

When Personal Walls are Broken

Nehemiah 1, 4, 6

INTRODUCTION: Thus far in our study of Nehemiah, we have primarily made application of the truths of this book to the corporate life of our church. You as a church have done that, and you have done it well. And while we will continue to live by the applications of these truths as a church continually, it is time for us to receive these truths individually and begin to apply them closer to home.

Today and for the next two weeks, we are going to complete our study of Nehemiah considering when our own personal walls are broken down.

- Like walls that picture our **family** life
- Our **marriage** relationship
- Our relationship to our **kids** or grandkids
- Or **teens**, your relationship to parents or siblings
- Or it may be walls that represent your **job**, your work, and they are broken down.
- It could be walls of **morality**, and something there or many somethings there are broken and in disrepair.

What do we do when these walls in our lives that are so important to us have gaps and holes or have crumbled altogether? How do we repair the personal walls?

Nehemiah dealt with his own personal walls being broken. It was not just a national issue for him. And in the midst of leading the people to rebuild the literal walls of Jerusalem, he had to wrestle with personal walls that were under attack and in need of repair.

So, what did Nehemiah do?

What did Nehemiah do that I can do to address broken walls, broken things, broken relationships, broken lives that are connected to me personally?

Actually, Nehemiah did three things, and all three of them are things we too can do with great success. Today we look at the first one. The next two weeks we will look at the second and the third.

But the one we examine today is where Nehemiah started every time. I'm not saying it is more important than the others, but it is always the starting point. It should always precede the others.

I hope you are wondering what is it? Can I really use it? Does it work; will it work for me?

Very quickly I am going to take you to three passages in Nehemiah that reveal the first thing Nehemiah did when he discovered a new wall either being attacked to create a hole in it or just discovering a wall in his life already broken down but neglected.

If you have your Bibles, print or electronic, I invite you to walk through this with me. I'm going to put some key verses on the screens for all to see, but looking at the context all around these three passages is always helpful.

The first one is at the very beginning of the book, and takes place when Nehemiah first receives the news that although the remnant of the Jews have been back in Jerusalem for many decades, the walls of the city are still in ruins.

Now at this point, this is intensely personal for Nehemiah. He has no official position or responsibility for the nation. He lives far away. He is the cupbearer to the King of Persia. Taking care of the walls of Jerusalem is not in his job description.

But when Nehemiah heard his heart was broken. He was devastated, and he began to do the first thing any person can do when they discover broken things in their lives, their families, their work, or their relationships.

Look with me and see what Nehemiah did first. Look at Nehemiah 1, beginning in verse 3.

Nehemiah 1:3–5 3 And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates *are burned* with fire.”

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.**

5 And I said: “**I pray, LORD God of heaven,** O great and awesome God, *You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You ...*

And Nehemiah's prayer in response to broken walls continues for the rest of the chapter.

Now go to Nehemiah, chapter 4, verse 1.

The rebuilding has started, but opposition has developed from two men name Sanballat and Tobiah and their friends.

Nehemiah 4:1–5 1 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a

day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—*stones that are burned?*” 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* beside him, and he said, “Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up *on it*, he will break down their stone wall.”

Ah, now it is a personal attack on Nehemiah himself. His integrity, his leadership, his wisdom, all are in question and up for ridicule. So what is the first thing Nehemiah does? Look at verse 4.

4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! 5 Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked *You* to anger before the builders.

Nehemiah prays! Nehemiah prays!

Now quickly to chapter 6

The enemies of Nehemiah are back and they brought their friends. They want to hurt Nehemiah, if not physically at least in reputation and in influence among the people.

Nehemiah 6:1–2 1 Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), 2 that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono.” But they thought to do me harm.

And when Nehemiah would not fall into their trap, they threatened to send a letter to the king accusing Nehemiah of leading a rebellion. Nehemiah says,

Nehemiah 6:8 Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart.”

And then Nehemiah does what it seems Nehemiah always does, when he finds things broken down, or things come under attack and are being broken down, or even when things are threatened with being broken down by others. When the personal walls were falling down, Nehemiah always prayed. And in the next verse we read the beginning of his cry to God,

Nehemiah 6:9 ... Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

And the conclusion of his prayer about the matter in verse 14.

Nehemiah 6:14 My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

Folks, look. This instruction here in God’s Word is exceedingly clear.

When things are broken,

When things are being broken,

When things are threatened to be broken,

PRAY!

Before anything else,

PRAY!

And this instruction given through the example of Nehemiah, we find multiple times in the Scripture.

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing,

Jesus says,

Matthew 6:6b ... pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*...

Matthew 6:9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Luke 18:1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

Jesus said, pray, pray, always pray!

Now, may I be audacious enough to verbalize a question that is almost sacrilegious? But it is a question that needs an answer, and it is a question that some of you are asking silently in your mind right now.

Why should I pray?

- Why should I pray when things are broken or breaking?
- **I prayed sometimes for things and nothing happened.**
- **God is sovereign, and He is going to do what He is going to do, no matter what I ask or say, so why should I pray?**

May I tell you why Nehemiah prayed?

May I tell you why when things around my life begin to break, I begin to pray?

I. BECAUSE OF PRAYER'S EFFECT ON US.

Jeremiah 33:3 'Call to Me (God), and I (God) will answer you (man), and show you (man) great and mighty things, which you (man) do not know.'

One reason to pray is because God enlightens our minds when we pray. Sometimes it means changing our mind or will.

II. BECAUSE OF PRAYER'S EFFECT ON GOD.

Some might desire to restrict prayer's effect to the one who does the praying. But the biblical testimony shows us that such is not the case. Many are the passages that demonstrate that the pleas of man have an effect upon God.

A. For instance, do you remember the story in Genesis 18:20-32? God has told Abraham He is going to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But Abraham pleads with God.

- If there are 50 righteous will you spare the cities? God says, "Yes!"
- 45?
- 40? 30? 20? 10? – God says, "For 10 I will spare the city."

We cannot read this passage without observing that Abraham's pleading with God visibly affected the Lord Almighty.

God began with the determination to destroy Sodom.

He concluded with the decision to spare the city if ten righteous people were found in it.

B. In Exodus 33, after Israel sinned against the Lord by making and worshipping the golden calf, God told Moses to lead the people to the Promised Land, and that God would send an angel to go before them. But God said that He would not go up in their midst because they were such a stiff-necked people.

So Moses prayed. And He said, "God, it is Your presence with us that makes us different from all the other nations. Lord, I cannot do this without You. If I have found grace in your sight and You have really called me to lead this people to the land You promised, I, we, need You to go among us."

And God said to Moses, "I will go with you."

It is not hard to believe that prayer affects man. It is more difficult to understand how prayer likewise affects God. But how can that be so?

How can it be that the pleas of a mere man would make a difference in the actions of Almighty God?

III. BECAUSE PRAYER IS AN ACT OF PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

Ezekiel 22:30-31 30 So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord GOD.

The context of these verses is the judgment of God upon the nation of Israel. The sins of the nation; judgment is well deserved. But Ezekiel 22:30 is shocking. It says that **God looked for a man to serve as a bridge between Him and Israel, someone to intercede, to stand in the gap.**

If He could have found such a person, just one, He would not have destroyed the land. But because the Lord could not find a man who would pray, God poured out His wrath on Israel.

This is an astounding truth that when understood will drive us to our knees in prayer. **God imposed a limit upon His own action.** He did not do what He desired because there was no man to cooperate, no man to enter into a partnership with God. While this principle may be startling, it is fully consistent with the whole of Scripture.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

God is sovereign. He can do anything that He desires to do without man's help. God is self-sufficient. Man cannot supply something God is lacking because God has no lack.

But in the beginning God gave dominion to man and woman over all the earth.

The word dominion means "rule" and is used to refer to a king's authority over his kingdom.

Nehemiah 9:28 "But after they had rest, They again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, So that they had dominion over them; Yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; And many times You delivered them according to Your mercies,

This delegated dominion in no way usurps the sovereign authority of Almighty God. But it allows man the privilege of sharing that authority.

Consider an illustration. A man owns many businesses and possesses a fortune. By signing his name to one of the company checks he can draw upon his funds kept by a bank. One day he voluntarily signs a card at the bank which authorizes the bank to require two signatures on the checks of one of his companies, his own and the business manager's. Now what is done within the company requires the activity of both the owner and the manager. The manager cannot spend on his own because he does not own the funds. But neither does the owner spend on his own for he has delegated the authority to cosign the checks to his manager. For the company to spend money, both signatures are required.

Do you know an equivalent term for business manager? Steward!

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

God is the owner. People are His delegated managers.

Prayer is the check requiring both signatures.

John 14:13-14 13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

John 16:23-24 23 "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

The reason Israel was not spared in Ezekiel 22 was that God could not find a man to cosign.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

This says that our prayers are sometimes not answered because God will not cosign some of our requests.

Effective prayer requires 2 things.

1. In God's Will – He cosigns.
2. Our Prayer – Our signature. That means there could be problems not solved, walls not rebuilt, relationships not healed, which God is willing to do, but does not do because we don't pray.

CONCLUSION: That's why Nehemiah prayed.

Folks, that's why I pray, and I confess that when walls are breaking, broken, or threatened, I pray more and more. Maybe I shouldn't, but I do.

But one of the reasons I do, is because I know that God in His power and sovereignty has chosen to do many things in response to prayer. I don't want things left broken that God was willing to fix, just because I was not willing to pray.

Do you?