

Week #1: September 12 - 18

Nehemiah 1:1 – 2:9 (Praying & Planning)

MAIN POINTS:

- Prayer: look at how Nehemiah prayed and how we can use his prayer as a model for our own prayers
- Planning: after we pray, we still need to plan

1. Describe the role of a cupbearer in the ancient kingdom in which Nehemiah lived. What position would this be similar to in our government today?
2. What news did the brothers from Jerusalem bring to Nehemiah?
3. On hearing the news, what three things did Nehemiah do?
4. Look carefully at Nehemiah's prayer recorded in 1: 5-11.
 - a) In verse 5, Nehemiah focuses on who God is. Which characteristics of God does he mention in his prayer?
 - b) Whose sins is Nehemiah confessing? What sins does he confess before God?
 - c) From his confession, how does Nehemiah see himself before God?
 - d) What is Nehemiah doing in the next part of his prayer (verses 8-9)?
 - e) Finally, Nehemiah asks God for help in verse 11. What help is he specifically asking for?
 - f) With verse 11 in mind, what is the purpose of what Nehemiah says to God in verse 10?
5. In this opening section, we see Nehemiah praying on at least two occasions (see 1:4-11; 2:4). Describe the occasion of each of these prayers. How did each prayer help Nehemiah?
6. Describe a recent incident when prayer really helped you.
7. a) Although Nehemiah spent four months praying (from the month of Kislev to the month of Nisan) and was the king's cupbearer, why do you think he was "very much afraid," when the king asked him why he was sad?

b) If Nehemiah was still afraid, what did the four months of praying accomplish?
(HINT: look at the word "but" at the beginning of verse 3)

8. a) From Nehemiah 2:4-8, what kind of planning did he make?

b) How are prayer and planning related?

c) What do you think might have happened if Nehemiah planned first, then prayed afterwards? Is the sequence of praying first then planning important? Share your opinion with your group.

9. How might prayer help you respond to the challenges that lie ahead of you this week, month, or year?

10. An excellent way to learn how to pray specifically and effectively is to write out your prayer in a prayer journal and then read it to God. Using Nehemiah's prayer (Nehemiah 1:5-11) as an example, write out a prayer of your own. Choose a specific challenge you are facing the express your need for God's help. Include the four components of Nehemiah's prayer noted in question 4. Once you have composed your prayer, pray this prayer to God. You may share this prayer with someone in your small group for accountability and support.