

Greg Laurie: The Prayer That Impacts a Nation

Looking at America today, I don't know when we've ever been more divided. We're divided along racial lines; we're divided along political lines; we're divided along ideological lines. Add to all these things a pandemic and national unrest, and it seems there's no human solution in sight.

Maybe you're facing an insurmountable problem in your own life as well, and it seems there's no way out. In all of these cases, there's a lot we can learn in Scripture from a man named Nehemiah and a prayer he prayed that impacted his nation.

Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king of Persia when he received news from his Jewish countrymen that the wall of Jerusalem and its gates were destroyed. After hearing this devastating report, Nehemiah wept (Neh. 1:4).

Perhaps you can relate. Have you ever wept over the torn-down walls in your life? Have you ever wept over your own spiritual condition? Have you ever wept over the condition of our country?

Nehemiah was deeply moved for his people, and he wanted to do something about it.

But first he prayed. And God answered his prayer.

Sometimes when we look at our problems, we only want to have a spiritual solution (for instance, pray and we don't do anything). Or we want to do something, but we don't pray. But we must learn how the two go hand-in-hand.

So let's look at some principles on praying from Nehemiah. If we want God to answer our prayers—if we want God to intervene

in our lives and in our nation—let us pray for a personal revival.

1. Nehemiah acknowledged the greatness of God. Nehemiah began his prayer with these words: “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands” (Neh. 1:5, NLT).

Before anything else, he acknowledged God’s greatness. Note that he calls God “awesome.”

The word awesome is still very popular, isn’t it? We say, “That was an awesome burger, wasn’t it?” Or, “That was an awesome movie.” We throw the word around a lot. But if you want to get really technical, only God is completely awesome.

What does awesome mean? It means awe-inspiring. Consider this: When you see God in His greatness, you will see your problems and their relative smallness. You may have a big problem. A big challenge. Something that’s kind of scary. But your God is bigger. Your God is way bigger than your problem. That’s something that you should always remind yourself of.

This way, you’re getting things into perspective before you even start.

Is this not what Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer? The disciples came to Him, and they didn’t say, “Lord, teach us a killer prayer.”

“They said, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’ And Jesus gave them this this template, or pattern, of prayer. ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’” (Matt. 6:9-10).

The prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, the model for all prayer, does not start with my needs. I don’t say, “Our Father who is in heaven, give me this day my daily bread.”

No. I should say, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

When we start there, we're contemplating God in His greatness.

2. Nehemiah reminded God of His promises. Next, Nehemiah addresses his prayer to "the God who keeps His covenant" (Neh. 1:5).

He reminded God of His promises. Did Nehemiah need to jog God's memory? Does God forget stuff? No, He doesn't. He is omniscient, which means He is all-knowing. So why would you remind God of something when you pray?

In a way you're reminding yourself as much as you're reminding God. We're effectively saying, "God, you promised to provide us for all of our needs, so we are praying in light of that."

When we say, "Lord I've been reading Your promises, and I remember Your promises, and I'm reminding You of Your promises," that's a good thing. That reminds us that we don't just read through the Bible. We pray through the Bible. After all, the Bible is filled with promises. Someone actually estimated there are 3,000 promises to believers found in the pages of Scripture.

I read some time ago that \$5.8 billion in gift cards go unclaimed every year. Think of all those gift cards unclaimed, all that money not utilized. So here's the Bible filled with gift cards, if you will.

Are you feeling lonely or discouraged? Remember Isaiah 41:10 (NLT) in your prayer: "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand."

Do you have unconfessed sin in your life? 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive

us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”

God has left us so many promises like these in the Scriptures, and we simply need to “cash them in.”

3. Nehemiah confessed his personal sin. And speaking of confession of sin, that’s exactly what Nehemiah did next in his prayer.

He said, “I confessed that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses” (Neh. 1:6-7).

Notice the use of the words “we have sinned” and “I have sinned.”

It’s interesting. As we look at Nehemiah’s life in the Bible, we don’t really read of any notable sin. He had not worshiped false gods like many of his fellow Israelites, yet he says “I have sinned. I’m responsible.”

You know, it’s easy to point fingers at everyone else and say they are the problem. But could it be you? That comes as a revelation to some people.

When your marriage is in trouble, it’s easy to blame your spouse. Or even the kids. You might be praying, “Lord, change them.” But maybe you need to stop and say, “Lord, change me.”

I once heard a story about a little boy who was sent to his room for misbehaving. He told his mom he thought it over and said a prayer. She said, “Very good. You should pray that God will help you not to misbehave.”

The little boy replied, “Oh, I didn’t ask God to help me not to misbehave. I asked Him to help you put up with me.”

Sometimes we are always praying for someone else to change. But let’s pray God starts with us.

Revival Starts With You

We say the nation needs a spiritual awakening. True. We say the church needs a revival. Again, true. But listen, revival starts with you. Revival is personal. What do I mean by revival? I mean restoring to original condition, coming back to life, so that we would be the people that God is calling us to be.

It's good to pray for our leaders and our nation as a whole. It's good to pray for other people to change. But pray that God would change you. Prayer does change things, but prayer also changes you, and sometimes prayer changes you and you change things.

Sometimes you will pray, and the Lord will send you to do the job.

Remember God answered Nehemiah's prayer, but God determined Nehemiah was the one through whom He was going to bring change, and He ultimately sent him to rebuild the walls in Jerusalem.

God could do the same with you. Do you need a revival in your spiritual life? Maybe it needs to start with a prayer, like Nehemiah, to see ourselves as we really are. It starts with seeing God and His greatness, confessing our sins and calling out to Him.

May God send revival to our nation, and may He start with us.

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