

Arise & Pray  
Nehemiah 1

**Key Verse:** Neh 1:4 “So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”

**Opening Illustration:**

Why Nehemiah? We were in Nehemiah just a few weeks ago for a message on rebuilding in 2017. But as I considered the month of January and the 21 days of prayer and fasting that begins tomorrow, I thought it would be beneficial to go deeper in our study of the book of Nehemiah. The account of Nehemiah, which we will read in just a moment begins with Nehemiah praying and fasting and that focus on prayer continues throughout. Nehemiah is a man that through prayer rose to the occasion and altered the course of a nation. It all started with concern and compassion for others who had a need they could not meet. Do you know anyone who has a need they cannot meet? We all know people that have a spiritual need they cannot meet. They have no spiritual walls, no protection, and Satan who walks around as a roar lion seeking whom he may devour wreaks havoc in their lives.

**READ Nehemiah 1-**

**Passage Context:** After the 70 years of captivity the Jews go back to Jerusalem in three waves under three men. The first is under Zerubbabel, to rebuild the temple about 80 years later the second group goes under Ezra, then 13 years after that Nehemiah leads an effort to return and rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. The book of Nehemiah is the last of the historical books of the Old Testament. There are prophetic books written, but this is the last one written about the children of Israel after their captivity. It covers 445-425BC. Nehemiah was cupbearer to king Artaxerxes, a prominent and prestigious role, but he was a Jew still in a foreign land, serving a foreign king, his heart was for his people and the city of his father - Jerusalem.

**READ Nehemiah 1**

## PRAY

**Key truth:** Nehemiah was a man of action, but of action birthed in and guided by prayer. Nehemiah interceded for those in need, taking a position of humility, personally identifying with the cause of the distress, and persistently pursuing God through a pattern of effective prayer.

What can we learn about prayer and fasting from Nehemiah?

### Four Aspects of Nehemiah's Prayer that were central to his success

#### I. Purpose of his prayer 1:3-4, 6a

##### a. Interceding for others

- i. John 17 – one of the longest recorded prayers in the Bible is Jesus praying for His disciples and for us. Seeing the persecution, hatred and challenges all His followers would face throughout time He prayed for our spiritual security, our unity, our joy, our protection from Satan, our sanctification by the word of God.
- ii. His intercession continues for us. Romans 8:43 *“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”*
- iii. Should we not be following Jesus' example? James 5:13-18 *“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses[fn] to one another,*

*and **pray for one another**, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit”.*

## II. **Posture of his prayer 1:4**

By posture I am not necessarily talking about physical posture although that is important.

A Baptist Pastor, a Catholic priest, and a Rabbi were discussing the ideal position for prayer over a cup of coffee while a telephone repairman worked nearby. The pastor stated his view, "Kneeling is definitely best."  
"No way," the rabbi countered: "I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to heaven."  
"You're both wrong," the priest insisted. "The most effective prayer position is lying prostrate, face down on the floor."  
Overhearing this conversation, the telephone repairman could no longer contain himself. "Hey, fellas," he interrupted: "The best praying I ever did was hangin' upside down from a telephone pole!"

### a. Humbling himself before God

#### i. Reflecting our total and absolute dependence upon God

1. Fasting is a way that we humble ourselves before God. Few things remind us of our human frailty and dependence upon God than hunger. It also a visible display before God our priorities, placing our spiritual need of Him before our most basic physical need of food.
2. 2 Chronicles 7:14 *“If my people, who are called by My name will humble [kä·nah' – bend the knee] themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I*

*will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”*

If Ezra were writing 2 Chron 7:14 today it would probably say something about God's people getting off Facebook and on their face and seek the face of God.

b. Persistent in prayer before God v.6 “...I pray before you now, day and night...”

- i. We have to overcome our spiritual ADDness. I am glad they didn't have all the diagnosis that they have today – because I probably would have had a string of acronyms attached to my file. I just had to deal with it. We have to learn to deal with the distractions that keep us from seeking God. Again, it comes back to desperation. How desperate are we to see God move?
- ii. Luke 18:1-8 This is a passage I refer to a lot, because, well, because it is so instructive in how we are to persist in our prayers to God. *“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’ 6 Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”*
- iii. Persist prayer is the key to prevailing prayer.

### III. Pattern of his prayer 1:5-7

- a. Appealing to God's mercy and character v. 5 "Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy..."
  - i. Appealing to God's character and seeking to defend that character is another key to effective prayer.
    1. Gen 18:25 *"For be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; for be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*
    2. Moses intercedes for the children of Israel appealing to God's character and reputation after they refused to go into the Promised Land because of fear of man. Numbers 14:13 *"Then the LORD said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? 12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."*  
13 *And Moses said to the LORD: "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, 14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, 16 'Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.'* 17 *And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, 18 'The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and*

*transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. [fn] 19 Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”*

- b. Confessing the sin of the people “confessing the sins of the children of Israel”
    - i. We must confess our sins, which is acknowledgment that we have done wrong. We take ownership for what we’ve done and God is ready to forgive.
  - c. Praying the word of God v. 8-9
    - i. Isaiah 55:11 *“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”*
    - ii. *Jesus resisting Satan. Matthew 4 “It is written”*
    - iii. *Matt 24:35 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”*
- IV. **Personalizing his prayer – 1:6**
- a. Identifying with those in distress “Both my father’s house and I have sinned.” When we look around us and we see the spiritual distress, we all have to contributed to it by either what we’ve done or not done. If we are going to truly intercede for we have to truly identify with.
  - b. Presenting himself as a solution V. 11
    - i. Nehemiah heard of the devastation of the city and the distress of the people and he was moved with compassion and concern. So much so he fasted and prayed that God would present a solution

and heal their land. He followed God prescription, humbling himself, seeking the face of God, confessing sin and during the course of this period of time which was about 4 months God is tapping Nehemiah on the shoulder, He is speaking to his spirit that he is to be a part of the solution. So at the end of this chapter is Nehemiah's "here am I send me" moment, *"O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray and grant him mercy in the sight of the man." For I was the king's cupbearer."*

Closing Illustration:

December 7<sup>th</sup> this past month marked the 75 anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor and the US' entry into WWII.

Roy Robertson was a sailor at Pearl Harbor in 1941: 'My ship, the West Virginia, docked at Pearl Harbor on the evening of December 6, 1941. A couple of the fellows and I left the ship that night and attended a Bible study. About fifteen sailors sat in a circle on the floor. The leader asked us to each recite our favorite Scripture verse. In turn each sailor shared a verse and briefly commented on it.

"I sat there in terror," he later wrote. "I couldn't recall a single verse. I grew up in a Christian home, went to church three times a week, but ... I couldn't recall a single verse. Finally, I remembered one verse - John 3:16. I silently rehearsed it in my mind. The spotlight of attention grew closer as each sailor took his turn. It was up to the fellow next to me. He recited John 3:16. He had taken my verse! As he commented on it I sat there in stunned humiliation. In a few moments everyone would know that I could not recall from memory even a single verse. Later that night I went to bed thinking, "Robertson, you're a fake."

At 7:55 the next morning I was awakened by the ship alarm ordering us to battle stations. 360 planes of the Japanese Imperial Fleet were attacking our ship and the other military installations. My crew and I raced to our machine gun emplacement, but all we had was practice ammunition. So for the first fifteen minutes of the two-hour battle, we only fired blanks hoping to scare the Japanese airplanes.

As I stood there firing fake ammunition I thought, "Robertson, this is how your whole life has been - firing blanks for Christ." I made up my mind as Japanese bullets slammed into our ship, "If I escape with my life, I will get serious about following Jesus."

Roy Robertson did get serious. He became the first missionary of "The Navigators" and did a lot of work with Billy Graham as well.

There is a spiritual battle raging around us for the very souls of our sons and daughters, our moms, dads, sisters, brothers, neighbors, co-workers and yes, our entire nation. This battle will not just determine the destiny of nations, it will determine our eternal destiny and those we love and care for. Are you ready to get serious about following Jesus?

In a moment I am going to ask you to do like Nehemiah – to make a commitment that you are going to Arise and pray as Nehemiah did over at least the next 21 days. Praying for your family, our church, our community and our country. There are a few here this morning that are like Roy, you've been playing church, playing Christian. It's time to stop faking it and make it real.