, grieved and acted by going to his knees
He did nothing until God made it clear what he was to do

If we respond to broken walls with our own plans without receiving direction from God, we
will likely be ineffective, at worst our own walls can crumble

PP ***“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Galatians 6:1***

What should you do when your walls are down, or your friend’s or your community’s?

Some just act, shooting first and aiming later

A person needs money, they feel bad, so they just give money, but is that really always wise?

What if God’s hand was doing what He did in Haggai, putting holes in their wallets so they did
not have enough, in order to bring them to repentance?

Years ago a friend of mine decided to resign from his job and move to another state to enter a
full-time ministry

There were major patterns in his life that shouted disaster, yet he always wanted to be in ministry

It set off 5 years of disappointment, multiple moves and financial struggle

Yet some told him how excited they were that he was taking this step of faith

Verse 4 says ***“I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” 1:4***

Meals in the ancient world were designed to last an hour or two, which gave this fasting wall-
builder extended times with God in prayer and it began to clear up confusion like the
morning sun burns off the fog

Four months this pattern continued until finally God made clear what Nehemiah was to do

Prayer burns off the fog and eventually brings us into the clear skies of action

And Nehemiah shows us how this can work in our lives

PP 1-Nehemiah’s prayer begins with elevation (5)

There is clear air up on high, but tend to lazily and carelessly bring God down to our level

Prayer is not to be flippant or reckless, we aren’t coming to our best bud in the whole world

PP Repeatedly Scripture warns us against lowering God to our level: ***“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God...Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.” Ecclesiastes 5:1-2***

Prayer ascends to God because He is ever over us in heaven and we are on earth

In **Revelation** prayer is like incense that rises to the nostrils of God (**Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4**)

When we pray then, we begin by elevating God in praise: ***“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” 5***

Notice how he begins: ***“And I said, ‘O LORD God of heaven’”***

Let me translate this a little bit, “O Yahweh Elohim of heaven”

PP **Lord** is Yahweh, **God** is Elohim, but those names are not familiar to most of us

“O Yahweh, our covenantal God Who will not forget His promises to His people and gave to them His personal name to call on Him”

You ever had an important powerful person give you his private cell phone number and tell you to call it anytime you need?

That is God’s gift of His personal name Yahweh, given only to His own treasured people

‘O faithful One, Elohim, the sovereign Creator and sustainer, Who rules over all from ‘heaven’

Nehemiah is grief-stricken because His people and their city are in shame and ruin

Yet his prayer, as it rises up to God grabs hold of the deepest truths about God Himself: God keeps His promises and God is supremely powerful over all

Nehemiah is expressing his faith in the language of prayer!

He goes on, ***“the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love”***

God has power to surpass every king, president, CEO or enemy: ***“The king’s heart is a stream***

PP ***of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will.”*** Proverbs 21:1

It would hardly be comforting to know that God is all-powerful if Scripture did not link that with the truth that He ***‘keeps covenant and steadfast love’***

PP God’s covenant is a relationship built on the promise of steadfast love: ***“you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”*** Ezekiel 36:28

All through Scripture, praying saints elevated God, refusing to reduce Him to our level

PP 2-Nehemiah’s prayer moves to Invitation (6a)

“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,”

I have a terrible habit that I am trying to break, one which my kids mock me regularly for

When I am on my laptop and they are trying to talk to me, they know I’m not really listening because I’m not really looking at them

Some are so skilled that they can look right at you and not really listen

Lord, I invite Your attention to fall on me, I ask that You open Your ears to my prayer and open Your eyes to see Your servant before You?

Every time the people of God pray, they will receive God’s full, personal attention

The wall-builder’s compassionate heart wants that, asks for that, is satisfied with nothing less!

Anything less is like going out and your date is watching a hockey game on the restaurant TV, or doing what I saw recently, reading a book on her kindle fire during the entire meal

God, I feel so strongly for Jerusalem’s situation, please give me Your undivided attention

We find prayer so difficult not only because we are so pragmatic and it feels like a waste of time
We find prayer difficult because like Adam and Eve, the approaching God moves us to hide from
His holy, penetrating and searching look
Nehemiah is inviting God's full attention-both listening and looking-to fall on him, knowing full
well what God is going to see...a sinner
There is no flying under the radar of God's holy gaze and when He responds to our invite
He will reveal what is displeasing to Him and it is what we moves Nehemiah to say next

PP 3-Nehemiah's prayer responds with confession (6b-7)

It is so easy to see someone's messy life, compare it to our own and then feel superior
"God, I thank you that I am not like that person who has made a mess of his life."
When we see the incredible character of God and elevate that, and invite Him to look on us, we
are reduced to the utter reality that at the foot of the cross, the ground is level
No one needs just a little of God's forgiveness to make up what they lacked in their goodness
We are radically contaminated by sin, and now, even when we are Christians, we cannot make it
through one day pleasing God without His constant grace upholding us
Nehemiah invited God's full attention and it revealed sin: *"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..."*

As a college student living with two other guys in an apartment, we weren't know for cleanliness
One time I got up in the middle of the night to get something to drink and when I turned on the
light, hundreds of cockroaches covered the floor like a moving black carpet
When we elevate God in adoration, inviting His attention, He will turn on the light so we can see
that He has always seen living in the darkness of the depths of our hearts
The heart of Nehemiah reacts in confession, of his and his own sins
When is the last time you confessed the sins of that broken, ruined friend, or this church, or your
school or community?

PP Before Nehemiah, Isaiah did the same thing when He saw holy God on His throne: ***"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"** 6:5*

PP Confession means to acknowledge or agree, and at the same time cast or throw
We acknowledge the sin that God has revealed and we immediately cast it away from us
Growing up, we had a dog that had the run of our yard and no one charged to clean up its poop
It wasn't uncommon for 6 kids who played outside to unknowingly step in it
We would come in the house and someone would smell it pretty quickly, and invariably, be
disgusted and go back outside scraping it off your shoes

Confession is our response when God shows us we sinned
And when He reveals it, we must agree with Him, that is has broken our peace with Him, it has
violated His holy relationship with us and it was place upon His Son on that horrible
cross

We acknowledge and agree that we have sinned, and cast in confession to the blood of Christ
But God never reveals our sin without the offer of His grace, and this is what shame-filled,

broken and ruined people have forgotten
My mercy is new today, my grace is sufficient, my love is steadfast, my vows hold true
Your sin was polluting our relationship, I held back from blessing you, I brought you to ruin to
get you to this point, that you would acknowledge what you have done
With your repentance, I will begin to pour out blessings, restore your peace, rebuild your walls

When we confess the sins of God's people, we are praying that God will pour out His mercy
upon them and remember His promises to them
We do this because of the incredible truth bound up in a word in verse 5, '**covenant**'
God is a covenantal God meaning He brings His people into a covenant with Him
Every single Christian is bound up in this covenant with God and with each other
When we see Christians in great trouble and disgrace, it doesn't matter that they are 800 miles
away, four months journey as Jerusalem was for Nehemiah
We are bound together, your struggle is mine, my struggles are yours
Remember when the Jewish soldier Achan secretly hid some of the spoils of Jericho, directly
PP violating God's command, God said, ***"Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my
covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they
have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings."*** Joshua 7:11
Sin in the camp of God's community brought His judgment against that camp
America is about individuality, the Bible is about covenantal solidarity

PP 4-Nehemiah's prayer focused on affirmation (8-10)

Nehemiah was bold in prayer, affirming the promises God had made to His people
***"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 dispersed be under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there 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."*** 8-10

He had already confessed all of their unfaithfulness, he is returning to His God
And God promised that should His people return to Him, He will restore them
God, You saved them from Egypt by Your power, redeeming them to be your chosen people
You do not break your promises, You still love them, and are ready to act!
I affirm your faithfulness and ask to restore and rebuild your people, for Your glory!

We can and should do this as well, affirming God's Word He has spoken
Have you made a mess of your life?
Irresponsible spending is fun until creditors demand their money
"Stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" until it turns both bitter and
moldy, and your marriage lies in ruin
Worshipping the idol of your career is fulfilling until you are used up and spit out and realize you
lost your family at that altar
God sees the rubble of your broken walls and He is shouting out His faithful love to you!
Affirm God's promises and the do what Nehemiah did, boldly ask God for help

PP 5-Nehemiah's prayer ends with petition (11)

“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.”

Nehemiah has elevated God, and in doing so, even the most powerful person in the world was just a ‘*man*’ before him

Be elevating God, his mind had been undergirded by truth

By inviting God to look upon him and hear his prayers, it had exposed his heart before the blazing eyes of his holy God and moved him to confession

Confessing what God reveals in that look cleans the soul and adjusts it to God’s purposes

PP Now Nehemiah can do what David wrote: ***“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”*** **Psalm 37:4**

The desires of this now repentant servant of God are those which God has placed inside his heart
Nehemiah’s heart now in agreement with God’s, and now God will act in power

Pray

Elevation

Invitation

Confession

Affirmation

Petition

Illus Gordon McDonald, in Rebuilding Your Broken World, wrote from one who experienced broken walls and humiliation. “In one of the darkest hours of my broken-world condition, I found myself one day in the front row of a Dallas church where I had been asked to give a talk. I had made a long-term commitment to be there, but had it not been for my hosts' hard work of preparation, I would have tried to cancel my participation. Frankly, I was in no mood to speak to anyone. But I felt constrained not to cancel, and so there I was. When the service began, a group of young men and women took places at the front of the congregation and began to lead with instruments and voices in a chain of songs and hymns: some contemporary, others centuries old. As we moved freely from melody to melody, I became aware of a transformation in my inner world. I was being strangely lifted by the music and its content of thankfulness and celebration. If my heart had been heavy, the hearts of others about me were apparently light because, together, we seemed to rise in spirit, the music acting much like the thermal air currents that lift an eagle or a hawk high above the earth. I not only felt myself rising out of the darkness of my spirit, but I felt as if I were being bathed, washed clean. And as the gloom melted away, a quiet joy and a sense of cleansing swept in and took its place. I felt free to express my turbulent emotions with tears. The congregation's praise was a therapy of the spirit: indescribable in its power. It was a day I shall never forget. No one in that sanctuary knew how high they had lifted one troubled man far above his broken-world anguish. Were there others there that day feeling as I did? Perhaps they would have affirmed as I did: *God was there.*”