



WEEK 1 – SUPPLICATION

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... it's a common practice for Christians to make a sacrifice for the season leading up to Easter. So, did you give anything up for Lent this year? Perhaps the standard chocolate or soda? Maybe you went a little off-book and gave up caring what your boss thinks of you? (Maybe now that you know that's a thing, you're going to take on a Lenten sacrifice. Could be worth it!)

OPENING PRAYER

God of Provision, help us to align our desires with what you want for our lives.

INTRODUCTION

Today marks the first week of Lent. Now, if you're unfamiliar with that church word, Lent is just the 6 weeks that lead up to Easter. And for

centuries, the season of Lent has been used by Christians as a way to prepare our hearts for the coming celebration of Christ's resurrection. It's a time of self-reflection, of repentance, of sacrifice, of purification... a time to get rid of anything that stands in the way of our relationship with God. (Hence the reason you gave up meat on Fridays or chocolate or give-a-craps for your boss.) So, if the point is to do some self-reflection and purification to prepare our hearts for the celebration of Easter, in order to achieve that goal, every year we try to do a coinciding Lenten series that will help. And in my opinion, the best way to help you achieve that goal is to do a series on prayer. Over the course of our history, we've done some solid prayer series. We've covered historic prayers, like the Prayer of St. Francis, The Wesley Covenant Prayer, the Lord's Prayer, all good stuff. (Go back and review those if you need some Lenten devotions.) But last year, I did a whole series on *how* to pray. It was a good series, maybe a good one to go back over if you need a refresher. But in that series, we didn't focus much on what to say, because the majority of prayer should not be talking. You should be listening. The start of prayer is quieting your mind and heart and listening for what *God* has to say to *you*. And only a very small part, (6.27% by my calculations,) is what *you* say. With that said, however, what you say *is* important and can be truly powerful for your relationship with God and for your preparation for Easter. So, this Lent, we're going to do a sequel to last year's. Continue to begin with quieting yourself, with silence and solitude, and listening for God's voice. And then move to what will be the focus for this Lent.... what do *you* say in prayer?

Setup Question: Anyone comfortable praying extemporaneously? Like, you're the person who always has to say grace before the meal at family gatherings. Who do you know who just prays well? They drop some eloquent pray-bomb, and you're left going, "yup, I'm never praying in public again."

SERIES SETUP

Here's the thing... no one is just born with the ability to pray eloquently. There are formulas and rubrics for what to actually say in a prayer. And that's what we're going to focus on for this Lent: what do you say when you pray? Well, for that, we're going to use...

THE SCRIPT

There are types of prayers that, when you get these down, give you a roadmap for what to say and can help unlock the power of your prayer life. Now, like I said earlier, prayer is 93.73% listening, (yes, I did the math for you.) Always start by quieting your surroundings, quieting yourself, and quieting your heart and mind to listen for God's voice. Then, and only then, do you move on to what to say. But when you do, if you know this SCRIPT, your prayers can be powerful and effective in helping deepen your relationship with God and others, in getting through the struggles and difficulties in life, and aligning yourself to God's will. So, where do we start? Well, the SCRIPT isn't just a script... The Script is an acronym. Each one of these letters is a type of prayer. (I've not seen this anywhere, so... Trademark Mike Whitaker Enterprises.) Six is a lot, and they're all big words... don't

worry, we'll get through it together. And so as not to overwhelm you, we'll take them one at a time. Now, the first 2 are about us, the middle 2 are about others, the final 2 are about God. And to bring them home, we'll look at an example of each from the Bible. But first...

Question 1: What do you usually pray about? What are your top 3 topics or requests? Do you notice themes or habits? I mean, there are only so many times you can pray for your boss to not be a butthole before you start to notice a pattern. Ready, go!

SCRIPTURE

So, we begin with the S... and to get at the S, we're going to go back to the Old Testament, and the book of Nehemiah. Here's your set up. We're in about the 5th century BCE. The Israelites had been conquered and exiled by the Babylonians. But the Persians overthrow the Babylonians and allow many Israelites to return back to Judea. Nehemiah is identified as a "cupbearer" in the palace of the king, which probably means he has some status in the Israelite community there, a leader of sorts. Plus, he does have the ear of the King, whose name is Artaxerxes. (Say that three times fast.) This will come in handy. Because, he still has some contact with the exiles who have been allowed to go back to Jerusalem, and in chapter 1, he receives word that the people in Jerusalem are not doing well. The city is in ruins. The temple is destroyed. And the walls of the city are rubble. And so, Nehemiah is distraught. But as a servant of the king, odds are he doesn't have to PTO to go back and help. So, verse 4 says, he fell to

the ground and wept. He fasted and mourned and prayed for days... (remember this, it's important later.) And in chapter 1, he recounts the prayer he prayed...

Read Nehemiah, chapter 1, verses 4 through 11.

Nehemiah wants to ask the King for permission to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. And so, this prayer is his cry of desperation to God, that God would soften the king's heart and allow him to go. Nehemiah give us a prayer that is a model for us to follow and begin the SCRIPT.

Question 1: Consider this Scripture and Nehemiah's prayer. What stands out to you about his situation and what requests of God? Ever prayed a prayer like that?

REFLECTION

Nehemiah makes a request of God. This type of prayer has a name and is the S in our SCRIPT. These prayers are called Prayers of...

SUPPLICATION

Yup, it's a big word, but it's easy to remember. The root of the word Supplication is supply... so this simply means asking God for what you want. Now, it's not that simple. I mean, I've been asking God for \$1M for years... still waiting. But we're starting with this for a reason. Partly because, this type of prayer is where most of us start with prayer.

“What can God help me with?” So we’re kinda getting it out of the way... cuz the next 5 are really where we go deep. But we’re also starting here because when you do this one right... it can be one of the greatest things for bringing you and closer God together. This one holds real power for preparing your heart for Easter, and deepening your relationship with your Creator.

So, how do we do it right? Well, Nehemiah was praying a prayer of supplication. So let’s take a closer look at his prayer and what we can learn. What do we learn from Nehemiah? Well, the first thing to note from Nehemiah’s prayer, is that... it’s okay to ask God for what we want. God already knows what you want... God’s pretty smart like that. So you’re not telling Him anything he doesn’t already know. You might as well vocalize it. Can’t hurt.

But our supplication prayers become so much more powerful when we do one other thing that Nehemiah does. Let’s look at how he started... what does he do first? Before he even prays the prayer, it tells us that he fell to the ground and wept, then he fasted and mourned. Before he prays this prayer of supplication, before he goes to God to ask for this request, he slows down to truly search his heart.

Question 2: What does your prayer practice look like? Do you pray like you take Tylenol... as needed when it hurts? Do you have a routine with a set time, location, and definitive amount of coffee in order to get started? Or do you have a continual conversation with

God, whereupon onlookers might think you're talking to the voices in your head... cuz you kinda are?

Nehemiah begins with a period of time to search his heart. What does this do for him? Well, it accomplishes two things. First, taking the time to search his own heart helps him figure out what his heart really wants. I believe that in this time of fasting and mourning he searches his heart and discovers, "man, I really want to go back to Jerusalem and help rebuild it. My hearts desire is to return home." Then, once he figures out what's in his heart, this allows him to be honest and vulnerable with God. God wants you to be vulnerable and honest. When you pray, God would rather you be authentic and real, than fake and flowery. And when you take the time to discover the true desires of your heart, and then honestly and humbly confess that to God, your relationship with your Creator can reach new, incredible depths. That's when it goes beyond the surface level prayers that don't mean as much just cuz you said big words. Nehemiah teaches us to take the time to first search our hearts and then, when we discover our hearts true desire, to take that to God... and your prayers become so much more powerful.

The second thing this does for Nehemiah is, it allows him to align his desires with God's. When we take the time to pause and search our heart, listening for God's voice... even saying the words, "God align my will with yours," or, "God, what do YOU want for my life?" and then align with God's desire for our lives, we're way more likely to get what we want. God whispers in your ear, "you don't need a million dollars,"

or, “no, I can’t make your boss magically disappear.” Instead, God sees the true desires of your heart and says, “instead, that desire of your heart to be a better husband, that I’ll help you with.” “Your request to be more patient and loving, I can work with you on that.” Prayer “works” way better if our desires align with what God wants for our lives.

Question 3: Time to go deep. Take a few moments to breathe, sit quietly, and ask God the question, “What is the deepest desire of my heart?” Then, if you have an answer, go ahead and ask God to grant that request. If you didn’t get an answer, repeat this practice on your own throughout the week, God might not be ready to reveal it just yet. If you’re in a group, discuss the exercise... it’s okay to be a bit vulnerable. It’s how we grow, right?

CLOSING

Nehemiah doesn’t know it yet, but when he prays this prayer of Supplication, and he is authentic and vulnerable with God, and his will aligns with what God wants for him and for his people, he gets his request. We read in the coming chapters that the King acquiesces, he’s allowed to return to Judea, and he and his people rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He gets his heart’s desire. Now, I’m not saying you’ll always get what you ask for. Sometimes, “no,” or, “not yet” is the answer. But that’s a different sermon for a different day. For this week, your challenge is to focus on your prayer of supplication. Take your notes from Nehemiah... begin with getting your heart right. Ask God to reveal the true desire of your heart and to reveal what GOD

wants for your life. Start there, and then, when you grasp that, go to God with vulnerability, honesty, humility, and pray your prayer in earnest. Then keep your eyes open... you never know how God might come through with the supply.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**