

VBS INVITE

Nehemiah Series slide

This summer- we're gonna to go through the book of Nehemiah together.

Here's why:

Nehemiah is a book about a desperate community of people that have a really big job in front of them.

And through the leadership of NEHEMIAH they work hard, form deep bonds with each other, face life threatening opposition...and end up playing a huge role in one of the greatest comeback stories in all of the Old Testament.

And at the heart of this comeback story is serious PRAYER that leads to profound ACTION.

In fact- in 13 chapters of Nehemiah- there are at least 12 instances of prayer- including one of the longest prayers in the Bible.

City Church Brothers & Sisters- I want us to grow and deepen a culture of prayer here. Jesus said that his house would be a house of prayer. Not a house of singing. Not a house of preaching. And certainly not a house of sitting around and taking it all in. A house of prayer. And you're gonna find THAT is the heart of Nehemiah.

Also- Jesus calls us to action. Take up your cross and follow me. You will be my witnesses in all the earth. Go and make disciples. Love your neighbor as yourself. Nehemiah is a story of what God does when his people pray and then act on their calling.

The Book of Nehemiah is about the ordinary everyday people of God- Spiritually Connected to God in Prayer- Side by Side in deep relationships- Acting on a transcendent purpose to achieve something together for the Kingdom of God that they could never do individually.

That's what we are building here at City Church. A church that lives the good life God calls us to...together.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Nehemiah is the last chronological book of the OT. Its not in terms of the order of the books in your bible- but time wise- it happens the latest of all the OT books. Directly following Nehemiah all the prophets for Israel stop showing up and Israel goes into a spiritually dry and quiet period where they really hear nothing from God for 400 years.

So let me set up what led up to the moment we're jumping in on right now...

Way back in Genesis 12- God made a promise to a wandering nomad named Abraham- that he would take his offspring- and he would make them a great nation- that would bless the whole world. He would give them a land to settle in- and they would worship him and show the world what it meant to have a deep close spiritual connection to the God who made the whole universe.

Those people ended up not in their own land, but as slaves in Egypt. God rescued them...and once again promised them- Come out into the desert and worship me... and I'll take you to your own land- a place you'll call home- and all the nations will be in awe of the relationship we have.

But in the desert they worshipped other gods- so God had them wander around the desert..unable to settle into their home.

Finally- they get to edge of the promised land-...and Moses stands up and delivers to them the law for a second time.- thats the book of Deuteronomy.

And in Deuteronomy look what he warns them about.

Deuteronomy 4:25 & 27

“When you have children and grandchildren and have been in the land a long time, and if you act corruptly, make an idol in the form of anything, and do what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, angering him

The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be reduced to a few survivors among the nations where the Lord your God will drive you.

Well- that happened...more than once.

But- God- just like he did with Adam and Eve in the garden- always leaves a ray of hope. He leaves the porch light on. A key under the mat.

A way back home.

Deuteronomy 4:29-31

But from there, you will search for the Lord your God, and you will find him when you seek him with all your heart and all your soul. 30 When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, in the future you will return to the Lord your God and obey him. 31 He will not leave you, destroy you, or forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them by oath, because the Lord your God is a compassionate God.

The book of Nehemiah is happening between those two realities. Their sin against God- and their hope of being back home again.

Title Slide “Dear Lord: How to Pray into Action”- Nehemiah 1

The Jews have been exiled and are ruled by the Persians.

The Persian king Cyrus- gave permission for some of the Jews to go back to Jerusalem.

The first wave went back under the leadership of a guy named Zerubbabel. Under Zerubbabel- they rebuild the temple.

Then a guy name Ezra comes later and helps them recover the Law of God. He starts reading it out loud...and slowly people are realizing what they left behind.

They are searching for God again- just like God said they would. But then- the rebuild stops. Ezra and Zerubbabel's leadership fades...and people get completely unmotivated.

So Jerusalem is just sort of half built....and there are no walls to protect it...no one to lead them... and everything is broken down... Its like an old junkyard.

Picture District 12 in Hunger Games. Or any dystopian novel scene.

Ok- so where is Nehemiah in all this?

He's not in District 12- He's in the Capital. He's in the city that kings go to in the winter. He's a Jewish man working for a Persian King. So- in a way- even though he's a servant- he's living a pretty posh life as King's cupbearer. The guy who gets to taste all the food and drink all the wine before the king eats and drinks to make sure its not poisoned. Upside- he literally eats like a king. Downside- at any moment he could fall over dead.

He still reads the Torah and he really cares about what's going on in Jerusalem. But for the moment- he's got a pretty decent life working for the Persian king.

...

And that...is where the Book of Nehemiah begins.

Nehemiah 1:1-11

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah:

During the month of Chislev in the twentieth year, when I was in the fortress city of Susa,
2 Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived with men from Judah, and I questioned them about Jerusalem and the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile. 3 They said to me, “The remnant in the province, who survived the exile, are in great trouble and disgrace. Jerusalem’s wall has been broken down, and its gates have been burned.”

4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of the heavens. 5 I said,

Lord, the God of the heavens, the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps his gracious covenant with those who love him and keep his commands, 6 let your eyes be open and your ears be attentive to hear your servant’s prayer that I now pray to you day and night for your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins we have committed against you. Both I and my father’s family have sinned. 7 We have acted corruptly toward you and have not kept the commands, statutes, and ordinances you gave your servant Moses. 8 Please remember what you commanded your servant Moses: “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. 9 But if you return to me and carefully observe my commands, even though your exiles were banished to the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I chose to have my name dwell.” 10 They are your servants and your people. You redeemed them by your great power and strong hand. 11 Please, Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to that of your servants who delight to revere your name. Give your servant success today, and grant him compassion in the presence of this man.

At the time, I was the king’s cupbearer.

Transition:

Its clear that Nehemiah has deep conviction. But he doesn’t just spring into action. Before Nehemiah acts...he prays.

Today- through this prayer- We’re going to deal with some misconceptions about what prayer is,...in the hopes that this changes the way you talk with God...by changing the way you feel about God.

And in the end- I hope you get a clear sense how God is calling you to act.

First-

1) Prayer is Relational: God’s not a claw machine. He’s a Father.

- Have you ever put a quarter in one of these claw machines at an arcade?
- You know...the ones that have stuffed animals, or mini-basketballs.
- You put a quarter in and then you have 15 seconds to maneuver the claw in the perfect place, push a button and see if the claw picks up the little bear you want and drops it down the chute where it can be yours forever.
- Those things are impossible. Unless you are an expert. Which is how we approach prayer and calling often. Its impossible unless you're an expert.
- Anybody remember a little book called "The Prayer of Jabez?"
 - It was a NY Times bestseller in the year 2000...in fact at that time it was the fastest selling book in history.
 - The author, Bruce Wilkinson, taught if you would just recite this little prayer tucked away in the Old Testament book of 1 Chronicles...just recite it over and over...then you would have blessing. The claw would deliver the basketball...or the bear...or the house, the boat, the raise.....whatever.
 - And so thousands bought the book.
 - And thousands prayed the prayer.
 - And thousands were disappointed.
 - Including the author himself.
- After his plans stalled and eventually failed to construct an amusement park/resort run by orphans in Africa (I'm not kidding)...
- The Wall Street Journal wrote this about Mr. Wilkinson-
 - **He says he weeps when he thinks of his disappointed acolytes, and is trying to come to grips with a miracle that didn't materialize despite his unceasing recitation of the Jabez prayer.- Wall Street Journal on Prayer of Jabez author, Bruce Wilkinson**
- See, for so many people God is claw machine and your prayer is a quarter.
 - If you can successfully say the right words...if you can push God's button at just the right time and in just the right way...you too can grab hold of the blessed life.
- And so, just like you get frustrated and angry at the claw machine as quarter after quarter doesn't get you that basketball...

- ...you have been frustrated with God as prayer after prayer hasn't resulted in a better marriage, or a healthy parent, or a higher paying job.
- ...and now you are ready to walk out of the arcade...and out of the church.

Back to 1)

- But God is not a claw machine...he's a Father.
- And, for some of you that seems worse. There is a reason why Mother's Day card sales are nearly twice that of Father's Day cards.
- Because we live in a country of broken father-child relationships.
- But if your Dad hurt you, I'm going to ask you, just for the next few minutes, to look beyond your Dad's failures to the Father he was supposed to show you.
- See, the only reason you know your dad wasn't a good father, is because, deep down, you know what a good Father is supposed to be.
- ...and when you pray...that is EXACTLY the Father you are praying to.
- Its who Nehemiah prays to.
- **Nehemiah 1:5**
 - Do you see what Nehemiah calls God?
 - He calls him "LORD God of heaven."
 - That word "LORD" spelled in all caps is the word YAHWEH.
 - YAHWEH is the personal name that God gave himself when he made a covenant with man.
 - Think of this like a marriage promise. Its like a vow.
 - Whenever you see YAHWEH or ALL Caps LORD in the Old Testament, it's a relational term. A Covenant name.
 - Its "This is the God who loves us for richer or poorer, better or worse, in sickness and health....This is God who is right with me when the crane grabs the stuffed animal...and when it comes up empty."
 - Doesn't that show up here?
 - See "God who keeps his covenant with those who love him"
 - Nehemiah is not coming at God primarily as someone who will give him what he needs to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem...he's coming at him as someone who loves him ...He's approaching him relationally- before he looks for the action.
 - This approach to God is not primarily based on God's power...though that is there...and important.

- But this approach to God is based on God's love. His promise-keeping love toward us.
- Let me show you how talking with God as a Father works.
- No one has ever been connected to the Father more than Jesus.
- In fact- this prayer follows a very similar pattern to the Prayer that Jesus teaches his disciples to pray- which starts with "Our Father".
- Look at this verse from Luke's gospel **Luke 5:16**
- **But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.**
- Often we think of Jesus as not really having problems.
- That Jesus just stoically went to the cross.
- But part of Jesus' human-ness is that he felt. He felt the dark pull of temptation. And by temptation...I mean there were ways that his will, his desire was drawn toward sin.
 - He didn't sin, but he was tempted.
- He also would get tired. Dog tired. In fact, this verse from Luke happens after he heals a guy from leprosy...and then tons of people start asking him to heal their disease. That's exhausting.
- Now, does anyone know what happens when you are tired and tempted?
 - Of course you do.
 - Sin.
 - Your defenses are down. Your head hurts. You need comfort.
 - And for most of us, that's when we yell at our kids.
 - Tired and tempted.
 - For most of us, that's when we look at pornography.
 - Tired and tempted.
 - For most of us, we are at our worst when we are tired and tempted.
 - But Jesus didn't yell. He didn't comfort himself sexually....or with food...
- When he is tired and tempted, he gets away where its quiet to pray.
- WHY?
- Why does Jesus the Son of God- who is -very God- pray?
- Here it is: **Jesus prays to remember that he is his Father's Son. Because forgetting your relationship with the Father is the root of sin.**
- Think of it like this.
- Jesus has a great demand on his life. He has great power. And great temptation to use that power. Outside of what his Father commissioned him to do.

- He has people begging him to heal them.
- He has the devil tempting him in the desert to use his power to feed himself...or to get out of suffering...or to take control of a kingdom.
- Even his disciples are begging him to take action. Do something with your power. Go do it. Lets overtake Rome. Lets put the bad guys in their place.
 - Jesus, you're a superhero.
 - Jesus, you're a military leader.
 - Jesus, you're a king.
 - ACT LIKE IT.
- But he doesn't. He moves away from this temptation...and he prays.
- And every time, he prays to his Father to remember that he is not mainly those things.
- He talks to his Father to remember he is the Son.
- He doesn't go to God and say "Can you smooth this out for me?"
- He goes to remember..."I am not who they say I am. I am not here to do what they want me to do...I am here to do what my Father wants me to do for them. Because I am not what they say, I am what HE says I am."
 - And that means a cross.
 - And that means that I tell Peter "No" when he wants me fight.
 - That means sometimes I have to step over hundreds of people with leprosy...to get to the one that you want me to heal Father...because the point is not giving them what they want...the point is doing what will show them that you want them as sons and daughters, too.
- Did you ever think about that?
- Jesus is utterly dependent on his Father.
- If you were to ask Jesus "How are you doing today." He would say "Me and the Father are doing fine."
 - And then you'd say "No, really, how are YOU doing?" And Jesus would say, "That question makes no sense."
 - The very essence of who Jesus is...is the son of the Father.
- Jesus was so connected, so dependent on the Father that every time he felt this temptation to operate alone...to use his power outside of his Fathers will, that he pulled back, withdrew...and bowed his head and he said "Dad....Dad....I'm yours"
- You and me, Dad. You and me.

Back to 1)

- Nehemiah gives a great picture of how this kind of prayer works.
- This entire first chapter is Nehemiah's dedicated time of prayer.

- From what we can tell about this text, it was about 4 months from when Nehemiah first hears about the bad shape of Jerusalem and when he makes his first move to help.
- Those months in between...he dedicates to prayer. This prayer stands in as a representative to what Nehemiah would have prayed day after day as he waited on his Heavenly Father.
- Before he went ahead with his plan to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, he dedicated time alone to pray.
- But wouldn't that discourage you if that was all prayer was.
- Quiet time?
- I mean, can we be real for a second? Quiet Time isn't very real life for very many of us.
- If I only prayed in quiet times, God wouldn't be a part of my day. He'd be a part of my early morning...but not my day.
- So, watch what Nehemiah does. He keeps the conversation going...not only in his dedicated quiet time...but as the craziness of his life is happening.
- See, in the next Chapter, Nehemiah goes to work...he gets back into the normal day-to-day activities as the King's Cupbearer. And when he sees his opportunity to ask the King for some time off to go start this rebuilding project....
- Look what he does.
- **Neh 2:4-5**
- **4 Then the king asked me, "What is your request? "**
-
- **So I prayed to the God of the heavens 5 and answered the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, send me to Judah and to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I may rebuild it."**
- Look- he prays AS he is answering the King.
- So on one hand, Nehemiah has a dedicated time of prayer. On the other hand, he fires up a quick one during his work day, right before his big ask of the King.
- Nehemiah prays and fasts for months
 - Then he is in front of the king and he sends a quick text. "Father, remember when we talked this morning about my meeting with the King. Well, he just asked me what I want? Thanks for that. Here I go. Stay with me on this one, Father.

- This prayer in chapter 2 is a relational- check in. The prayer in Chapter 1 is intentional undistracted time. Both are vital in a healthy relationship. Both are vital to keep the conversation with your Father going.

Back to 1)

Listen, before you start worrying about WHAT to pray about, ask yourself...am I praying to a claw machine...or to a Heavenly Father.

- Because, frankly, if you get the stuffed bear every time, but you only Know God as a machine...you've lost everything.

TRANSITION: Now, let me show you what the content of our prayers look like.

2) Prayer is Confessional: Don't pray put together prayers...pray honest ones.

- I don't think I have ever seen as much terror in a person's eyes than when I would ask someone to pray in our community group.
- Everybody knows when that time is drawing near. And immediately, everybody in the room begins to try and shield their eyes from my gaze.
- People all of sudden have to go to the bathroom.
- If we had theme music at my community group for the seconds just before prayer time it would be the theme from "JAWS"
 - (Duh nuh, Duh nuh, Duh nuh)
 - I say 'Ok, who's going to pray for us now and people (at least in their minds) start grabbing their floats and scrambling out of the water with looks of panic on their face.
- Do you know why that is?
- Because somewhere along the way, the church culture has made it seem like you need a Masters degree to pray.
- Need me to prove this? Just invite me to your dinner party and tell the host I'm a pastor that went to seminary.
- Guess who gets asked to say the blessing?
 - Me. Because for some reason we all assume that I took a class in seminary called "Prayer"
- Listen, God is not looking for you to say the **right** words...he's wants you to say **honest** ones....which oddly, are usually the ones that make you sound least like a pastor.
- Look how Nehemiah prays, this great leader. This wonderful "Man of God"

Nehemiah 1:6-7

let your eyes be open and your ears be attentive to hear your servant's prayer that I now pray to you day and night for your servants,

the Israelites. I confess the sins we have committed against you. Both I and my father's family have sinned. 7 We have acted corruptly toward you and have not kept the commands, statutes, and ordinances you gave your servant Moses.

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- Can you imagine if I prayed that prayer before dinner?
 - Lord, bless this food, and all of us are corrupt sinners...starting with me. I've lied, I've been proud. I've hated. Even right now, I kind of don't like Bill...who's standing right next to me,...and I'm sure Bill has his own junk too...In fact, Bill is going to confess his sin with me right now...Bill?
 - **[JAWS THEME]**
- I mean, Nehemiah's prayer doesn't start with "LORD will you do this for me...."it starts with, "Father, this is exactly where I am now...and its not pretty."
- Nehemiah is not praying a put together prayer...but he's not a put together person....and neither am I.
- We are messy people. We are sinful people. We are people who do a lot of projecting how awesome we are while we hide our broken souls.
- Nehemiah flips it inside out. He confesses "Father, here's my nasty insides..."
- There is no blame shifting. There are no excuses. There is no holier than thou.
- For Nehemiah...and for us. We come completely honest...inside out...to the God who ALREADY can see us inside out.

Back to 2)

- The idea that you have to pray some put together cleaned up prayer to a God who sees your ugliest moments, and the darkest desires of your heart is a bit comical. So, lets stop.
- The word "confess" means to "agree"?
- See when I confess, I am agreeing with God about who I really am, and about who he really is.
- I REALLY am a messed up sinner....and he REALLY is a Good Father.
- Not only that, this gives incredible freedom to actually pray what I for my heart wants.
- I don't have to hide things I really want from God. He already sees that...why not just be honest and ask him?
 - And then trust him as a good Father to give me what I need.
 - A good father gives his kids food when they are hungry...even when they ask for candy.

- See, my goal in prayer is not to get what I want...its to get my Father wants for me.
- Its for my heart to agree with God.
- **Prayer is not about getting what I ask for. Its about learning the heart of my Father.**
- And listen, that will never happen if every time you engage God you are trying to impress him with how awesome you are. You might sing great songs, preach great sermons, do great things for people...but you'll never know the heart of your Father...and one day...he'll say "I never knew you"
- Look what Jesus says. **Matthew 7:21-23**
- **21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' 23 Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!'**
- If you want to know "is that me? Am I the one who will go through life with tons of action FOR God, but never know the Will of the Father...never know the heart of God?" Then start by taking a look at your prayers.
- Are you praying put together prayers...or honest ones?

TRANSITION: Ok, there's one more important part of prayer. That is...

3) Prayer is Submission: Don't tell God what you'll do FOR him. Ask him what he'll do WITH you.

- Sub- Under. Mission- Called to a purpose. Transcendent.
- My mission doesn't trump God's mission. I'm UNDER him.
- Yet- often- we act like our mission is the bigger one.

Fire Truck ILLUS- Chief, Driver, 2 Hose operators, Back of truck Steerer
"What's your primary job?"
To put out fires

- Have you ever bargained with God?
- Like, you try to convince God to do something for you, by telling him first what you'll do for him
- (LORD, just get me this job, and you'll see, I'll turn this thing around. I'll be a good person. I'll go on a mission trip. I'll be nicer to my neighbor.)

- See why you really care about there...is you getting the job. Not the mission of God.
- The Jews in Nehemiahs day lost sight of their mission to be a distinct people worshipping God so other Nations could know YHWH and worship him too. Instead- they became a sad unmotivated laughing stock because they didn't want to do what the hard things— face opposition— or risk losing the little bit that they had for the sake of a greater purpose.
- They had no sense of calling...they had lost their sense of a transcendent purpose-a larger calling on their life. Thats why Jerusalem was in ruin.
- When you look at Nehemiah's prayer here, you need to realize he is about to do something REALLY difficult. In fact, impossible. All because he has a deep burden and sense of calling to God's greater purpose for his people.
- First he is about to ask a king for a favor.
 - Listen, you don't do that.
 - People get killed for asking kings for a favor.
 - The cupbearer doesn't look at the king and say "So...last night I was just thinking...how about a couple years of paid vacay so I can go build up another kingdom that's not yours."
- The reality is, Nehemiah could easily be killed for asking the king this.
- But second, what he is about to go do in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem is no cakewalk.
- This isn't just about laying brick and mortar or hanging drywall.
- It's about hanging drywall while people try to kill you.
- But notice- there is no bargaining with God here. There is no, "Just do this one thing for me and we'll be nice."
- **Neh 1:8-10**
- Nehemiah doesn't try to convince God how great he'll be, he tells God how great God is and how great God's people will be WITH him.
- He says, "Here is what Moses wrote down about you."
- according to what you say, God, these are your people...and you have promised to use them.
 - Now, did God forget this? No.
 - But the Jews did.
- Besides being relational and confessional...
- **Prayer is asking God to use us based on what HE has said about us... instead of what we have said about ourselves.**
- Nehemiah doesn't bargain. Instead, he prays back to God what God has already said about his people.
- And finally, he makes the ask. After the honest conversation, he finally he gets to the action.

- **v 11**
- He says "God, I don't know what will happen to me when I go before this king, but I do know that I can't be afraid of him. Because you are sovereign. You are bigger than this king. You are the creator. You have incredible power. And you are my Father. My covenant keeping God. You love me. You love your people. So grant me mercy when I ask this King."
- And look at this little detail. Its so poetic.
- See, Nehemiah tells us "And you know what, I'm already the cupbearer to the king."
- Right there Nehemiah is saying, "All along, even when I got this sweet job sitting next to the King, God was working his plan to protect his people. Even WHEN I DIDN'T know it, God was working for my good and the good of his people."
- Listen to me. Your job is not just a job. Your place in your family, at your school, in your neighborhood...none of it is just coincidence. God has you in a place at a time for a season and a reason. Can you see beyond the SUB-MISSION he has you on to how he is using you in HIS MISSION.
- He wants to use you. He wants to lead you into action.
- But you will never realize it as long as you are trying to show him how good you are at stuff instead of having honest hopeful, Bible saturated prayer with your Father that loves you.
- As long you are trying to do FOR God instead of humbly submitting yourself to what he wants to do WITH you...you'll always have to hide your broken soul to prove to him how awesome you are. You'll miss his mission for you.

Conclusion: You understand, you'll never pray like this without Jesus.

- See, you can't pray to God as your FATHER if you don't know him as your father. Because then you aren't being honest.
- This is why Jesus died.
- When Jesus died on the cross, he never cried out in pain or anguish because of the physical pain.
- He didn't scream at the nails, or the thorns, or the whips or the punches. He was silent.
- **MATT 27:46**

- But when he did open his mouth in anguish, it was to cry out “My God why have you forsaken me?”
- It was at this point Jesus, who only really knew himself as the son of the Father...felt the anguish of being alone.
- He felt a loss of the connection to the Father that he daily walked and talked with...so you could have the opportunity to know him as Father.
- See, all the sin you confess to God, it would be like going before a King, like Nehemiah did, and saying “I hate you.”
- But where that would have meant certain death for Nehemiah...because Jesus died our death, was separated from his Father FOR us, now, we can boldly and confidently...and honestly...approach our Father with our darkest secrets and say, “While my sins were as dark as night, Jesus’ blood has washed me clean..”
- ...and because Jesus resurrected after he died, he now gives us his Spirit. If your trust is in Jesus for your salvation- your ongoing connection to your Father- and not your own fabricated “awesomeness” ...then the very power that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in you.

...which gives you all the confidence in the world to do the impossible. To know he is calling you to a life of risk...of doing something truly remarkable...of making the most remarkable comebacks.

This is how much Jesus loves you.

- The conversation with his Father that was absolutely crucial to his life.... It was broken so you could have it.
- Does God hear you? Unless Jesus wasted his life and death....then absolutely. SO why not start the conversation today?

Black Screen

1) We’re building a Culture of Prayer at City Church.

Prayer Counselors- Use them!

Altar

Prayer and Worship nights

Will you join us?

2) Personally- Use City Church Bible reading- prayers suggested there for you. On the app- how to do a hear journal.

- When you start working out, you pick up a 5 lb dumbbell.

- So start with some 15 second prayers.
- Have a 5 minute time with God after you read the Bible....and 15 second prayers during the day.
- You do realize "Help me, Father!" is a prayer. In fact, its one I pray QUITE often.
- And then, tell someone else. Tell somebody in your community group...or a friend...I want to pray...and I'm just not "good at it" will you help me?
- And how about this. Practice this this week. Try turning thoughts into prayers
 - "I hate that Guy" to "Lord, do something with him. Will you show that guy some of your grace today?"
 - But get ready, because there is a good chance he is going to look at you and say "You're the cupbearer to the king. I've put you in a position to show my grace...thanks for keeping the conversation going...time for action."

Often your prayers turn not into opportunities he is going to call you into.

Spoiler- Nehemiah- just like Zerubbabel and Ezra- is going to have a point of failure with Israel. So if we only see Nehemiah as a template for a career change or social activism we miss the point.

Nehemiah points to a real savior- a real reformer- who wouldn't just motivate people- but actually change their hearts.

Jesus was better than Nehemiah in every way.

Nehemiah was a servant of the king- who left a palace to do dangerous- tiring work. Jesus- was a son of the King- who left all his royal privileges to come to a broken world where he knew he would die.

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king- tasted wine to be sure it wasn't poisoned. Jesus intentionally drank from the cup of the wrath of God against our sin. In fact- when the disciples asked if they could do what Jesus does- he told them- you can't drink the cup I'm about to drink.

Nehemiah prayed and wept for his people.

Jesus did too- but not as just another sinner in need of confession- like Nehemiah- but as a sinless substitute who would die in our place.

Nehemiah literally means in Hebrew- “the Lord Comforts” but Nehemiah’s story doesn’t end with comfort- it actually ends in despair.

Jesus- when his story ends- our sins are forgiven- the curse of death is broken- and he sits down at the right hand of our Father and wipes every tear from our eyes. In fact- When Jesus’ story seems to end in death and failure- its actually the beginning of a story of new creation forever!

The point of all this is not you becoming a better version of you. Rather- it is you seeing and acknowledging the truer and better Nehemiah- and receiving his invitation to be forgiven and to come into his family. To make him your king. He’s the only king who dies for you...instead of using you like a cupbearer to protect him.

You can do nothing for Him until you acknowledge that he has done everything for you.

Prayer Counselors & Altar