

Sermon 3:
HOW TO PUT UP SUPPORTS



Day 1

Sermon Sentence: Prayer and Fasting are two of the best tools to help understand God's call for your life.

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah has heard the plight of his people and now has a heavy burden on his heart towards them. His fallow heart has been replaced with a fertile field that is ready to do the will of God. So, what's next? We see Nehemiah employ the service of two very powerful spiritual tools when taking this need before God. Most of us are familiar with prayer and the other is fasting which we will look at both in detail in the following days of the devotions. Look at Nehemiah's prayer in the passage above. Nehemiah knows how to approach God in a proper prayer!

- Look in detail at the prayer of Nehemiah. In that prayer what are some key elements that stand out?
- Look at Nehemiah 1:5, what is the purpose of this line of the prayer? Does God need reminding of who he is and the promises he has made? What is the purpose of this way of addressing God?
- Look at line 1:6, Nehemiah first asks for God's attention and then professes we are sinners. How often do we ask for God's attention and then offer our own faultlessness before God in our situation and proceed to blame God for something? What are your thoughts?
- In verses 1:8-9, Nehemiah returns to reminding God of elements of the covenant He made with Israel. Now clearly the current situation indicates that God is well aware of these details, so why does Nehemiah offer them before God anyway? Is it for God or man? Why?
- Finally Nehemiah makes a petition, what is it? What does he want to do?

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Day 2

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Matthew 6:5-8

How to pray

Jesus gave instructions on how to pray. In the above scriptures, Jesus points out some common practices in prayer that are not accepted by God. In reality these practices are all religious type expressions and not from a contrite heart from which we should pray. Jesus contrasts two different prayer groups the Jews and pagans. The Jews represent piety and religion. Their lips were honoring God but their hearts were far away and they were praying out of duty not love. (Matthew 15:8) The Jews would make a show of prayer through many words, shouted loudly so all could hear. They would try to out do each other with robes, tassels and prayer boxes. Often they would try to sit in the best seat at the table and synagogues to be thought of as more important. The pagan practices are ritualistic in nature often having elements of bead counting, repetitious speech and even mantras which Jesus counted as babbling and many words. When we pray we must approach from the proper heart turned towards God, contrite and broken. Proud, religious, and mechanical prayers will be rejected because this is not the real heartfelt relationship the Lord desires with us.

- What are your thoughts on Jesus' instructions on prayer above?
- How do you pray? Are there any elements that Jesus has mentioned above that you need to work on?
- Why did the Jewish people pray loud and in sight of everyone? What was in their heart?
- Why did the pagans pray with repetition and many words, what was their hope in this type of prayer?
- Why are we instructed to pray alone? What element of temptation does this eliminate?

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Matthew 6:9-15

What to Pray

Jesus proceeds from what not to do into what to say. Look at the prayer Jesus quotes, many are familiar with this prayer as the “Lord’s Prayer” and have recited it many times. It should be noted that Jesus was not instructing us to say “this” prayer word for word every time although that is okay if it says what you need to say but rather was offering a template to good prayer. Once again the prayer has a basic outline. First we tell God who He is to us, not for His sake but to profess an understanding before Him. Second, we express a desire to be in His will. And third, we petition our needs. When we pray from the proper heart and with the proper method, God will hear you! Remember unanswered prayers are not the same as a prayer unheard. God knows the bigger picture and what we pray for may not always be good for us in light of that bigger picture! God is not a grammar teacher, He is not grading the structure of your prayer, the idea here is to pray in the most effective way however.

- What are your thoughts on the Lord’s prayer? Many were taught to recite this prayer, do you believe this to be the spirit in which this was delivered?
- Compare the prayer in Nehemiah to the Lord’s prayer. Do you see common elements? What are they? How similar are they?
- How do your prayers compare to these examples? Do you have things you would like to change? If so, what?
- Often times we feel like we are babbling when we pray, is this of great concern to God? Why or why not? What is far more important than the structure of our prayer when we pray?

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Day 4

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Matthew 6:16-18

A word on fasting

Fasting seems to be one of the elements of worship that has fallen to the wayside in many christian churches. Fasting in the traditional sense is most commonly thought of as the denial of food during a spiritual battle. The idea is to be so consumed with a spiritual need before the Lord that you are willing to deny the needs of the flesh in order to be more dedicated to the Lord. Fasting can also be the denial of other needs of the flesh as well. For some due to health conditions the fasting of food is not practical or may even be dangerous so they may elect to fast sleep, or even relations with a spouse for a period of time during the time of fasting. The main idea to keep in mind is that we are showing our dedication to the Lord by allowing a discomfort in the flesh. A choosing of spiritual needs over flesh desires.

Interesting note, the origin of the name for the morning meal "breakfast" gets its name from the concept of fasting. Because this was the meal to directly follow an evening of fasting it became known as the break fast meal, later shortened to breakfast.

- What are your thoughts on the concept of fasting?
- Have you ever fasted? Of what and for what purpose?
- Do you feel that fasting is a powerful spiritual tool? Why or why not?
- True fasting from the heart should be about a desperation in the spirit that causes the fasting in the flesh. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Can you think of anything that could lay a burden on your heart so deep that fasting would be natural? What would it be?

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Day 5

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Life Application: Here are some other considerations to make sure that our fasting and prayers are more successful in the attempt. It is a spiritual battle and the enemy's greatest fear is our submission to the Lord's will. He just can't allow that! So examining our hearts and using our spiritual tools to our greatest advantage is the idea of the lesson!

With the proper heart.

Matthew 6:16-18

With sincerity of purpose.

Joel 2:12

In unity.

Esther 4:16

Faithfully, steadfast.

Luke 2:37

In need for God's power.

Mark 9:29

- Is there a spiritual battle in your life that God is placing a burden on your heart for and you are resisting because you don't know what to do about it? What is it?
- So far has the lessons in Nehemiah been helpful in giving an understanding on how to prepare for a spiritual battle? What has been the most helpful?
- What are your thoughts on the spiritual weapons of fasting and prayer? Do you have a need to go deeper? If there are still unanswered questions concerning them, write them down and ask your pastor or fellow Christian!