

LifeGroup Discussion Questions  
Nehemiah 1:3-4  
January 3, 2020

**Overview:**

The events in the book of Nehemiah take place during the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes. The Israelites had been living in exile but there was still a remnant living in Israel. Nehemiah was getting reports from the people in Israel and they were not good. They were in "great trouble and shame." The walls of Jerusalem were torn down and the gates were burned by fire. This news broke Nehemiah's heart and he began to pray. Nehemiah 1:4 reads: "4 As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven." I would encourage you to read his entire prayer which continues through verse 11.

Nehemiah's first step upon hearing devastating news was to pray. This seems so contrary to our "get it done" culture of today. We might say a quick prayer to make sure God is on our side, but then it is time to roll up our sleeves and get to work. We don't view prayer as an integral part of anything. Nehemiah spent days praying before God. This was not only an act of prayer, but also an act of worship. Before Nehemiah did anything, he made sure he had presented his request before God. He demonstrated persistence, patience, and humility.

In today's world we expect immediate gratification. Patience is a virtue of the past. When we are faced with problems most of us will turn to the internet before we turn to God. There are many obstacles we tend to struggle with in prayer. Doesn't seem like God is listening. Awkward speaking out loud to an empty room. We don't get the results we want. If God really wants something why doesn't He just do it? What difference do my prayers make? Why would God want to listen to me? A short quick prayer should be enough, after all I have other things to do. We start out praying and 30 seconds later we are writing our grocery list (focus). We feel too much guilt to pray. We don't know what to pray (words to use). We don't believe prayer actually does anything. Praying for something you want seems selfish and petty. These are just a few areas we struggle with.

The area you struggle with may not be listed above, but if we are honest all of us at some point have struggled with prayer. Out of all the things Jesus did in His ministry the one request we see from the disciples is to learn how to pray. Jesus cast out demons, walked on water, raised the dead, cleansed lepers, fed thousands, turned water into wine, ect. The disciples recognized prayer as an essential part of Jesus' ministry. All the miracles we tend to focus on came after Jesus spending time in prayer. If you had been beside Jesus and witnessed all the

miracles would you have asked to learn how to pray? We want action. Prayer is too passive.

Nehemiah knew there was power in prayer. Which is why he spent days praying before he took any action. We don't read of God immediately answering Nehemiah's prayer. Nehemiah was a cup bearer before the king. One day the king noticed that Nehemiah was sad, which was punishable by death to be sad before the king. Nehemiah 2:4-5 reads: <sup>4</sup>Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it." We read in these verses that Nehemiah prayed again, before answering the king. We can learn from this that Nehemiah had both long persistent prayers and short in the moment prayers.

Nehemiah didn't just pray so God would change his heart. I have heard this numerous times while growing up in the church. "Even if God doesn't answer your prayer at least praying will change your heart." While I am not doubting that prayer changes hearts, I just find this to be an extremely unmotivating reason to pray. Nehemiah wasn't praying for a change of heart. He was praying about a devastating situation for the Israelites. If he really didn't believe in the purpose and power of prayer why would he spend days praying? Maybe our first obstacle to praying is believing it has power. Praying may change your heart, but that is a ripple affect of prayer. The primary reason to pray is you BELIEVE God will intercede with unimaginable power and grant your request. If we don't start by believing there is power in prayer then all the other obstacles mentioned earlier will continue. God wants to hear from you. He wants you to pray.

### **Bible Study:**

1. What is an obstacle for you praying?
2. Do you believe there is power in prayer? Why or why not? If you do believe there is power in prayer does your prayer life reflect that belief?
3. Write out a plan for praying and fasting for the next month.
4. Find a prayer partner. A partnership where you can hold each other accountable to praying every day.
5. Go to [www.firstmbchurch.org/21](http://www.firstmbchurch.org/21) and learn about all the prayer initiatives going on in the church.
6. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-8. Before we lift our hands to get to work we need to lift our hands in prayer.