

# SERVING GOD WITH DETERMINED FAITH - 2

## Look to God for Help

"O 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."  
- Nehemiah 1:11

### **Bible Truth:**

*Prayer should never be a last resort, but always a first priority.*

### **Life Impact:**

*When faced with spiritual challenges, your ability to confidently look to God will be a reflection of knowing God and His promises.*

Nehemiah was a get-it-done type person. He was an organizer, a motivator, a manager. Yet, instead of immediately going out and doing something about the distressing news he received, Nehemiah got alone with God in prayer. Prayer was a significant part of the pattern of his life, reflecting a deep dependence on God. How easy it is for any of us to miss this necessary balance. If our work does not flow from wonder at the greatness of God and from depending on His strength and wisdom, we can fail to accomplish the purposes of God—despite the earnestness of our efforts.

## Welcome

Do you have a tendency to make distressing news worse or better than it really is? Explain.

## Word

**Read Nehemiah 1:4-11.** Nehemiah was burdened for a city and a people he had never seen. As a result, he fasted and prayed. The two are very much connected—especially in cultures that spend an enormous amount of time preparing and eating meals. In order to clear some time for prayer, one would go without food. And that's exactly what Nehemiah did in order to take his burden to God.

1. What do you learn about God from the way Nehemiah addressed Him in his prayer (v 5)? Nehemiah began his prayer recognizing the character of God. Why is this always the place to begin?
2. What does Nehemiah see in himself, the more he focuses on God (vv 6-7)? What strikes you about Nehemiah's confession?
3. What does Nehemiah recall as he persists in prayer (vv 8-10)? Was it really necessary for Nehemiah to remind God of His promises?
4. Great prayers in the Bible often quote Scripture, calling upon God to keep His promises. Are you aware of promises of God that relate to specific challenges in your life? How would praying Scripture prove beneficial in your own prayer life?
5. How do you know Nehemiah expected God to answer his prayer? What difference would it make if you were to be more conscientious about being an answer to your own prayers?

## Worship

Nehemiah did not allow difficult circumstances to diminish his need to praise God. God deserves our praise on difficult days as much as any other. Spend time in song and prayer—praising God. Conclude your time by putting this week's lesson into practice, by "reminding" God of His gracious promises. Nothing would please Him more. Remember, prayer is not a matter of overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of God's great willingness.

## Works

How do your prayers compare with Nehemiah's? What changes do you want to make in your prayer life to follow his example?

## Leader's Notes – Look to God for Help (Lesson Two)

### Discussion:

Question 1: Nehemiah's prayer is rooted in God's character and God's promises. God is great, good, and faithful. He knew God could move the heart and hands—not only of the faithful but also of a pagan king. Often when people in the Bible ask God for something, they presented a basis for it. “Why should God answer this prayer?” Nehemiah began with a conviction about the character of God—always a good place to begin!

Question 2: Nehemiah was quick to associate himself with the sin of his people, in part because he has just praised God. He has seen God's greatness. And when you've seen the greatness of God, you can't help but remember the smallness of your own life. Nehemiah's appeal was not on the basis of their goodness, but rather God's. Other examples: Daniel 9:5; Ezra 9:15.

Question 3: In a sense, Nehemiah “throws the book” at God! He quotes Scripture to “remind” God of His great promises. Of course Nehemiah was actually reminding himself more than anything. Prayer is not a matter of overcoming God's reluctance, of trying to talk God into doing something He doesn't want to do. Prayer is laying hold of God's great willingness: “Lord, I know you want to do this because you've promised in your word, so do it!”

Question 5: Nehemiah's prayer ends with an interesting and important twist. Notice, he did not merely call on God to “be attentive to the prayer of Your servant...” (v 11), but added, “Give Your servant success today, and have compassion on him in the presence of this man.” Nehemiah shifted from simply thinking in terms of what God (alone) would do to fulfill this promise to how God might use Nehemiah as part of the answer to his own prayer. This was faith in action.

## Fasting: "A Hunger For God" Some Brief Observations:

### I. **FASTING DEFINED:** the voluntary abstinence from meeting a physical need for spiritual purposes.

Fasting always related to prayer; denying a physical need so that spiritual need can be met by greater devotion to prayer. Fasting acknowledges there are needs more important than our most demanding physical needs.

### II. **FASTING DECLARES...**

#### 1. **TO INTENSIFY** our prayer life.

*"So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer." - Ezra 8:23*

*"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes." - Daniel 9:3*

#### 2. **TO SEEK** God's guidance.

*"While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed...." - Acts 13:2,3*

*"Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." - Acts 14:23*

#### 3. **TO PETITION** God's deliverance or protection.

*"Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah." - 2 Chr. 20:3*

*"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or days. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." - Esther 4:16*

#### 4. **TO OVERCOME** temptation.

*"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry." - Luke 4:1-2*

#### 5. **TO EVIDENCE** love and devotion to God.

*"There was also a prophetess, Anna...she never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying." - Luke 2:36, 37*

#### 6. **TO EXPRESS** grief, particularly for sin.

*"The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth." - Jonah 3:5*

#### 7. **TO ADMIT** repentance and a turning to God.

*"And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, 'If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts....On that day they fasted and there they confessed, 'We have sinned against the Lord.'" - 1 Samuel 7:3, 6*

#### 8. **TO HUMBLE** ourselves before the Lord.

*"...I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting." - Psalm 35:13*

*"I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God...." - Ezra 8:21*

### III. **FASTING DEMONSTRATES** our desire to be living sacrifices.

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship." - Romans 12:1*