

Responding to a Changing World

Nehemiah 1

I remember how everything took place as if it were yesterday. It was June 2008. I was living in Miami, Florida at the time. I was working construction when I got the call. Yusdenis, my wife, was in labor. Our firstborn was on the way.

I didn't own a car at the time. I had only been in the country for about a month. Fortunately, the place I was working at was on the way to the hospital. So, with the help of a friend, my wife picked me up at work and to the hospital we went.

When we got to the delivery room, we were joking, laughing with each other, and showing affection to one another. What a lovely situation. But, it wasn't too long when things began to change. Little by little, as the labor pain increased, the mood of my lovely wife changed significantly.

All of a sudden, my jokes were not so funny anymore. Somehow, my expressions of joy became annoying. My wife became irritated and I noticed that she was mad when she yelled at me, "Stop trying to be funny! This is all your fault!"

Trying to ease things up, I said, "Honey, remember, it takes two." My comment didn't help. She didn't like what I said, and she kicked me out of the room. (That day I learn that my wife is sweet and nice. But, if you make her mad... she will send you flying...).

The baby boy was born, and our lives were changed. Peace and harmony returned to the delivery room. And then, for the first time in my life, I didn't get any sleep for 24 consecutive hours. The same story was repeated again in 2010 and 2013. But, the truth is that the births of my children have changed our lives, and for sure the relationship of my wife and I, forever.

Have you ever lived an event the has changed your life forever?

The people of Puerto Rico have. About a year ago, in September of 2017, Puerto Rico received the unwelcomed visit of two major hurricanes. The devastation was tremendous. About 80% of the island's agricultural industry was wiped out. The life of thousands of people changed in a matter of hours. Boricuas found themselves in a new reality with the passing of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

The people of New Orleans found themselves in a very similar situation back in 2005, after hurricane Katrina made landfall in Louisiana... Haiti suffered extreme change after the earthquake of 2010... In March of 2011, the lives of many Japanese changed after a massive earthquake that caused one of the most aggressive Tsunamis in history.

Closer to home, the early morning of September 11th, 2001 seemed like a normal day for many people until disaster struck at about 9 a.m. That terrorist attack changed the course of the lives of many people, a whole nation, and even the world.

Change is constantly happening. Sometimes change is noticeable, other times it is subtle. Sometimes, a little bit of change is expected, other times it happens randomly and drastically. I am pretty sure all of us have experienced change.

Perhaps it was a routine visit to the doctor, an unforeseen phone call, the visit of someone you never expected. Maybe a surprising knock to your door changed the course of your life completely. A fire, a car accident, a betrayal... you name it.

I am pretty sure that all of us have experienced the feeling of being in a new and unknown world. This new world sometimes gets more beautiful and more colorful. But, there are times it gets dangerous and frightening.

We live in a changing world where things happen in our lives in dramatic, unexpected, and at times ordinary ways. But, despite the constant change that sometimes brings us joy and sometimes sadness, I can safely say that today we find ourselves in the best story ever written. A story that began in a garden and has continued until today. **This story includes many betrayals, including our betrayal to God, but it also includes our redemption.**

The scripture reading for the day came out of the book of Nehemiah. One of the things we learn from the first chapter of this book is that Nehemiah's world was drastically changed. In a blink of an eye, Nehemiah found himself facing a new reality.

Nehemiah lived comfortably and with honor. He was a Hebrew exiled in Persia who worked at the court of the king as a cupbearer. Cupbearers were responsible for selecting, serving, and trying the wine to make sure it was not poisoned. Nehemiah was the bodyguard of the king. Nehemiah put his life in danger to protect the life of the Persian king. His work was dangerous yet prestigious. Nehemiah lived comfortably and with honor, but his situation was about to change.

It was late November or early December, 445 years before Jesus was born, when Nehemiah received the sad news that Jerusalem was in ruins. The main Jewish city was a disgrace. In a blink of an eye, Nehemiah's life changed radically. He was now in a new world. On the outside everything seemed to be the same, but inside of him everything had changed. So, like many of us, Nehemiah found himself in a new normal, facing a new hostile world.

How can we deal with/respond to changes in our lives?

From the Scriptures we learn that **the best way to respond to a changing world is prayer.** Nehemiah knelt before God and prayed.

The power of any Christian is in prayer. Prayer is talking with God. It is not only sharing our problems, needs, plans, goals, and accomplishments with God. **Prayer is also about hearing the Word of God** spoken to us to comfort us, to teach us, to guide us.

Unfortunately, we do not pray as often as we should. I do not know all the reasons for which we neglect prayer, but I know one of them. I have seen many people misunderstanding the verse that says, “*your Father knows what you need before you ask him*” (**Matthew 6:8**). Some people say, “If the Father knows what I need then I don’t have to pray.” That is a serious problem because this thinking deprives us from one of the greatest means God uses to strengthen us.

Many times, our prayer life reveals the deceptive idea that prayer is just about asking. Dear church ... yes, “*your Father knows what you need before you ask him*” (**Matthew 6:8**). This means that **we pray not to inform God, but to let God transform us through prayer.**

Prayer helps us to reflect and adapt our will to God’s will. Prayer is the acknowledgement that only God can truly satisfy each of our needs. We pray because through prayer we breathe in God’s desires, and we align our will to God’s will.

We have to make the use of prayer our first available resource. For years, I have seen how difficult it is for most Christians to pray. Not too long ago I was reading one of the writings of Rev. David Wilkerson. He said that in his ministry, one of the things that most amazed him was to see people looking for solutions to their major problems in audio-cassettes, books, counselors, by calling to radio stations and attending therapies of all kinds, but rarely resorting to prayer.

Unfortunately, that is the reality of many people today. Our priorities are reversed. I am not making a case today for praying just in difficult times, but for praying at all times, and have prayer as the first resource in our daily lives. We seek help in many different places and when things change drastically we use prayer as a last resort. **There are many people who see God as a giant aspirin pill; they come in prayer just when it hurts.**

We need to have prayer as a tool that we use every day. Before seeking help anywhere, we have to come in prayer to God. I am not saying it is wrong to seek professional help. But if we first stand before God for help, the Lord will use as a river of blessings psychologists, doctors, counselors, pastors and anyone else we consult in the midst of adversity.

The Scripture is clear and says that the answer to everything in our lives is prayer with faith. The apostle Paul writes: “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*” (**Philippians 4:6**).

The psalmist said:

- *When I called, you answered me; you greatly emboldened me.* **Psalm 138:3**
- *I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.* **Psalm 118:5 NKJV**

- *When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me. Psalm 86:7*

Nehemiah's name literally means the Lord comforts. Truly the Lord is to comfort us when our hearts are broken by the circumstances of life. The first and most vital tool we can use to receive comfort from God is prayer.

God wants to restore and give purpose to your life. Make contact with God through prayer. Make prayer a priority in your life. Seek first the Kingdom of God. In this changing world, we should respond to any and every situation by praying. The Bible encourages praying continually.

John Wesley said:

1. "God does nothing except in response to believing prayer."
2. "Prayer is where the action is."

Someone said: *I fear a Christian's prayers more than an army of ten thousand men. Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees.*

In the face of changes and difficulties, pray to God. The Lord will provide you with everything you need to respond in a healthy way to the circumstances that come your way. There is nothing we can do to prevent things from changing, but by praying, we can prepare to deal with change.

Let us seek God's direction. Let's seek refuge in God. Let's follow the example of Nehemiah who prayed and interceded before God in times of change and difficulty.