

**PP** **Nehemiah: Four Dimension (4D) Praying**

Nehemiah 9:5b-15

Part 29, 3/9-10, 2013

**PP** *“The mark of great prayers, in the Bible or elsewhere, is that they express a great awareness of a great God.”<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer*

Two weeks ago, we began to look at five principles in preparing our hearts to pray

A heart of humility, a heart that confesses sin, a heart filled with God’s powerful Word, a heart yearning for God’s full attention and a heart that blesses God

These same exact principles, as one person wrote me after the sermon, are found in Nehemiah’s personal prayer in chapter 1

They are found throughout the bible, and a heart prepared to pray guards us from praying like the hypocrites in Matthew 6

Today, in Nehemiah 9, what we will see is 4D praying, with 4 distinct and wonderful dimensions that function as principles we can weave into our prayer lives to foster a rich and intimate relationship with God

**PP Principle #1-Look Up (9:5b-15)...‘You’**

The first dimension of this praying congregation is upward

Look at how it begins in verse 5, ***“Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”*** Nehemiah 9:5b

Their hearts did not begin prayer like ours so often do, mired in our own circumstances

Notice **verse 6** for example: ***“You are the LORD, You alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and You preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships You.”***

**PP** 57 times the word ‘You’ occurs in Nehemiah 9

**PP** *How often do you use the word ‘I’ when praying?*

Just begin there for a moment, before you even begin to pray and it may already begin to transform our prayer by centering on God

At the beginning, their hearts looked up to God’s ***‘glorious name, which is exalted above all’***

That may sound a little odd to exalt a name above all

In the Bible, the name of a person represented the character and attributes of the person

If you slander someone’s name, you slander their character

If you praise someone’s name, you praise their character

The saying, ‘She’s made a name for herself’ goes way beyond just the meaning of a name

**PP** This is why the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment is so important: ***“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”*** Exodus 20:7

Taking God’s name in vain is to empty it of its exalted status and reduce it to the common

We are not to carelessly say, ‘O my God’, or use His name in connection with cursing

Christ has put His name on us, Christian, and to carry His name into a lifestyle of sin is to reduce it by defaming the reputation of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer, Praying the Lord’s Prayers, p. 35

His name is exalted ***“above all blessing and praise”***

**PP** The word ***‘praise’*** comes from a Latin word for value, worth or price

**PP** Look at the word ***‘appraisal’*** and you will see it

The greater value, worth or price, the greater the praise

We praise God when we recognize that He is more worthy than anything or anyone

To bless God’s name is to acknowledge and praise Him for His great acts and eternal character

And this is how the Levites lead the people in prayer...lifting up God’s acts and character

### **PP a) God is the faithful One**

The depth of our prayer lives is directly connected to the height of our exaltation of God

In other words, the more we know God the more highly we exalt Him

***“You are the LORD, you alone.” 6a***

When you see the word ***‘LORD’*** with all upper case letters, it is the name of God, Jehovah, the name of God that was sacred to the Jews

They wouldn’t write it, instead writing Yahweh but pronouncing it Adonai

Jehovah is the personal name of God, given to His people, the name revealed to Moses

**PP** You see the root word of this name in Exodus 3, ***“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” 13-14***

***‘I am’***, not ***‘It is’***, because God is personal

***‘I am’*** not ***‘I came to be’*** because He is eternally self-existent, no beginning or end, or change  
He is the promise making God who is the promise keeping God

By the way, and I don’t have time to expand much on this, but the Person of the Triune God speaking from that burning bush to Moses, was Jesus

**PP** Jesus Himself said, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” John 8:23-24***

Jesus is the ***‘I am’***, Jehovah, our personal, promise-keeping God, Whose name ***“is above every***

**PP** ***name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:9-11***

**PP** ***“For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory.” 2 Corinthians 1:20***

As we bless God’s glorious name above all, it is the name of Jesus that we praise

Let me offer some brief and practical ways that can help us praise His glorious name:

**PP** **P**osition-get down, get low, get on your face or knees, bow your head deeply

Not because of the Peanuts comic strip where Lucy walked in on Linus as he was learning to pray. Linus said to Lucy, ***‘I think I’ve made a new discovery...’***. ***‘What is it’*** she asked him. ***‘If you hold your hands upside down, you get the opposite of what you pray for!’***

There is no magic in a low position, but it expresses the lowly heart, full of humility

**PP** **R**eflect on Jesus, what He has done for you and what He continues to do each day

**PP** **A**ttitude check...trade in the ***I’s*** and ***me’s***, for more ***‘You’s’*** and ***‘Your’s’***

**PP** **I**nvestigate the Scriptures and learn from those who enjoyed a deep prayer life

**PP** **S**ecret place-Find a place with no distractions where you can regularly meet with God

**PP** “What a man is alone on his knees before God—that He is and no more.”

Murray McCheyne<sup>2</sup>

While we can pray on the bus, or behind the wheel, it is not free of distractions  
Get away from people and distraction, and be like Daniel who knew God more deeply than  
most, who prayed three times each day in the upper chamber of his home

**PP** Exalt God by bragging on Him and His character and His perfect acts in your life and others

### **PP b) God is the Powerful One**

Illus In Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town*, the character Jane received a letter addressed to her farm, town, county, state, and it continued, ‘the United States of America, Continent of North America, Western Hemisphere, the earth, the solar system, the universe, the Mind of God.’<sup>3</sup>

***“You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you”*** Nehemiah 9:6

Who here owns a Mazda vehicle?

It might interest you to know that the Japanese automaker borrowed the name from the ancient god of Zoroastrianism named Ahura Mazda ( god of light and wisdom)

In Nehemiah’s day, the Persians believed Ahura Mazda created another being, Angra Mainyu, who brought forth evil and ignorance, corrupting creation, but Ahura Mazda, in his wisdom made a way for creation to be restored to its original pure state

I recently read this explanation for the creation of the universe: “*Within the first 100 seconds of the Big Bang, all of the building blocks for all of the matter in the Universe today were formed.*”

*“Scientists do not know how the moon was created, but the generally accepted theory suggests that a large Mars sized object hit the earth causing the moon to splinter off.”*

The Jews exalted God, Who ***‘made the heaven, the heaven of heavens’***

The Jewish people understood that there were three heavens: the blue sky above, the starry night sky, and the place where God ruled over all, the ***‘heaven of heavens’***

God made them all along ***‘with all their hosts’***, either the stars in the night sky or the angels in God’s presence, who worship and serve God

All the wonder of the universe-big and small- reflects the glory of our Creator God

The Levites have taken their people to the depths of God in prayer, looking up to see His faithful love, His creative power, and now the next attribute of God

### **PP c) God is the Gracious One**

Our Creator God is transcendent, ever above us on His throne keeping the universe in order, and at the same, immanent, with us, exerting His power in us

He is ever above us and infinitely greater than us, yet always with us and dwelling among us

<sup>2</sup> J.I. Packer, *Praying the Lord’s Prayer*, p. 15

<sup>3</sup> Philip Yancy, *Prayer*, p. 23

**PP** This is the balance that Jesus has taught us in His prayer, ***“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name”*** Matthew 6:9

Illus In India, the word for father is Pita (with an *it* sound). The important thing to know however is that you do not call your father Pita even though that is the correct word. You always add the suffix *jee*, *Pita-jee*. Because *jee* denotes respect and reverence. The closest parallel in the U.S. is the southern upbringing of ‘Yes sir, daddy’. That which is dearest is also revered.

Our omnipotent creator God, who created everything from nothing, has poured His grace upon us for no reason other than His desire and will

God’s grace is never deserved, never earned, always freely given and always transformative  
And this is the third attribute of God that the Levites exalt

**PP** ***“You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham.”*** 9:7

God chose Abram for no other reason than it was His will to do so, and it changed his life

**PP** ***Abram*** means *exalted father*, but he didn’t even have any children, his wife was barren  
Even his name was a constant reminder of his plight

**PP** God changed his name to ***Abraham***, *father of a multitude*, before Abraham ever had a child

He changed Jacob to Israel, the one who contended with God

He changed Simon to Peter which means rock, who would be a strong pillar for the church

He changed Saul who was filled with self-ambition and arrogance, to Paul, a name that means small, capturing the humble character of a life of unmatched usefulness in God’s hands

His grace is still changing names

You may have been called an addict before, but God’s grace can break those chains and  
and make you an overcomer

You may have been called worthless as a child, but exalt the name-changing God of grace and  
He will begin to transform you by His love

Friends, no matter your situation, God has the power and His grace can change your name and  
give you a new life that pleases Him

Christian, you are not who you were, you have been remade and changed by grace!

So look up to our gracious name-changing God and draw hope that He will continue to change  
and transform you into the man and woman He wants you to be!

In fact, draw hope from the truth that God will change the name of all His faithful:

**PP** ***“To the one who conquers... I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”*** Revelation 2:17

In ancient Rome, a white stone was awarded to a person on trial who was proven innocent

A black stone went to those who were proved to be guilty

White stones were also given to those who won the Olympic games, with their name inscribed

That new name will be your adoptive name unique to you, evidence that you are God’s child for  
eternity and your guarantee of all the rights and privileges you will receive for eternity

Our name-changing God is full of eternal grace, so exalt Him above all others

How do these truths transform us?

Significantly, going down deep with God in prayer, looking up at His amazing attributes

Illus Calvin Miller in his book, Into the depths with God, shared a time he went to the great barrier reef with his son

He decided to snorkel on the surface, while his son went deep with scuba tanks on his back

At the end of the day over dinner, they talked of their day and he heard the wonder in his son's voice as he described all that he saw and touched

The most that Calvin had to share of his experiences was a sunburned and painful back

God wants to draw you into the depths of a relationship with Him, and prayer is the key

Friends, go deep with God, strap on your spiritual tanks and get in your secret place and pray

Look up, and see His faithful love, His creative power, and His eternal name-changing grace

Pray