

“Knowing How To Pray (Nehemiah, Part 1)”

Today we begin a study of the Book of Nehemiah. This Old Testament book shows us how God can rebuild and restore things that have been destroyed and are lying in ruins. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, the wall, and the Temple in 586 BC, and carried off the exiles into captivity. After the Persians overtook the Babylonians, King Cyrus decreed that some of the Jews could begin returning to their homeland. The Israelites did this in stages, over about 100 years. Some started rebuilding the Temple but got discouraged and quit. Eventually Nehemiah, who was the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes, heard reports of how much of Jerusalem was still lying in ruins after so many years.

Prayer is one of the overriding themes of the Book of Nehemiah. There are 12 recorded prayers in this book, and most of chapter 1 is a prayer. Through his process of prayer, we see that Nehemiah started with **a concern about the problem** (1:2, 4). Nehemiah could have ignored Jerusalem’s plight, but as he received reports about its status he could barely stand it. Likewise, nothing will change in our lives, families, communities, nation and world until we become concerned about the problem. We need to let Scripture shape our view of the true nature of the problems we face.

Next, Nehemiah expressed **his conviction about God’s character** (1:5). Nehemiah extolled God as “Lord” and “great and awesome One.” Nehemiah knew that God was not only able, but also willing to respond to his prayer. When we go to God in prayer things get put into their proper perspective. Nehemiah was now moved **to confess his sin and the sins of his people** (1:6-7). Nehemiah was intense and honest in his confession. He made no attempt to excuse the Israelites for their sin, and he actually owned his part in their guilt. Nehemiah recognized that sin is not merely a stubborn refusal to obey certain rules but is also a defiant act of aggressive personal rebellion against a holy God. It’s better to confess our sins now than to wait until our sin exposes us.

Nehemiah then expressed **confidence in God’s promises** (1:8-10). God’s promises will always be fulfilled. Sometimes we recognize that some promises have been fulfilled while we still wait for others to come to pass. Someone has calculated that there are over 7,000 promises in the Bible. The better we know the Word of God the better we’ll be able to pray with confidence in God’s promises. Finally, Nehemiah was ready to **make a commitment to get involved** (1:11). Prayer is not getting man’s will done in heaven but getting God’s will done on earth. For God’s will to be done on earth He needs people to be available for Him to use.

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Are you concerned about the problems in our world?
2. Often call to mind God’s character traits and attributes.
3. Don’t try to sugarcoat your sins or dismiss them or hide them from God – confess them.
4. Stand on God’s promises.
5. Are you available for God to use?