

The Tools of Nehemiah - Nehemiah 1

How many of you consider yourself to be pretty handy when it comes to working on cars? Like most guys, I used to be pretty handy when it came to working on the older stuff but now, not so much. When I was a senior in high school, I bought a bright red '67 Mustang fastback. It was a beautiful car. 289, automatic, a/c, and it was fast and loud and I loved that car...and it hated me. That car broke down every chance it got so I got pretty good at working on it.

I didn't know much at first but pretty soon you either learn or you don't drive. I learned by just popping the hood and getting after it but what I really learned from that method was just how much I didn't know. I quickly learned that just popping the hood and turning wrenches was not the way to make it run. In fact, it often caused more problems.

I had a bunch of tools but that didn't make me a mechanic. This was before the internet so I couldn't just google something to find out the problem. I had to go to the library and check out some books. Now, for you younger folks and for Lonnie, a library is a big building with lots of books that you can borrow. I also got to know some mechanics who were willing to talk to me about things without charging me. So, that helped.

See, I wanted really badly for that car to run and not have problems but I learned that I needed to know how to use those tools and when and what exactly I could do and what I needed to leave to the professionals. Just popping that hood and slapping wrenches on bolts didn't help anything. I needed a plan. I needed to know what I was doing.

I know I'm not the first guy to be in that position. There was a man who lived 2500 years ago who probably would have been a pretty good Mustang mechanic. His first advice would probably have been for me to sell that red demon car and hopefully I would have listened to him because this guy knew what he was talking about. Nehemiah was a very wise man and we are going to learn today where that wisdom came from.

See, Nehemiah knew that you didn't just grab some tools and start twisting bolts. You need to have a plan. You need to know what to do and how to do it and he found that out by learning from the One Who was able to fix the problems. So, open up your owner's manuals to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah and let's see how he learned to solve his great problem.

As you find **Nehemiah** in between **Ezra** and **Esther** let me tell you really quickly about this fascinating little book. It goes right along with those two books on either side of it and gives us some insight about life after Israel was destroyed. If you remember, God told them that as long as He was their God that He would keep them safe but if they disobeyed and rebelled against Him that he would finally raise up other countries to defeat them and carry them to other lands and the walls that protected Jerusalem would be torn down and burned and that is exactly what happened.

Gradually, though, the Israelites started to make their way back to Israel after many years and when they did, word got back to Nehemiah about the state of destruction that the walls of the city were in. It had been a long time and the people that had moved back to Jerusalem were just living amid all the rubble. It was dangerous not to have walls but it was also embarrassing to have God's holy city still in shambles after all this time but Nehemiah was not in position to really do anything about it.

Nehemiah was in Persia, a thousand miles away, working for the King of Persia as his cupbearer. It's not a bad job if you can get it but it had no real power or status or anything that might be able to help his people all the way over in Israel. That was Nehemiah's problem. His country was in trouble and he had no way to help. Sound familiar? It does to me because that is how I feel about our country today. We are living with the walls of democracy, decency, and doctrine in complete shambles and it is not getting better. It is getting worse. Christians today are losing our protection and it is embarrassing for us to be living this way. We live in a country where Islam, a false religion that worships a false god is being given favored status while Christianity, the worship of the one, true God, is being persecuted at every level of society and government and I feel like there is nothing I can do sometimes.

I know what the answer is. I know the answer to all of this is to lead people to have a life-changing relationship with God through His Son Jesus. I have the greatest tool to work with that mankind has ever known, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and I know how to use it too and so do you.

What's the bad news that **Romans 3:23** and **6:23** talk about? The bad news is that we are all sinners and what we deserve for that sin is eternal separation from God in hell. Now, what is the good news that **John 3:16** talks about? The good news is that God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die in our place and all we have to do is believe it. Now,

with that simple but great tool we can literally solve the greatest problems of this world but we need to have a plan.

I have said before that if we knew how great Heaven is going to be and how horrible hell is going to be that we would be stopping traffic to tell people the bad news then the good news. We would be running up and down the streets and knocking on doors but that's like popping the hood and turning every bolt you see. That doesn't work and may even cause more problems. So, let's look at what Nehemiah does first to get a plan of action going to solve his problem and maybe we can get some ideas about how to solve similar problems here in our country 2500 years later and 7000 miles away.

Nehemiah 1:4-11 says, *“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said: “Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open 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 family, have committed against you. ⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. ⁸ “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, ⁹ 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.’ ¹⁰ “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. ¹¹ Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of 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.” I was cupbearer to the king.*

Imagine going to New York City on September 12, 2001. We have all seen the pictures but without actually being there we can never realize the extent of destruction and the amount of debris from the tragedy the day before. Everybody wanted to help but can you imagine the chaos that was going on? Just getting from point A to point B was impossible. They had to have a plan or nothing would ever get done and it had to get done. You can't just live that way.

But the Israelites who had managed to get back to Jerusalem after being scattered to all points of the world had just lived that way for way too long. The task of rebuilding the walls

was so overwhelming that they pretty much just didn't try and when word got back to Nehemiah, what was the first thing he did? In **verse 4** it says he mourned and fasted and prayed.

Every one of us here has heard that the first thing we should do in a crisis is pray, right? But what do most of us do? We take a mental inventory. *"Ok, I can do this and this but I don't know how to do that and then what am I going to do if such and such happens?"* Then we get worried and then we get high blood pressure and then we go to the hospital when all we had to do is pray about it first and foremost.

Nehemiah knew when to pray and we are going to see how Nehemiah prayed in just a minute but first I want to tell you how his prayer turned out. Nehemiah asked for something specific. In **verse 11** he asked God for special favor in the presence of the king and do you know what happened? It says the king was sitting there next to the queen and he asked Nehemiah why he was so sad-looking.

Nehemiah said his hometown was in ruins and he wanted to go rebuild it. Now, how's this for favor in the presence of the king? King Artaxerxes asked him how long he needed to be away. Then he asked what else he needed. Do you need money? Supplies? Letters of recommendation? Do you need an armed escort? How about some extra help? Nehemiah said, *"Yea, that'll do. Thanks, king."*

But look at how it came to this point. Nehemiah prayed first and foremost. He fasted. He was sacrificial in his prayer. He was persistent in his prayer but look at how he starts this prayer. *"Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God..."*

Why do you think he started that way? Was he trying to butter God up so God would be lenient? Turn over to the New Testament to **Luke chapter 11** and read how Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. **Luke 11:2** says, *"When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name...'"*

There is a time and place for bursting into God's throne room and hollering, *"God, I gotta have you now! Help!"* But most of the time we need to realize that our Father, our Abba Daddy is also Almighty God and should be addressed as such. When you realize who He is and who you are, *you will* approach the throne of grace with confidence but also with great reverence and Nehemiah understood who he was talking to.

The next characteristic of Nehemiah's prayer was it was **a repentant prayer**. In **verse 6** he confesses his own sins and the sins of his country knowing that sin puts a barrier between

the sinner and Holy God and when you go to God in reverence and confidence it makes you aware of the grace and mercy He shows and you don't want that sin in your life and so you will repent of that sin.

Then look at **verses 8 and 9**. There we see another characteristic of Nehemiah's prayer. It was biblical. His prayer was based on what God had already said He would do so many years ago for Moses. Have you ever been talking to somebody and they bring up something you said a long time ago? Most of the time that's bad news for us but God wants you to pray biblically. He wants you to know what He has said because then you can pray in God's will.

Go back to the Lord's Prayer in Luke. He says to pray, "*Thy will be done...*" Well, how do we pray for the Lord's will to be done unless we know what he says in scripture? I read that before **George Mueller** would pray for something specific he would search the scripture to find if there was some promise that covered it. He might have to search for days but when he found it he could go to God and say, "*Look! You said this and that's what I am praying for.*"

Nehemiah went to God and repeated back to God what He had said years before and Nehemiah made his request based on that. He was persistent, sacrificial, repentant, biblical, specific, and he was also urgent in his prayers. Do you feel the urgency? Can you sense the feeling of Nehemiah that if God doesn't do something then it will not get done and lives are in the balance?

Dr. Helen Roseveare, missionary to Zaire, told the following story. "A mother at our mission station died after giving birth to a premature baby. We tried to improvise an incubator to keep the infant alive, but the only hot water bottle we had was beyond repair. So we asked the children to pray for the baby and for her sister. One of the girls responded, 'Dear God, please send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late because by then the baby will be dead. And dear Lord, send a doll for the sister so she won't feel so lonely.'

That afternoon a large package arrived from England. The children watched eagerly as we opened it. Much to their surprise, under some clothing was a hot water bottle! Immediately the girl who had prayed so earnestly started to dig deeper, exclaiming, 'If God sent that, I'm sure He also sent a doll!' And she was right! The heavenly Father knew in advance of that child's sincere requests, and 5 months earlier He had led a ladies' group to include both of those specific articles." *Our Daily Bread*.

What is the best position to be in for God to answer your prayer? Is it kneeling, standing, arms up or out? Do we need to cry or say some fancy words? Maybe we should do all of it. I think we all know that position doesn't matter much but if the Bible said to stand on your head while praying I would be an upside down, hand stand-doing fool because our country is broken and getting more and more so every day.

Isaiah 5:20 says, *“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”* Isn't that exactly what is happening today in our country? Well, how long are we as Christians going to sit here in this filth and rubble before we get serious about crying out to God and quoting back to Him His words in **2 Chronicles 7:14** that says, *“if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land?”*

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Do you mean that? If you do, I want you to bow your heads right where you are and say it again back to God in urgent prayer. *“if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*

Almighty, gracious God, our country is in ruins just as much as Israel was in the days of Nehemiah and we need your help. We have the tools that you have given us. We have opportunities that you give us and we are counting on you to use us to do what you have called us to do right where we are today and if we need to go somewhere else or do something different, please show us. Give us wisdom about what to do and where to go and what to say and we will do it for glory of your holy and precious name.

We repent of all of our many sins and the sins of our country, our state and our church and we pray that even today you would give us favor in the eyes of this community and we know that if you don't do a mighty work it will not be done. We ask these things for your sake and for the sake of your Kingdom. And all the people said amen.

If you don't have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus then we need to pray again right now. I'd love to pray with you and answer all the questions I can and read scripture with you that will tell you that we are all sinners. And we all deserve Hell. But Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for your sins so you wouldn't have to. And all you have to do is

believe it. But that belief will change your life. You will start to become more and more like Jesus every day. Let's do that right now as the music plays.