

## 2

### Prayer

Nehemiah 1:1-2:10

A lack of time or quality in prayer seems to be an almost universal frustration among Christians. A recent survey of American pastors revealed that the average pastor spends only three minutes a day in personal prayer. Andrew Murray once said that we spend a lifetime with Christ in the school of prayer. Yet too many of us are still in kindergarten!

Nehemiah provides an excellent model for Christians in the twentieth century. In the midst of daily pressures and crises, he demonstrates a life of deep dependence on God combined with well-planned action. During the exile Nehemiah served as cupbearer to the Persian king, Artaxerxes I (465-425 B.C.). To the Jewish people of that day the physical condition of Jerusalem (in this case the wall) was symbolic of the state of their relationship with God.

1. How do you usually respond to crises in your life?

2. Read Neh. 1:1-2:10. What tragic report does Hanani bring to Nehemiah about the Jewish remnant in Jerusalem (Neh. 1:1-3)?

3. In Neh. 1:4 there are several verbs which demonstrate Nehemiah's distress over Jerusalem's ruin. What do these verbs indicate about Nehemiah's heart and attitude toward God?

4. What does Nehemiah recognize about God's character in Neh. 1:5?

How would this be an encouragement to him in prayer?

5. What does Nehemiah's confession reveal about his character and his understanding of sin (Neh. 1:6-7)?

**6.** In Neh. 1:8-11, how does Nehemiah apply God's Word in his prayer?

**7.** Think of people and things you pray for regularly. How can God's Word encourage you as you pray?

**8.** The acrostic ACCTS (adoration, confession, consecration, thanksgiving, supplication) is a helpful reminder of the elements of a balanced prayer life. Which of these elements do you find in Nehemiah's prayer?

**9.** Which of these elements do you tend to omit when you pray, and why?

**10.** What impresses you about the discussion between Nehemiah and the king (Neh. 2:1-4)?

**11.** At the critical moment Nehemiah sends a brief "holy telegram" (Neh. 2:4). How can this little prayer also be a model for us?

**12.** How does Nehemiah demonstrate a willingness to be used by God in answering his own prayers (Neh. 2:1-10)?

**13.** Summarize what we learned about the quality of Nehemiah's prayer life.

**14.** In what areas do you most need to follow Nehemiah's example of prayer?

## Leader's Notes

### Study 2. Prayer (Nehemiah 1:1-2:10)

Prayer.

Nehemiah 1:1-2:10.

*Purpose:* To consider what Nehemiah's example can teach us about prayer.

**Question 2.** In Neh. 1:11 Nehemiah mentions that he was "cupbearer to the king." His job was to taste the king's wine in order to insure against poisoning. Cupbearers were normally foreigners, but they occupied a high position and often had considerable influence with the king. This may explain why his brother and the men from Judah came to him.

**Question 5.** Nehemiah's use of the third person plural in confession stands in sharp contrast to the individualistic approach which typifies most contemporary Christians. You may want to highlight this point.

**Question 6.** Nehemiah is quoting from Deut. 30:2-4 in his prayer.

**Question 8.** Some members of your group may not understand the meaning of *consecration* or *supplication*. *Consecration* means to dedicate ourselves to God's service. *Supplication* means to ask for something humbly and earnestly.

**Question 10.** The mention of the month Nisan in Neh. 2:1 indicates that it was four months since the news had reached Nehemiah. This fact, in conjunction with the phrases *for some days* (Neh. 1:4) and *day and night* (Neh. 1:6), are further indication of a diligent and persevering prayer life.

Nehemiah had good reason to be afraid (Neh. 2:2). Rulers at that time could punish or even execute a servant for being sad in their presence. Also, Artaxerxes had previously halted the rebuilding of Jerusalem because it was considered a place of rebellion and sedition (Ezra 4:18-22). In asking him to rescind this order, Nehemiah risked being identified as a rebel.