

God's
Rebuilding Process
Repent, Return and Rebuild

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THE POWER OF PLEADING

Richard Elworth Day, in his book Filled With The Spirit, wrote, "It would be no surprise if a study of secret causes were undertaken. To find that in every golden era of human history, it proceeds from the devotion and righteous passion of a single individual. There are no bonafide mass movements. It just looks that way. At the center of the column, there will always be one person who knows God and who knows where he is going." He is exactly right! That is why God is always looking for leaders.

In Ezekiel 22:30, God said, "I look for a man who could stand there and build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of my people." then He said, "I could find none." But He is always looking.

The reason God is always looking for leaders is because nothing happens without leadership. Everything rises or falls based upon leadership. That is true when you are talking about a nation, city, church or family. Everything rises or falls on leadership and it is really built from the inside and works its way out.

In the book of Nehemiah, the men had come back from Jerusalem and they gave the report, "Oh, Nehemiah, it's terrible. Back in Jerusalem, the wall is down and the people are living in squalor." Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed. (Nehemiah 1:4)

When should you pray?

Nehemiah was a man of prayer. I'm fascinated that in the 13 chapters of Nehemiah we find him praying nine different times. So, when should you pray? You pray before you do anything else, that's when you pray. Nehemiah's praying lasted over a span of four months. In other words, Nehemiah kneeled in the presence of God for four months before he ever took a single step of action. A leader does more than pray, but he doesn't do anything else until he prays.

Leaders make prayer a first priority; losers make prayer a last resort. That is needed counsel especially for those of us who are Type A personalities. You know what I'm talking about? Those people who are goal-oriented, achievement driven and busy people who want to get the job done. Nehemiah was the epitome of a Type A personality. You don't rise to be second in charge of a kingdom by just being a no-count lay-about. This man was an organizer, motivator, manager, and get-it-done kind of guy. In 52 days, he rebuilt half the wall around the city of Jerusalem. Talk about a Type A! But, instead of just going out and doing something, the first thing that Nehemiah does is get alone with God.

A good little book came out a few years ago. The best thing about it was the title, Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something. That's exactly what Nehemiah did. He was God's kind of leader. He was a leader from the knees up. He was a leader who understood that leading begins with pleading. You pray before you do anything else.

Why do we pray?

1. Pray to acknowledge your dependence on God. In fact, the reason we don't pray more is because we don't think we need to. We think we can handle it on our own. What's your most common reaction when you have a problem? I dare say for most of us, the common reaction is "what am I going to do about this?" When the reaction should be, "God, what do You want to do about this?"

All too often we tend to forget what Jesus said "Apart from me, you can do nothing." (John 15:3) That's pretty strong. Paul wrote "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your request to God." (Philippians 4:6) What do you pray about? Everything! Present your prayer with petition. My fruitfulness and my usefulness for the Lord begins when I recognize my absolute dependence upon Him. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." The Bible says He holds the world together by the very word of His power. We take that for granted. Do you realize the molecules in your body cling together? Oh, you say it's the laws of physics and chemistry. Where do you think those laws came from? The reason your body doesn't just go off into space is because He is holding it all together by the very word of His power. I pray to remind me of that.

2. Pray to alleviate the burden. Nehemiah dropped to his knees because he had this bad report about what was happening in Zion. The Bible says he wept over the ruins. Rather than simply mourn and moan, he prayed. He took his problem to God. In Hebrew Nehemiah means "the Lord is my comfort." Paul said "In everything offer prayer, and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6) "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31) That's why godly people take their problems to the Lord because His peace follows prayer and God takes that burden off your back and lets you soar again. It alleviates the burden.

3. Pray to access God's power. This is the most important reason of all. Nothing releases God's power like the prayer of faith. God says, "Call to me and I will answer you." (Jeremiah 33:3) Oh, if we just had a better appreciation of the power that God has available for us.

Israel was having trouble with a nation of people called the Aramians. The Aramians were trying to conquer them but at every turn, Israel was heading them off and the king of Aram said, "There's some spy out there who is telling everything we plan." The people said, "No, King, there's no spy. There is a prophet in Israel named Elisha and he knows where we're going." The king of Aram said, "Then we'll get him." So at night he sent this huge army with chariots and horses. At daybreak they had surrounded the city where Elisha lived. A servant woke up and looked out and said, "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" Elisha said "Don't be afraid, those who are with us are more than those who are against us." (2 Kings 6:16) He prayed "Let their eyes be opened." (2 Kings 6:17) When the servant looked out the window again, he saw the Aramian army was surrounded by horses and chariots of fire and that God had blinded the Aramian soldiers.

My prayer is that God would open our eyes and let us see the horses and the chariots of fire. I access God's power through prayer. And Nehemiah did the same thing.

How do you pray?

1. "Then I said, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey His commands." (Nehemiah 1:5) Do you remember who Nehemiah worked for? He worked for a guy named Artaxerxes, the Persian king, who was the most powerful man on the face of the earth. The man who is Nehemiah's boss is the king of the world. But the first thing Nehemiah does is go to the King of the universe. He goes to the King of Kings and recognizes who the real ruler is. He starts his prayer with two things that we teach our children to pray. He says, "God is great, and God is good." See what he says: "Our God is the great and awesome God, the King of Heaven. God, you are good. You keep your covenant of love."

Praise is simply acknowledging God for who He is; a) He deserves our praise, and b) He is the King. When you focus on the greatness of God your problems shrink. Nehemiah experienced that, have you? He did not allow the difficult circumstances to diminish his need or desire to praise God. He said, "God, I know our situation is a mess, but you are bigger than the mess. God, I know that the problems in Jerusalem are great, but You are greater than the problems."

When things in my life are going well, when circumstances are lined up in a rosy fashion, I'm quick to praise God. God is great, God is good! But when I'm in despair, when I feel like I'm at the end of my rope because circumstances around me are as negative as they can be, it's harder for me to praise. Nehemiah says God, I praise you—I don't care what the circumstances are. It doesn't make any difference. You are bigger than my circumstances and the more I praise, the smaller those circumstances get.

2. Confess your sins. "Let your ear be attentive and your eyes be opened to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you, day and night, for your servants the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses." (Nehemiah 1:6-7) Nehemiah was not born when Israel was taken into captivity but he could identify with the sins that caused their downfall and captivity. When you start extolling God for His wonderful righteousness and holiness, then your own smallness and sinfulness becomes more apparent.

The prayers of other great men of Scripture have a common thread, they identify personally with the sins of the people. One of the most righteous men who ever lived was Daniel, not one negative word written about Daniel. "We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and rebelled. We have turned away from your commands and laws." (Daniel 9:5)

Ezra came back as a priest to restore public worship. He was a great and godly man, but look what he prayed, "Oh my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you. My God, because our sins are higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached the heavens." (Ezra 9:6) We are so individualistically minded in America, that kind of thinking seldom crosses our minds.

When is the last time that you confessed the sins of this nation and identified yourself as part of the problem? When's the last time you've done that and said, "God, I'm sorry. I'm a big part of this." Oh, no, we like to pray for God to help

those heathen, pagan people that are out there doing all those terrible things. When's the last time you confessed the sins for your church? When's the last time you confessed your part of the sins for your family? Society teaches us that you are only responsible for you. That's just not true! You are your brothers' keeper. We are all in this together and there will never be revival where there is no sense of community responsibility.

Leaders accept the blame, but losers pass the buck. If you want to be a leader, you'd better be quick to accept the blame and be quick to share the credit. Losers, on the other hand, are always accusers and excusers. Do you ever see them? They always say it's their fault and they are the reason it's like it is. Let me tell you why I'm not involved in all this! Nehemiah stepped to the plate and said, "God, I've never been to Jerusalem, and I don't know any of the homefolk there, but I want to tell you I'm sorry. I'm part of the problem."

3. You claim God's promises. Nehemiah prays, "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my name.'" (Nehemiah 1:8-9) He's claiming the promises. He prayed to God saying "I've read your book. I've read in that you promised if we disobeyed you, you'd send us into exile. (Leviticus 26:33) You kept that promise. But God You also promised that if we return to You spiritually. You would gather us up and bring us to the place where Your name dwells. (Deuteronomy 30:4) I'm calling boldly on you now, God. Keep your promise."

That boldness may blow some of your minds. In fact, most of you would think it very presumptuous to even use the word "remember" in the context of God. Now, God, You remember what You promised. If that is your thinking you need to read your Bible more because all the way through it you find people reminding God about what He promised. Abraham did it, Moses did it, and David did it. Every one of the prophets did it. They said, "God, I call to your remembrance your promises." Does God need to be reminded?" No! "Has God forgotten His promises?" No! Then why do we claim the promises of God in prayer? Because it helps us remember what those promises. Presumptuous? No! Nothing pleases God more than when you remind Him of one of His promises, because you are stating to God that you believe Him.

Do you realize there are over 7,400 promises from God in the Bible? Over 7,400! Now, some of those are in a context where they have a restricted audience for a restricted time. But most of them are universal in their scope and that is why they have been recorded for us.

4. Boldly make your petition. "They are your servants and your people whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Oh, Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer, this your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." (Nehemiah 1:10) Nehemiah has a heart that's breaking. He's mourning over Jerusalem. He's willing to go there. He's willing to rebuild the wall, but in order to go he's going to need the king's permission.

That's going to be easier said than done because King Artaxerxes is an unbeliever and Nehemiah is his right hand man. This is the man whose trust has grown over the years to the point that he tests the king's food and drinks of the king's wine. Now Nehemiah is going to say "Oh, King, can I take a little three year leave of absence? Also, would you equip me with men and equipment so I can go 1,000 miles from here and rebuild a wall that you don't know anything about?" What are the odds he's going to say yes? Nehemiah knows that his cleverness and his articulation and his personality are not going to get it done. He also knows that God can do it, so he prayed "God give me success." (Nehemiah 1:11)

Have you ever prayed boldly, "God, give me success in what I'm asking you to do." If not, what do you pray for? We should not be afraid to pray for success when what we are trying to do is advance the Kingdom of God.

When Arnold Palmer was back in his prime as the world's greatest golfer, he was in Saudi Arabia and he was doing a little golf exhibition. The king of Saudi Arabia was so impressed that he told him before he leaves that he needed to give him a gift. Palmer said, "Oh, don't give me a gift. I was paid to come over here." The King said, "You don't understand our culture. For me not to give you a gift would be a great insult upon me. So, what gift would be appropriate?" Palmer didn't know what to say, so he said, "Just give me a golf club." He said, "Fine". The next morning, an emissary arrived at his hotel and hand him the deed to a 300-acre "golf club." The moral to that story is when you are in the presence of the king don't bother to ask for small things. Ask for great things.

Let's pray boldly. There is nothing wrong with asking and praying to God for success if what you are doing is ultimately for the glory of God. In fact, if we can't ask God to bless what we're doing, then we need to be doing something else.

It's just that simple. Praise Him, confess your sins, claim the promises and boldly ask for success.
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