

Amen.

Amen.

I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Nehemiah as we are back into our

Let Us Pray series, looking at some of the most powerful prayers in Scripture.

You can look on your electronic device, you can grab one of the Pew Bibles, or you can bring your own very copy of God's Word.

Here at Pinewood, we believe there's just one place in the universe where you can go to find absolute truth, and it is the Bible, which is the very Word of God.

Every single word of it is directly inspired by Him.

It is inerrant, meaning it has no errors.

So what God says is true.

is true.

It's infallible that it will never fail, never be proven wrong, never contain error, so you and I can trust it completely as our only rule for faith and life.

And today as we hear God's Word, watch Nehemiah pray his way forward, that he is recognizing that God has given to him a broken heart and a burden that pushes him to his knees to cry out to God for favor

that he would be able to withstand the calling that he has been given, and that through it he would glorify God.

Hear now the word of the Lord from the book of Nehemiah, chapter 1, verses 4 through 11.

Nehemiah says, "'As soon as I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days.

And I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

And I said, "'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, 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, 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 and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you have commanded your servant Moses."

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 outcasts are in uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them 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.

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.

Now I was cupbearer,

to the king.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Let's pray.

Father, we do give you thanks for your word.

And we do pray that today we would be those.

who you give such a burden for something or someone or a situation in our lives that we would look to you, knowing that you and you only are the only one who's able to bring about success.

So, Father, we pray that you would increase our faith today, but that we would be a praying people.

And I pray, Father, that the words of my mouth, the meditations of my heart would be pleasing to you, O God, my rock and redeemer.

It's in Christ's name that we pray.

Amen.

You may be seated.

Now, in 2016, a great film came out called Hacksaw Ridge.

I actually ended up going seeing it with a group of guys from the church here.

They're all retired, and they would go see movies.

I don't know if they're still doing that or if I didn't.

I embarrassed them somehow because I never got invited again.

But if you're familiar with that movie, it is the story of Desmond Doss, who was a conscientious objector, but became a medic in World War II.

He didn't carry a weapon at all, but rather wanted to serve his nation.

And the movie really captures tonight.

He stayed on the Maida Escarpment, it's called, which is like this cliff area there in Okinawa.

in which he was praying over and over again with tears in his eyes, with passion in his heart, Lord, help me get one more.

Before he moved, before he did anything,

He prayed.

He sought God because before this impossible task that was placed before him, before he knew would ultimately or possibly result in his death, he asked for the Lord's favor.

Before the work, he began to pray, just like we'll see in our passage today.

that that's what Nehemiah did.

Just a little background.

You can read the first four verses, but just know this.

Nehemiah is in Susa.

He is the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I.

the most powerful man in the world at that time.

He hears news of the fact that the temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem, but the problem is Ezra had gone about 15 years before Nehemiah and had realized that the people were falling back into the very sins that led them to exile.

And even though God in his faithfulness brought them back, they were doing the exact same thing.

And more than that, the temple and the city of Jerusalem lay exposed to marauders.

Because there were no walls and no gates.

And the state of God's people and the state of God's city moved Nehemiah to do something.

To do something that no servant should ever do.

And that is to ask the king something.

That's not his role.

Advisors, friends, counselors, family, they can ask the king.

But not if you're one of the staff.

Not if you're a cup bearer.

And yet he knows that if he could just have favor with this king, everything that Jerusalem would need, everything that would encourage his people to be faithful to God can be given.

But he recognizes, just like Esther, to go before the king and ask something that you were not invited to ask, to be a part of something or to expect something in which you have no standing to expect.

could result in immediate death.

But Nehemiah was so moved, moved by his love for the people of God and for the things of God, the city of God, that he was willing to take that risk.

Now, I think for you and I, we oftentimes find ourselves capable of handling what God has presented before us.

Most of you go through your day and expecting, well, what you're experiencing, what you're dealing with, well, that's just life.

And you live your life on your own.

Trying and seeking to accomplish whatever task, whatever you find yourself in, the situation that surrounds you or the circumstance or people that you're interacting with, let's be honest, you normally seek to handle that yourself.

In fact, you might take some principles from Dale Carnegie.

Maybe you'll throw in a little Tony Robbins in there.

Maybe you'll learn how to have your emotional intelligence, which, by the way, that's good stuff to do all of those things.

It's good to consider what other people are thinking.

In fact, I encourage you to come to Pastor Dennis' RW360 class.

Or you can come to Pastor Dan's class and you can learn about the times of waiting when we're waiting for God to act.

That time of waiting is not wasted, but rather it can be intentional and full of purpose.

Or maybe you just want to know more about God's Word.

And in the Old Testament, you can sit under the feet of Pastor Ren as he opens up the Pentateuch for all of us.

Or maybe, just like us, you really just want to know about Jesus.

And if that's the case, you can join two of our elders, John Campbell and Rick Roberts.

Now, I walked around today.

Today was a great day.

We at least had probably over 150 people in Sunday school.

And so we're so thankful that this ministry is something that we really feel called to be and to do.

I do have a hard time sometimes with church ministry.

And the reason why is that

Well, there's a lot of reasons.

I'm not going to get into it.

But I love what I do.

But somebody reached out to me that's been a part of Pinewood in the past and others, and I didn't meet all their expectations.

I am not as good-looking maybe as some of the other pastors or maybe not as exciting as something else.

But yet, I find it time and time again that when individuals are then faced with difficult circumstances...

They call me, or they talk about coming back to Pinewood.

Now, my heart wants to say, well, send your pastor that you're currently with a video since all you see of him is a video.

Don't do that stuff.

That's wrong.

Don't think that.

But let me tell you this.

I feel for all pastors, whether they're on video or in person.

There is so much hurt and so much pain and so much suffering and so many difficulties that happen in this world that no number of pastors are enough to bring about the care and the gospel encouragement that Scripture brings.

But we might have, we might have success when each of us realizes that that's our job as well.

I do mourn with people who mourn and even those who may have hurt my feelings or said I wasn't good enough.

My heart is still broken when I hear what they're experiencing when they're living in a broken and fallen world.

You guys know my story.

I don't want to talk about it.

There's aspects where myself has been broken with my heart condition.

The fact that my life has been broken with a horrible disease.

Brokenness is out there, and I mourn.

And when I hear things, it drives me to my knees.

And you know what?

My own life has set that example.

Today, I want you to think about what burden do you have?

What experience have you been a part of or have seen others experience?

experience that breaks your heart.

You see, before the work begins, work that we can't do on our own, work that it's impossible for us to accomplish by ourselves, drives us to our knees and to the place where we should have begun with, and that is prayer.

You see, the first thing that you see from Nehemiah here is that prayer begins with burden.

As

And I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

How quickly do we just say when someone pours out their heart that they're experiencing difficulty or pain, we say, I'll be praying for you.

And yet, really no prayer is even offered.

But what have you heard or what have you seen that would cause you to mourn for days, even fasting?

And it might not even be intentional fasting.

You're so upset and so overwhelmed you have no appetite even to eat.

That's where Nehemiah is.

And look what has driven him to his knees is the position of the people of God and the things of God.

Drove him so much to his knees that he began to ask, Lord, how can I be a part of seeing you remedy this situation?

What cause, what person, what thing has brought you to your knees?

For William Wilberforce, that was the slave trade.

In fact, in October 28th of 1787, he wrote this in his journal, God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of people.

And that line is the hinge of his life.

And not only that, but for two years, William did nothing but pray.

In fact, at that time, he was a member of Parliament.

And after his conversion and after realizing the world needs Jesus, he said, I'm going to leave politics.

This is a waste of time, and I'm going to just go into full-time ministry.

But it was John Newton, the pastor, the former slave trader, the author of the hymn Amazing Grace, who said, no, no, no.

Serve God where you are.

Think of Nehemiah.

Now, you might not be a cupbearer to the king, but where are you?

Where are you at work, at school, retirement?

What groups and communities are you a part of?

Do you have a burden for them and their well-being and that they might be free
that they might love the Lord.

Or maybe it's in your own family.

William Wilberforce had this and for two years he did nothing but pray before he made his first speech.

And not only that, he worked and labored for many years until March of 1807.

The Slave Trade Act was passed.

And basically what it did was abolish the slave trade.

But it wasn't 20 years after that until it was completely eradicated in Great Britain.

William stayed focused.

He was personally engaged.

He mourned for the condition of those who were trapped in this chattel slavery.

And he used what God had given to him in the place that he was in Parliament.

to make that change, but that change didn't begin until his entire life was consumed with coming before God that God would grant success.

It begins with that burden.

What burdens you today?

Who burdens you today?

What are you praying for that brings you to tears desiring that God would grant success?

Well, the great thing about Nehemiah is that he gives us a good pattern to follow.

You see, Nehemiah doesn't bring and begin with his problem.

He begins with praise.

And so he declares, and I said, O God, Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.

He prays to a covenant-keeping God, a God who says he is steadfast in his love.

Let me teach you a Hebrew word.

Hesed, hesed.

It's a single word in Hebrew, but it takes multiple words for us to explain in English.

And hesed is that steadfast love, that covenantal love.

What he's saying is, in hesed, is that I love you even if I don't feel it.

And my love will be shown in what I do.

Now, I love romantic love.

Those of you who are married, romantic love is fantastic.

And you know what's really fantastic is when that romantic love is aligned with that steadfast love.

But let's be honest, there's time where the romantic love isn't there.

You're just not feeling it.

But it isn't and shouldn't change that solid, steadfast, foundational, covenantal love.

And so Nehemiah begins not with his problem but with saying, God, this is who you are.

Yeah, I can look at my life and it looks messed up.

It looks difficult.

It looks painful.

Or I see others that are struggling and my heart goes out to them.

Or I see the lost in our neighborhoods or community.

I see the struggle that young people are dealing with today.

So much different than when I grew up.

It's a lot different when you grew up as well.

And it breaks our hearts.

And so he begins to cry out, realizing this is a big problem, big problem.

And maybe you have a big problem in your life right now.

But friends, you have a bigger God.

You have a bigger God.

And so I encourage you to remember who God is and not allow that problem

to persuade us that this is something too big for God.

It's not.

Is it too big for you?

Yeah, Nehemiah knew that.

Nehemiah knew that going before the king could result in death, and more than that, what he was asking was so extraordinarily out of the ordinary, so expensive, so gracious, that he knew that he would not have success unless God granted it.

And so he declared the truth about who God is.

Thirdly, we see that prayer includes confession.

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 confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned.

We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant David."

Notice a little bit how this is somewhat like a worship service in his prayer.

Kind of what we have here as we recognize there is a call to come, and then there is a recognition of who God is.

When we have our call to worship, we're reminded of this great and almighty God.

Nehemiah is reminded of how great and marvelous and amazing God is.

And friends, every time we have our gaze drawn closer to Jesus, the brighter it is of what we see, the more darkness we understand exists in ourselves.

When you come near to God, when you are at a point where there is no hope and no success apart from him, and when you recognize how amazing he is, the first response should be confession.

Confession.

Nehemiah is saying, I heard about the people that are there in Jerusalem.

They're taking wives from the other nations.

They're doing the exact same thing over and over and over again.

I feel for Nehemiah.

I feel and have felt Nehemiah's hurt.

Where I work with individuals...

Even those that have addictions and you seek to help them and yet they fall back into the ways that brought harm to them.

And it doesn't have to be something you might be like, well, I'm not addicted to anything.

No, your sin, your words that you say, your attitude towards your spouse or kids or neighbors.

Prayer owns our sin.

I think prayer that moves heaven

Starts with a humbled heart on earth.

Here's the thing I love about Nehemiah.

He does a better job than so many of us.

It's always good to talk about other people's sin.

Oh, Lord, please be with my spouse.

Please be with my kids.

Please be with a neighbor.

Please be with that guy who cut me off.

They're so sinful.

Lord, I'm so thankful that I'm not like all of them.

Nehemiah isn't even there.

And yet he recognizes that he has sinned.

Yeah, maybe he's not over in Jerusalem and hanging around with these crazy women that all these guys are marrying up with.

But he knows that he himself has sinned.

And as such, even though it's not their sin, it's his sin.

You see, part of the gospel is us understanding that all have sinned.

and fall short of the glory of God.

And we sometimes get caught up the fact that we may have gotten a little bit closer to the mark than somebody else.

But the reality is we both have missed the mark.

We all have missed the mark.

And so that should create within us humility.

Humility.

You're asking God things.

You're frustrated with God.

You're upset that He's not moving or acting like you think He should.

Well, wake up.

You're not moving or acting like He thinks you should.

And we should acknowledge that, not in order to gain something from God, but rather to gain an understanding of our need for Him.

If you're living your life free from prayer,

If prayer isn't something that the first thing you wake up in the morning, you're crying out and declaring who God is and who you desire to be for Him, then you're not much different than what was happening in Jerusalem as many centuries ago.

Nehemiah intercedes.

He recognizes his own sin and he intercedes for others.

Friend, we can do that.

We can recognize our sin and intercede for others.

Now let me tell you, there's a better intercessor than Nehemiah.

That's Jesus who knew no sin.

He intercedes for us.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

He wept over us and his people because we were like sheep without a shepherd.

He desired that the Father would send the Holy Spirit

so that we would be comforted.

Here's someone who has everything and yet is burdened by what you and I are experiencing.

Prayer includes confession.

Now here's the point you need to remember.

You forgot everything else, here's the point, write it down.

Prayer remembers God's promises.

Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the people.

But if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to a place that I have chosen to make my name.

They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.

How many of you, if you have kids or even as a child, asked your parents something and they said, yes, we'll do that.

And then it didn't happen.

And you go to your parent and you say, but you said so.

And maybe that frustrates them.

It shouldn't.

They should recognize that they are teaching and that we are teaching integrity.

If you're going to say something, you should do it.

Nehemiah is saying to his dad, you said so.

This is what you have said.

And it's not whining.

It's trust that God is faithful and will do what he says.

Oftentimes we're asking, we're asking, and then we do confess saying, I'm not worthy to get it, or we leave saying, well, if God doesn't do it, it makes sense, I don't deserve it anyways.

That's not Nehemiah.

Nehemiah says, this is what you said.

This is what you've said.

And so here are just a couple passages.

Isaiah 41.10, fear not for I am with you.

Be not dismayed for I am your God.

I will strengthen you.

I will help you.

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

You know what my prayers sound like nowadays?

Lord, you said so.

You told me not to fear.

I'm afraid.

You told me not to be dismayed, but I'm dismayed.

You're my God.

You said you'll strengthen me.

You said so.

He said, you'd help me, help me.

You said so.

Uphold me, as you said, by your righteous right hand.

Sounds pretty arrogant.

You might be saying, pastor, don't you dare talk to my God like that.

Don't you be so demanding.

But we see here, and we see in Jesus, if God said it, that settles it.

Forget the whole part about you if you believe it or not.

God said it, I believe it, that settles it.

Doesn't matter if you believe it or not.

God said it, that settles it.

Or maybe you're not sure what to do or where to go.

Psalm 32, I will instruct you and teach you in the ways you should go.

I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Lord, you said you're going to guide me.

You said you're going to counsel me.

I need help.

That's what you said.

And this boldness comes when we are at our wit's end.

Maybe you've not been to the point where you're crying out saying, God, you said so because right now you're operating as if he's not there and maybe he's like a tag team partner.

If you can't do it, then high five him and he'll come in off the ropes and give the atomic elbow.

Maybe your life is turned upside down and you're anxious and you're struggling.

Well, Jesus said, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

Not as the world gives do I give to you.

Let your hearts not be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

God, I'm troubled.

Jesus, I'm afraid, but you told me not to be because you're here.

You said so.

I can't make it through this.

This is too hard.

I don't have the strength.

God says, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest in me.

God, I'm at my physical end.

I can't do it.

I'm weak.

But you said that your strength and your power is made perfect.

I'm doing my part.

I'm weak.

You said...

Man, it just feels like this faith stuff, I've been doing it so long, doesn't feel fresh.

It feels dead to me.

I wish I was renewed like I see in others who have this enthusiasm, this excitement, but, you know, the things of the world have just kind of beat me down.

Ezekiel says, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put in you.

I'll remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And I'll put my spirit within you and cause you to walk on my statutes and be careful to obey all my rules.

Lord, you said you're going to help me with this.

I'm struggling in this area.

Whether it's temptation or frustration or pain or difficult or getting worn down.

Man, I'm going through some fires.

I feel like the water's up to my neck.

I feel like I'm about to drown.

God says in Isaiah 43, fear not for I have redeemed you.

I've called you by name.

You are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I'll be with you.

And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

You said that I'm not going to be burned.

I'm feeling burned up, Lord.

You said that I won't drown.

I feel like I'm sucking in water.

Friends, know the Word so you can pray the Word.

God delights to be trusted on what He has said.

Now, you might be out there saying, wow, that seems way, way more than what I'm doing.

I really feel I should do that or the need to do that.

Well, just wait.

Our world is broken and sinful enough that you might have something that breaks your heart.

Maybe it's something that you see.

Maybe it's something that you're experiencing.

And so, Nehemiah, he's burdened.

He knows who God is.

He knows that He's greater than the situation that's happening there in Jerusalem.

He recognizes that he and of himself is

not worthy of anything from God.

He confesses his sinfulness.

He confesses his lack of faithfulness.

He confesses that he doubts and all of these things, and then he is reminded of God's promises.

And he's bold in it, not timid.

I mean, he's going to be asking a king.

He's going to do something bold.

And if he's able to do that with a king who owes him nothing, he's saying, I can go to the God of the universe who says, ask.

See, real prayer, true prayer, boldly asks for favor.

Oh Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and 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.

This man, he's talking about the king.

He's about to ask for a long leave of absence and millions in resources.

And Nehemiah understands that favor with the king or with anyone or in any event is granted by the hand of God.

So, friends, don't just pray in generalities, Lord, be with so-and-so.

God's like, I'm omnipresent.

I'm everywhere.

What do you mean be with them?

Don't pray in generalities.

Pray for specific outcomes in line with God's mission based upon God's Word.

Now, what bold prayer for favor have you been afraid to pray?

Maybe about the Powerball.

Did anyone win?

It'd be great to have the parking lot, but guess what?

We're on our way.

Parking lot's coming.

In fact, you can pray.

That everything goes well with the planning committee.

That's the next step.

It's before the county.

And Lord willing, we'll get this thing going.

It's been a pretty bold prayer for about 17 years for me and about 30 years for everybody else.

Nehemiah is interceding on behalf of the people of Jerusalem.

I told you there's a better Nehemiah.

It's Jesus Christ.

Before He faced the cross, He prayed in the garden.

He declared God's greatness.

He owned our sin and took our place, and He held and clung to the Father's will, and He secured favor for us forever.

In fact, Hebrews 7.25 tells us He always lives to intercede for us.

Don't pray this prayer.

We're back to our prayers for the week.

Take your picture, send it out.

I'm going to warn you on this one.

Only pray this if you're serious.

Lord, give me a burden.

Let's pray it together.

Lord, give me a burden worth praying over and the faith to believe you will grant favor as I follow you.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Prayers don't have to be long.

They don't always have to be the same thing.

I have a daily prayer.

Lord, help me make it a great day for Dory today.

And then I get to work.

Pray that God would advance His kingdom.

Pray that.

Then get to work.

That the lost would be found.

Whether it's in your family or your neighbors or friends.

Pray.

Pray.

Pray.

and then get to work.

Ask the Lord to give you a burden worth praying over.

If your prayer life is, well, at least give thanks to God that your life's easy right now.

Because let me tell you, there are many in this room whose lives are not that way, and they are crying out and mourning and weeping as they are boldly asking God and reminding God of who

He is, so that their faith would be increased.

Here's your takeaway.

Bold faith begins with brokenhearted prayer.

When you've come to your end, when you finally exhausted all of your abilities, talents, efforts, and resources, then and only then, when you see a problem or a difficulty that you know you have no solution to, as Nehemiah looked at the situation there in Jerusalem, he knew he himself had no ability, no power, but he knew one that did.

And he asks the God of heaven, out of a broken heart, to do what God said he would.

So friends, don't bypass the burden.

Sit with it long before you start trying to solve it.

Start by declaring who God is.

Let him know that you know what he said, that you're reminded of the fact that he is great.

and of his deep chesed love that even when you've blown it, even when you haven't been all that attentive, he's not changed in his love for you.

Confess quickly and specifically your failures, your part in the problem, if it's with you or family or friends.

Pray the promises.

Open the Bible and say, God, you said it.

and then ask for favor, that God would grant you success, and then in faith take the next step.

After hours of gunfire there on that escarpment, Desmond Doss continued to lower wounded men down by a rope, a rope that mutilated his hands.

pain that was unbearable, each time whispering the same words, Lord, help me get one more.

That night felt endless, but the prayer came first, and the courage and the grace necessary to do the task came after.

That's what bold faith looks like.

It doesn't start with pride or confidence or swagger.

It starts with a broken heart.

mourning and weeping over the situation.

It started with his heart that couldn't walk past the wounded, and it starts on our knees.

And then with God's help, it stands up and moves towards the pain, asking and seeking that God would grant success.

So who is or what is your one more?

What's that prayer that breaks your heart?

What's that need that you have that is beyond your own ability to solve?

What is it that brings you to a place of brokenheartedness?

I know it's hard and I know it's tough.

I don't wish the pain on anyone, but I do wish the praise, the protection, the power, and the presence of God in those times.

Bold faith begins with brokenhearted prayer.

One more prayer before you act.

Then faith moves you to action.