

Series: Rightly Dividing the Subject of Prayer
"I Prayed in Faith: Why Didn't God Answer?"

Introduction:

1. Many Christians are hurt and confused because they prayed about something and God didn't answer their plea (restore my marriage, heal my loved one, meet this financial need, don't allow my child to make this mistake, etc.).
 - They prayed in faith with all of their heart, but it didn't happen. I've been there and you probably have, too.
2. Many preachers present the subject of prayer in an almost spooky, superstitious way. Prayer is like their lucky stone that they can rub and get whatever they ask for. Inevitably, they always use the prayer promises in the gospels as their proof texts. **Matthew 16:19, 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 14:13-14**
3. If people get what they asked for, they declare, "See! It works, prayer works." But if not, they begin to doubt God's promises and doubt God's faithfulness. They lament, "This prayer stuff just doesn't work like the Bible says."
4. As a young Christian, I struggled with this. I would pray in faith, believing with all of my heart, yet the answer never came. I heard explanations, but they didn't satisfy me:
 - **Example:** It must be in accordance with His will (**1 John 5:14-15**), then these prayer promises in the gospels will work for you.
 - 1 John wasn't written until over 50 years **after** these prayer promises were made. If this was the disclaimer (so to speak), why didn't Jesus tell them then?
5. Finally, as I began to understand the importance of right division (**2 Timothy 2:15**), I realized that I had been taking verses out of their context and claiming their fulfillment.
 - **Illustration:** Imagine me taking a letter that was written to Pastor Tommy and claiming promises made to him.
 - The entire Bible is written **for us**, but it isn't all written **to us** (this is evidenced in the fact that we worship on Sunday, eat meats that were forbidden, etc.).
6. In this Bible study, we will examine these prayer promises in their context. We will see that they were valid prayer promises, made to a specific group. We will see who they were made to, why they were made, and even see their literal fulfillment in Scripture.

First, these prayer promises were made to the twelve apostles.

1. Let's examine them one by one.

- **Matthew 16:19** - Jesus is speaking to Peter (one of the twelve) - He grants unto him the power to bind and loose things and promises that God in heaven will respond. A key is a badge of authority and power - this is given to Peter and the rest of the twelve (as we will see).
- **Matthew 18:18-19** - This is spoken to all of the twelve
- **Matthew 21:21-22** - This is spoken to the twelve. Notice the phrase "all things." The order is clear - A) ask B) believe C) receive
- **Mark 11:22-24** - This is spoken to the twelve. Say it, believe it, and you'll have it (verse 23) - desire, pray, believe, and receive (verse 24)
- **John 14:13-14** - This is spoken to the twelve. This is clear - ask in My name and I will do it.

2. Mark this carefully: These promises were never made in public to just anybody. They were made specifically to the twelve disciples of Jesus (the apostles). This authority was granted to them in light of the position they were to hold in Israel's kingdom. **Matthew 19:28**

Second, these prayer promises were made in the time context of Israel's kingdom.

1. During the time these promises were made, Jesus and His disciples were ministering to Israel only. **Matthew 10:5-6**

2. The gospel message they were to preach was Israel's kingdom at hand (near). **Matthew 4:17, 9:35, 10:7**

3. The twelve were looking for Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom church, built on the declaration of Christ, as Messiah. **Luke 22:28-30**

4. The twelve had no understanding of the present Body of Christ that you and I live in.

- The **kingdom** church was to be built upon the declaration of Christ as Messiah.
- The church, **the body of Christ**, is built upon the declaration of Christ crucified, buried, risen again and exalted in the heavenly places. **Ephesians 1:20-23**
- The twelve didn't even have a comprehension of this most basic truth. **Luke 18:31-34**

5. This is the time context of these promises. They were made in a time when Israel's kingdom was being prepared for and they were made in view of this coming kingdom (refer to chart).

6. These promises were not made to the church, the body of Christ, nor were they reinforced in any of Paul's epistles to the church. They were made to the men who would be the pillars of Israel's future kingdom on the earth.

Third, these promises were fulfilled to the twelve apostles in Acts 1-7.

1. So what did Jesus mean by these promises? Were they legitimate? Most definitely - for the people, purpose, and time period in which they were given.

- This is important. You cannot just lift promises out of their context.
- Specific promises and commands are given to specific people at different times. You must look at Scripture in context.

2. What about these prayer promises made to the twelve? We see them fulfilled to the letter in Acts 1-7.

3. In Acts 1:6, Jesus is risen and the twelve are still looking for the establishment of Israel's kingdom (they hadn't been told anything different).

4. Jesus, once again, promises the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit comes in **Acts 2:4**. At this point, the twelve are supernaturally endowed with and led by God's Spirit.

5. Once again, they preach strictly to Israel (**Acts 2:36**), and their subject is repentance in view of the coming kingdom. **Acts 3:18-21**

6. Of course, Israel refused to repent nationally. Instead, they imprisoned, beat, and persecuted the twelve and even murdered Stephen.

7. But, here in the early part of Acts (while the kingdom is being offered to Israel), the apostles get a little foretaste of the power and authority they will have in Christ's kingdom (**Acts 2:43**). The apostles make no mistakes or blunders. When they prayed it or said it, it happened.

- **Acts 3:4-8** - a literal fulfillment of **Mark 11:23** and **John 14:13-14**

- **Acts 4:24-33** - a fulfillment of **Matthew 18:18-19**
- **Acts 5:9-10** - a fulfillment of **Matthew 16:19**
- **Acts 5:15-16** - a fulfillment of **Mark 11:24** and **John 14:12-13**

8. We see all of these prayer promises fulfilled literally (no mistakes, no misfires, and no blunders). They could bind, loose, say it, claim it, and it happened. Why would God grant such power to men?

- Because they were supernaturally endowed with God's Spirit under God's kingdom program for Israel (a foretaste of **Joel 2:28-29; Ezekiel 36:24-29**).
- God was using the signs, wonders, and miraculous power of the apostles to call Israel to repentance (**1 Corinthians 1:22; Acts 2:43; 4:29-30, 5:11-12**).
- After Israel rejected God's call to repentance, God raised up the apostle Paul and revealed to Him that Israel's kingdom program would be temporarily suspended. He revealed to him the dispensation of grace and the mystery of the body of Christ (refer to chart). **Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:1-9; Colossians 1:25-27**

9. But, what about today? Do men possess these same powers? Can they pray in faith, speak a word of faith, and have it happen instantly? Can they see people healed instantaneously (every person)?

- I see no evidence of it. Some may claim these prayer promises and claim to have these apostolic powers, but "the proof is in the pudding." They don't have it.
- There is no need for it. The apostles have all died and Israel's program has been temporarily suspended. When Israel's program resumes in the tribulation, we see this miraculous power demonstrated again. **Revelation 11:3-6**

In Conclusion:

1. Does the body of Christ today have any prayer promises? We, in fact, have some glorious prayer promises that were given to us by Christ, through the apostle Paul.
2. They are not of the "name it and claim it" variety because we are not living under God's prophetic kingdom program for the nation of Israel.
3. We are part of the one body, the Body of Christ living in the mystery program as revealed to the apostle Paul.

Next week we will examine our glorious prayer promises.

Rapture of the church

Christ's
return to earth

Jesus & the
Twelve

Old
Testament



Acts 1-7

"Grace"
Body of Christ

7 years
Tribulation

1000 Years

KINGDOM
PROPHESIED

KINGDOM DECLARED
AT HAND

-PRAYER PROMISES
MADE TO TWELVE

Mt. 16:19, 18:18-19,
21:21-22; Mk. 11:22-24;
Jn. 14:13-14

KINGDOM OFFERED
& JESUS' PRAYER
PROMISES FULFILLED
TO THE TWELVE

KINGDOM
POSTPONED

KINGDOM ESTABLISHED
-THE TWELVE SITTING ON
TWELVE THRONES
MATT. 19:28

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"Prayer Promises for the Body of Christ - Part 1"

Introduction:

1. When it comes to the subject of prayer, we learned in last week's lesson how important it is to rightly divide God's Word (**2 Timothy 2:15**).
2. Whenever we see a prayer promise, we must look at to whom the promise was made, and time context in which it was made. When we claim prayer promises that were never intended for us or the time period in which we live, we corrupt God's Word.
 - Before Israel - when people approached God in prayer, it was with a blood sacrifice. **Genesis 8:20**
 - Israel under the law of Moses - the people approached God through a priest and were required to bring the proper animal sacrifice.
 - During the apostolic time period - they would ask or speak in faith and immediately receive (refer to lesson: "I Prayed in Faith - Why Didn't God Answer?")
 - During the tribulation - martyred saints pray and receive white robes. **Revelation 6:9-11**
 - During Israel's kingdom - believers go to Jerusalem and commune with God. **Isaiah 2:1-5**.
3. Do you see how important it is to rightly divide God's Word?
 - We sing a song that says, "Standing on the promises that cannot fail."
 - If you are standing on a promise that was never made to you, it **can** fail.
4. So, what about the dispensation of grace that we live in today? Do we have any prayer promises? We, in fact, have some glorious prayer promises. They are very special and they fit for today. For the next few weeks we will study these glorious prayer promises.

We have a promise of unexplainable peace through prayer. **Philippians 4:6-7**

1. Here is ample proof that God is not deaf to the cries of His children in this church age. He desires for us to pour out our hearts before Him in prayer. There is not one detail of our life that He does not want to hear about.
2. Paul uses three different words to describe our praying in verse 6:
 - Prayer - carries the idea of worship and adoration.
 - Supplication - an earnest sharing of our needs and problems.
 - Thanksgiving - thank Him for hearing and answering our prayers according to His will.
3. God not only wants to hear our prayers, He wants to hear about everything in our lives. He's interested in it all. God says to "be careful for nothing", but "in **everything** by prayer."
 - The word "careful" means "anxious." It literally means to be pulled in different directions.
 - Have you ever heard someone say, "I feel like I'm coming apart at the seams?" This is what worry does. In this text, God is saying, "Worry about nothing, pray about everything."
4. Notice that Paul says, "Let your **requests** be made known unto God."

- This is a far cry from **Matthew 18:18** where God tells the twelve apostles that they can bind and loose and it will happen (also cf. **Mark 11:23-24** - say it, believe it and it will happen).

5. Church age saints are never told to do this. We are told to "let your requests be made known unto God."

- **Illustration:** I made many requests of my dad while growing up. Some of them I received, and some of them I didn't.

6. "Name and claim it" advocates writh at this. They tell us to simply believe, and whatever you desire, you'll receive.

- But this doesn't fit for today. It doesn't fit Biblically or in our daily experience. Have you ever prayed believing and didn't get what you asked for or maybe even received the opposite? Even Paul experienced this in **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**.

7. This is why God says to let your requests be made known unto God. In verse 7 we have the promise that is associated with this.

- Notice, He didn't say that if we let our requests be made known unto God, that "whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."
- Our promise is different, yet glorious.

8. Our promise is **peace** - an unexplainable peace - a peace that passes all understanding. We see here an utter inability of man's mind to even comprehend this peace that God gives through prayer.

9. When we pray, God says that He will keep our **hearts** and **minds** through Christ Jesus.

- "Shall keep" is a military term meaning "to guard."
- The heart and mind are two areas that produce worry, and God says, "If you pray to me, I will guard them and flood your heart and mind with peace."
- This text says nothing about keeping our **bodies** as the result of prayer. In this church age, our blessings are of a spiritual nature (**Ephesians 1:3**).

10. You've heard the expression, "Prayer changes things." While this is true, this is not the primary purpose of prayer today.

- We enter this passage in anxiety and worry, but we come out of this passage with peace. What is in between? - Prayer!
- Circumstances may not have changed at all, but something has happened to the individual. Something has happened to the heart and mind.
- **Illustration:** Paul's thorn in the flesh (**2 Corinthians 12:8-9**). He had a physical problem and he prayed about it and his prayer was answered. While nothing changed in his body, prayer **did** change his spiritual outlook of the problem. In verse 8 he wanted to get rid of the problem, in verse 9 he gloried in it. What changed? His physical condition did not change, but his heart and mind changed.

11. In our anxiety, we want God to change everything around us - "Give me this, don't let this happen, open the door, make me feel better, take this away." When we should be praying, "Oh God, change me."

12. In this church age, **more than prayer changes things - prayer changes me.**

- We may enter the storm with worry, but we come out with peace.
- **Illustration:** My dad had a massive heart attack and I prayed for God to heal him. God allowed him to die, but an unexplainable peace flooded my heart and mind.

This prayer promise in Philippians 4:6-7 is absolutely true and it fits for today.

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3. Do you see how important it is to rightly divide God's Word?
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4. So what about the dispensation of grace that we live in today? Do we have any prayer promises? We, in fact, have some glorious prayer promises. They are very special and they fit for today. For the next few weeks we will study these glorious prayer promises.

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This was covered in Part 1

We have a promise of Holy Spirit intercession when we pray. Romans 8:26-27

1. In our text, we see our great need – verse 26a
 - Again, this is completely opposite of what Christ told the apostles on earth and what they experienced in Acts 2-7.
 - In this age, Paul says "**For we know not what we should pray for as we ought.**"
 - He includes himself in this verse and he, in fact, experienced this truth in **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**.
 - Haven't we all, at times, encountered the difficulty of knowing how to pray and for what to pray? Do I pray for healing or for them to go home? Do I pray for this job or the other job? Do I pray for their salvation or are they saved and need to repent?
 - Why is it that we do not always know what to pray for?
Suffering and sickness can cloud our thinking.
 - Our text says, "**The Spirit helpeth our infirmities**" (infirmities - feebleness, frailty; also translated weakness, sickness).

- Even after salvation, weakness characterizes these fleshly bodies and many times our fleshly weaknesses give us an inability to analyze situations correctly and pray about them intelligently. We're human.
- One of the basic instincts of humans is self-preservation, therefore we tend to pray for things that will help us and make us feel better and meet our desires and needs and eliminate our suffering.
- But many times this isn't God's plan or will – His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

We do not possess full knowledge.

- Our text says, "...*for we know not...*"
- There are some things we simply do not know. We cannot foresee the future. We cannot see a year or even an hour ahead.
- Because of our imperfect perspectives, finite minds, and spiritual limitations, we cannot always know exactly what to pray for.
- Many times we or someone else will have needs and we don't even know they exist, much less know how they could best be met. So many times we pray unwisely because "*we know not.*"

We do not know what is best for us.

- "*We know not what we should pray for as we ought.*"
- God, like a parent, sometimes has to refuse His child's request or compel him to do something he does not want to do because He knows what is best.
- Many times, we, with our finite minds cannot grasp God's plan, which brings me to my next point.

2. In our text, we see the Holy Spirit's great work. Verses 26b, 27

- We saw the problem in verse 26, but God has a great promise to offer a solution to the problem.
 - What is the promise? While we are praying, the Holy Spirit (indwelling the Christian) is filtering through our prayers and offering up intercession to the Father.
 - In our weakness, sickness, suffering, and lack of knowledge, the Holy Spirit is right there with us when we pray. He is entering into our experience, interpreting our innermost feelings and interceding to the Father on our behalf.
 - Even when all we can do is cry and say, "Lord I need you" and we can't express in words the needs that we feel, the Holy Spirit is groaning within us to God the Father, making intercession, saying, "Father, your child needs this or that, etc."
 - We do not hear the Holy Spirit's groanings. They are not audible and are inexpressible in words (cannot be uttered). Yet these groanings carry profound content as He appeals to the Father for the spiritual welfare of each believer.
 - Notice in verse 27, the Father knows the mind of the Spirit. When we pray, there is profound communication going on between the Father and the Spirit. Isn't that awesome? Did you know that all of this was going on when you pray?
- 1 Corinthians 2:10-11
- If the Father knows the hearts of men (vs. 27a), He surely knows the mind of the Spirit. When you pray, the Holy Spirit begins interceding and the Father knows exactly what the Holy Spirit is thinking and saying.

- What a blessing to know that when I pray with a yielded heart and I don't know quite what to say or how to say it and it comes out awkwardly, the Holy Spirit is right there translating that prayer into the perfect prayer when it enters the ears of my heavenly Father.
3. In our text, we see God's great plan. Verse 27b
- Notice, the Spirit makes intercession for the saints **according to the will of God**. The Holy Spirit's groanings to the Father are all perfectly in accordance with God's will for your life. God has a will or plan for your life.
 - Verse 29 tells us what His ultimate will is for all of His children. His great plan is to make us like Jesus. Because of the glorious purpose of verse 29, we have the grand promises of verses 26-28.
 - When we love God with a sincere heart (verse 28), and pray sincerely (yielded to God's Spirit), God promises us that the Holy Spirit will be interceding for us and praying to the Father for His will to be done. Because of this great truth, we can rest assured that all things are working together for good and for God's purpose (verse 28).
 - Praise God, we know that all things **do** work together for good to them that love God. Why is this? - Because the Spirit makes intercession for us according to the will of God.
 - **This is a promise that you and I can stand on and claim for today!**

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We have a promise of complete access to our heavenly Father in prayer. Ephesians 2:18, 3:12

1. Have you ever felt like your prayers were not being heard? Have you ever felt like there was no use in praying because God wouldn't listen and wouldn't hear?
2. This is very common, and if you have ever felt this way, you desperately need to understand the promise we will study tonight.
3. Turn in your Bible to **Ephesians 2:18** and **3:12**.
 - The word "access" means "admission."
 - It means that believers have unhindered approach to God (cf. **Hebrews 4:16**).
 - There is never a "please wait" sign or "take a number" or "out to lunch" or "will be back in 10 minutes."
 - We have 24 hour a day access. Do you realize how unique this is?

4. This is a privilege that was unknown to any other group of people in any other time period.
5. This is what Adam had before his fall. He was supposed to represent God on earth - managing, ruling, and governing the earth. God told Adam what He wanted and Adam "re-presented" Him to the rest of the earth.
 - Adam was a go-between for God. Adam was God's mediator on earth. Adam failed and was expelled from the Garden and no longer had access into God's presence continually. He lost it for himself, and as representative for all mankind, he lost it for everyone.
 - Sin had alienated mankind from God. **Colossians 1:21**
6. Under God's Old Testament with Israel, God instituted the priesthood. Through the priests and sacrifices, it allowed for temporary forgiveness, but the people could not go directly into God's presence (the Holy of Holies). They were represented by priests who would mediate for them. **Hebrews 5:1**
 - But the priests who mediated were also sinners (**Hebrews 5:3**) and had no right or ability to open up the way for anyone else to enter into God's presence.
 - So Adam sinned and failed. The priests were sinners and failed. Mankind needed a perfect mediator between him and God.
7. *"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son..."* **Galatians 4:4**
 - Because of Adam's failure, God came down from heaven and took humanity into union with His deity in order to make Himself known to men.
 - Christ is called the "last Adam" (**1 Corinthians 15:45**). He came and did what the first Adam was supposed to do, but failed to do. He became the intercessor, going between and "re-presenting" God to humanity. He made reconciliation possible.
 - Colossians 1:20-21**
 - Only God could devise a plan in which the only person in the universe Who can condemn us is the very person who died for us! He died but He also rose again and ascended to the right hand of the Father where He is now said to be our intercessor or mediator. **Romans 8:34, 1 Timothy 2:5**
8. What is an intercessor? It is a go-between, one who pleads for another, represents one party to another. It carries the idea of representation.
 - Christ is said to be our intercessor, our mediator, our advocate.
 - So Christ came down to earth to represent God to man, but now He's in heaven representing man to God. He is the final and ultimate go-between. **1 John 2:1**
9. He is now functioning as our representative, guaranteeing us access to the Father. His work of intercession gives us absolute assurance that we can enter into God's presence and He hears us.
 - Christ "re-presents" us to the Father as righteous and one of His own when we pray. Satan may accuse us and condemn us (**Romans 8:34**) and point out sins in our lives, but Christ stands up in our defense. He is pleading our case.
 - Jesus, as the God-Man is the perfect mediator. He alone can bridge the gap between us and God. Dan Proctor (a sinful, pagan Gentile before Christ saved me) can enter into the very presence of a holy, infinite God and talk to Him. Why is this? I have a perfect mediator, representing me and pleading my case and pronouncing me righteous through His blood.

- Last week, we saw the Holy Spirit's groanings of intercession when we pray, and now we see Christ's work of intercession on our behalf. The Holy Spirit's intercessory **prayers** are received by the Father because of Christ's intercessory **work**.
- Nobody else is qualified to do this work - only Christ. Our prayers of intercession for others (**1 Timothy 2:1**) are always and only an extension of His work of intercession.

In Conclusion:

What does all this mean to the believer in your every day prayer life?

1. It means you can go to God any time and know that He hears you. Not only this, He understands your needs and infirmities (**Hebrews 4:15**). When you go to Him, He isn't going to get upset with you.
2. It means that everyone has equal access. **Ephesians 2:18, Galatians 3:28**
 - Nobody has a special prayer line above and beyond others. Rather, we all have a special intercessor.
3. It means that when we pray, we must come to the Father through Christ.
 - Christ is the reason the Father hears us. He cannot honor any other approach than through His Son. **Hebrews 10:19**
 - This is why we pray in Jesus' name. This isn't a formality that we tag on at the end of our prayers. It's not a magical catchphrase. The key is you understanding in your heart what it means.
 - When we pray in Jesus' name, it means that we aren't approaching God through our good works, self-righteousness, and religious pride or through another person. We are coming into His presence through our mediator and intercessor, Jesus Christ!

Everything Starts with Prayer

Nehemiah 1

Introduction:

1. Have you ever gotten bad news and all you could do was just sit down and cry? This is how the book of Nehemiah opens.
2. Nehemiah was a Jew that was in captivity, but had a dream job working in the palace as the king's cupbearer. Although he was physically miles away from the once glorious capital city, Jerusalem, his heart was still there.
3. A group of Jews had been allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it, but it wasn't going well at all. vs. 2-3
4. Nehemiah was heartbroken. Jerusalem was designed by God to be the glory of the whole earth and be a testimony to the true and living God, but instead it was in shambles and was a reproach.
5. At first, Nehemiah just sat and wept, but then he made the best decision he could have ever made. He prayed before the God of heaven. vs. 4
 - There is nothing wrong with sitting down and having a good cry - it's human. But it doesn't change one thing. Nehemiah decided to get proactive and he went to prayer.
6. God ended up doing some incredible things through Nehemiah, but here's what we need to understand - **it all started with prayer.**
7. From Genesis to Revelation, there are two common threads when it comes to prayer. First, God longs to have His people pray to Him. Second, God answers prayer.
8. In fact, if God is to do His work through us and through Crossroads, it will all begin with prayer.
9. This morning I want us to examine Nehemiah's prayer (vs. 5-11), make application to our lives, and allow God's Word to encourage us in our prayer lives.

Every time we pray, there are three vital truths we must remember.

God is faithful. vs. 5

1. God had a covenant with the nation of Israel called the Law of Moses (vs. 7). The word "covenant" carries the idea of a contractual agreement between two parties.
2. God had promised blessings to Israel based on their obedience to His commands within the covenant. "Keepeth" and "observe" are the exact same words.
3. God would keep His covenant promises **if** they kept His commandments. Nehemiah knew that God was faithful to keep His covenant agreement.
4. We are not under that old covenant today. God gave us all spiritual blessings **up front**, the moment we trusted Christ (**Ephesians 1:3**). It is not a situation where you have to perform to a certain level and then God may hear and answer your prayer.

Romans 7:6

5. But as we pray, like Nehemiah, we can also rest secure in the fact that God is faithful. All the spiritual blessings and privileges we have in Christ are ours forever. Romans 8 affirms that **nothing** can separate us from His love.
6. Over and over again, Paul reminds the church that God is faithful.

1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:13

God is attentive. vs. 6a

1. Nehemiah's request in this verse is a typical Old Testament request. He was beseeching God to be attentive and hear his prayer.
2. In the Old Testament, God's eyes were continually fastened upon the Promised Land that He gave to His people, Israel. **Deuteronomy 11:12**
3. As long as they kept God's covenant agreement and obeyed God's law, God would listen, hear, and answer their prayers. **Deuteronomy 13:18; cf. Psalm 34:15**
 - When Israel was disobedient before His eyes, God said, "...*I will not hear.*" **Isaiah 1:15-16, 59:1-2**
4. Christian, you need to understand that God is not operating today with His children on the basis of a performance system (the law), but on the basis of His grace.

Romans 6:14

5. You will **never** find in any of Paul's epistles to the church a request for God to open His eyes or His ears to believers. You will never find God's eyes or ears being shut to His children. Why is this?
6. Here is why: if you are saved, you have actually been given a position of **oneness** with Jesus Christ (**Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 5:30-32**). Your identity is **in Christ**. You have been brought into a spiritual union with Jesus Christ.
7. For God to deny **you** access to Himself, He would have to deny His very Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is said to be our intercessor (**Romans 8:34**) and our mediator (**1 Timothy 2:5**). For God to shut His ears to you, He would have to shut them to His Son.
8. Our unique position of being in Christ insures us total, unhindered access into God's presence. **Ephesians 2:18, 3:12**
 - Christ has forever made us at peace with God, and we stand sure in this grace.

Romans 5:1-2

9. Christian, you never have to worry that God is mad at you and has turned His eyes and ears away from you. God had to do this to His Son when Christ was made sin for us on the cross. Because of His great sacrifice, we have been made the righteousness of God in Him, and God will never turn from His Son again.
10. God's eyes and ears actually live within you because God's very Spirit lives within you, if you are saved. **Romans 8:9-10**

God is forgiving. vs. 6b

1. Nehemiah knew God's law program. He knew that sin had caused a separation between God and His people and that God's eyes and ears had been shut towards Israel.
 - This was why Israel had been taken captive by the Gentile nations and Jerusalem was lying in shambles.
2. So what did Nehemiah do? He did exactly what the law had instructed Israel to do. He began to repent and confess the sins of Israel. He did it in a three-fold way:
 - He confessed the national sins of Israel.
 - He confessed the sins of his family.
 - He confessed his own personal sins.

3. Do we see this kind of thing in Paul's epistles to the saints in this church age? It is nowhere to be found. You can confess the sins of America, your mom and dad, your husband, your children, etc. until you are blue in the face and it won't make one iota of a difference. Why is this?
4. Because God is not dealing with the world through a nation or nations today. He is dealing with every person on an **individual** basis.
5. You will stand before God based on your individual acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ. If you are saved, you will stand before God individually for how you chose to live your Christian life. **Romans 14:12**
6. But there is an application we can make from this text. Just as Nehemiah knew that God was a forgiving God, I've got good news. He still is a forgiving God!
7. In fact, if you have accepted Christ as your personal Savior and have been made righteous in Him, you have total and complete forgiveness in Christ. **Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13**
8. Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins on the cross and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.
9. The sin issue was dealt with on the cross. If you will place your faith and trust in Jesus' sacrifice for sin, on the basis of what Christ did, God will give you complete and total forgiveness today.
10. You do not have to detail all your sins to God. You couldn't remember them all any way. Nothing you have done will keep God from forgiving you. You must simply turn to Jesus Christ and place your full and total faith in what He has done for you.

How to Have an Effective Prayer Life

Nehemiah 1:5-11

Introduction:

1. Here in our text Nehemiah is heartbroken over the devastation in his beloved city, Jerusalem. Instead of Jerusalem being a light and testimony to the glory of God, Jerusalem was broken down, burned with fire, and was a reproach to God's people. vs. 3
2. Nehemiah made the best decision he could ever have made - he went to prayer. vs. 4
3. Last week we began to examine Nehemiah's recorded prayer (vs. 5-11). We learned that there are three vital truths that we must keep in mind every time we make a move to go to God in prayer.
 - God is faithful.
 - God is attentive.
 - God is forgiving.
4. What if I were to ask two questions this morning?
 - How many of you believe in the power of prayer?
 - How much did you actually pray last week?
5. I wonder if there would be a great discrepancy between these two questions.
6. This morning, I would like to examine Nehemiah's prayer. Nehemiah was a servant of God, with a heart for God. God used him mightily to turn things around in Jerusalem, but it all started with prayer.
7. Nehemiah is not a church age saint. He is an Old Testament Jew, praying under the Old Testament law economy. We must keep this in mind. But there are some wonderful lessons that we can learn and apply to our lives as we study Nehemiah's prayer life.

If we desire to have an effective prayer life, we must pray:

Earnestly - vs. 6

1. I want to draw your attention to a very important phrase. Nehemiah said, "...*which I pray before thee now, day and night...*"
2. What does this denote to us? Nehemiah was not flippant about his prayer request. This wasn't a casual sort of thing. He was serious about it. He earnestly sought the Lord.
3. Did you know this is applicable to our prayer lives today? Just as Nehemiah was earnest, Paul taught the church that we are to be earnest in our prayer lives.

Ephesians 6:18

- Notice he said, "*Praying always.*" The word "watching" means "to be sleepless, to keep awake." "Perseverance" means "persistency."
4. Paul taught that we should **labor fervently** (to struggle, to compete for a prize) in our prayers. **Colossians 4:12; cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 2 Timothy 1:3; 1 Timothy 5:5**

Honestly - vs. 7

1. Nehemiah did not go to God extolling his virtues and the goodness of his people, Israel. He didn't go to God with the attitude, "You owe it to me to answer my prayer."
2. Nehemiah was brutally honest with God: "We have dealt corruptly with you, we haven't kept your commandments, and we have repeatedly broken the law of Moses."
3. When you talk to God, you can lay open your heart before Him. In fact, you should! God is looking for there to be congruence between your mouth and your heart.

Romans 10:1

4. When the **words** of your prayer contradict your heart, this is called hypocrisy.
 - **Illustration:** Publican and the Pharisee. **Luke 18:10-14**
5. We are to provide things honest in the sight of the Lord, and this would apply to our prayer lives. **2 Corinthians 8:21**

Intelligently - vs. 8-9

1. In verses 8-9, Nehemiah is basically praying God's Word back to God. He is reminding God of His promises to the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 28 and 30.
2. Nehemiah was praying intelligently for the time period he lived in. He knew what God's Word was to Israel, as written and detailed in the law of Moses. He understood God's Word and God's promises for Israel under the Old Testament law economy.
3. Would a believer today in the body of Christ pray this prayer in verses 8 and 9? Of course not, because we are not Israel, and we are not living under the Old Testament law program.
4. Just as Nehemiah knew God's Word **to him** and his people, we must know God's Word and God's promises **to us** today.
 - If a tsunami is about to hit Daytona, we don't build an ark and pray for God to deliver us. That is not what God is doing today.
 - If I need to cross the Halifax River to go beachside, I don't pray for God to part the Halifax River. That is not what God is doing today.
 - If I am hungry, I don't pray for God to rain manna on my front yard.
5. It is pleasing to the Lord when we stand on His Word in prayer, but we must do it in an intelligent fashion, understanding God's program for today.
 - If a tsunami is about to hit Daytona, we don't build an ark and pray for God to deliver us. That is not what God is doing today.
 - If I need to cross the Halifax River to go beachside, I don't pray for God to part the Halifax River. That is not what God is doing today.
 - If I am hungry, I don't pray for God to rain manna on my front yard.
6. Just as Moses was Nehemiah's spokesman for his day, who has God established as our spokesman for today in His Word? **Romans 11:13; 1 Timothy 2:7** - According to the Bible, Paul is our spokesman. Based on this, notice what Paul commanded.
1 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 3:17, 4:9; 1 Corinthians 14:37
7. A believer today should make a thorough study of Paul's thirteen letters and understand the commandments and promises that God has given to **us** through Paul.
2 Timothy 2:7
8. Like Nehemiah, it pleases God when we pray with an intelligent understanding of His Word.

Specifically - vs. 10-11

1. Notice that based on Israel's position as God's redeemed people (vs. 10), Nehemiah makes a very specific request of God. He desired for God to grant him mercy in the sight of the king so that Nehemiah could travel back to Jerusalem and help restore it.
2. God answered Nehemiah's request in chapter 2 in a big way. Not only did the king give him permission to go, he gave Nehemiah an escort and footed the bill for it!
3. What about today? Can we take our specific requests to the Lord in prayer? Does God want us to pray about the details of our life? The apostle Paul teaches us to pray specifically. **Philippians 4:6**
 - Paul asked believers to pray specifically for his deliverance from prison.**Philippians 1:19; Philemon 22**
 - Some of Paul's prayer requests are recorded in Scripture. **Colossians 4:3;** **2 Thessalonians 3:1** - they aren't vague, they are specific.
 - Many of Paul's prayers are recorded in God's Word and they are very specific in nature. **Romans 10:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; Colossians 1:9**
4. Christian, based on your redeemed position in Christ, you can go to God and talk to Him about every detail of your life.
5. You are God's child and He wants you to talk to Him.

In Conclusion:

1. Remember what I asked at the beginning of this message? Do you believe in the power of prayer?
2. Then the logical question is, "Are you praying?"
3. What wonderful application we can make from the prayer of Nehemiah. It isn't meant for us to imitate or recite, but it teaches us some wonderful principles about prayer.
 - Pray earnestly - pray honestly - pray intelligently - pray specifically.
4. May we leave this place, not just **learning** these truths, but actually **practicing** these truths in our daily prayer lives.

Colossians - Chapter 1
“Teach us How to Pray, Paul”
Colossians 1:9-10

Verse 9

1. Since Paul had heard of the salvation of these people, he had regularly prayed for them.
2. Passages such as this give us great insight into Paul's prayer life.
 - When Paul prayed for others, what did he pray for?
 - What did Paul deem important as he prayed for others?
 - Did he pray for their material prosperity? Paul's prayers were always focused on the spiritual welfare of believers.
3. Paul desired that these converts be filled (fully furnished) with the knowledge of God's will.
4. We think of God's will in terms of the details of our daily lives, but that is not what Paul had in mind. Paul wanted these believers to understand what God is doing today in this dispensation of grace. The emphasis is not on them, but on God, and what God wants done today in the present dispensation.
5. God had an over-arching secret purpose and will that He has revealed through Paul. God's will is no longer a mystery, but has been fully revealed and manifested. Ephesians 1:9
6. How do we discover how we fit into God's objective, purpose, and plan for this present time period?
 - Paul says that it comes through wisdom and spiritual understanding.
cf. Ephesians 5:17
7. How do I grow in wisdom and spiritual understanding? I grow as I study and learn God's Word. God's Word reveals God's will. 2 Timothy 3:15-16
 - I understand the will of God as the Spirit of God teaches me the Word of God.
8. Do you want to be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding? You must read, learn, and understand the revelation that Christ gave to you through Paul. It is the key. Read Ephesians 3:3-4.
 - The word “*knowledge*” is the same word translated “*understanding*” in Colossians 1:9. Paul is saying, “When you read what I have written to you, you understand my understanding in the mystery of Christ.”
cf. 2 Timothy 2:7; Acts 22:14
 - All of God's Word is profitable, but Paul's passion was that believers would understand God's will that had been revealed through him for this present dispensation. cf. 1:25-26, 2:2-3
 - Without that understanding, no matter how sincere we may be, we cannot “*walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.*” vs. 10
9. Please understand, it isn't that God is not concerned about the details of your life. He most certainly is. He loves you and wants you to talk to Him about everything in your life.

10. But if a believer is ignorant of the will and purpose of God for this present dispensation, then does it really matter if he should go into the ministry or serve God in Mexico, or Brazil on the mission field? He will do more harm than good in whatever He endeavors if he doesn't have an intelligent understanding of God's will, purpose, and plan for today.
11. As we read God's Word and understand Paul's mystery, we begin to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, and then we can take that knowledge and apply it to the details of our lives with wisdom.

Verse 10

1. Without a proper knowledge of what God is doing today, there is no way that we can experience a fruitful and pleasing life unto the Lord.
2. Some people think that all that God is concerned about is sincerity, and that if a person is sincere, God is pleased. Nothing could be further from the truth.
3. Without a proper spiritual understanding from God's Word, it doesn't matter how sincere you are. You will end up off course, unfruitful, and counterproductive in God's work. This is what Paul is teaching in verse 10.
 - As we read and gain understanding into God's plan and purpose for today (revealed through Paul), it serves as a compass that directs us and helps us in our decision making and prioritizing.
 - Until you gain a basic understanding of God's **Word**, your **walk** won't be right.
4. A proper understanding of God's will for today enables the believer to:
 - "*Walk worthy of the Lord*" - This simply means "to walk in an appropriate and godly manner."
 - "*Unto all pleasing*" - It is by Christ's revelations through Paul that we learn how to walk and to please God, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:1.
 - "*Being fruitful in every good work*" - Sound doctrine and spiritual understanding lays the foundation for true spiritual fruitfulness. It is impossible to be fruitful in every good work if we don't have an intelligent understanding of what He is doing.
 - "*And increasing in the knowledge of God*" - Once I gain an understanding of the knowledge of God's will (vs. 9) and what He is doing in this present day, then I can begin to truly increase (grow) in the knowledge of God. I can begin to know, understand, and discern God in a deeper and more meaningful way.
5. Did you notice a very important order in verses 9-10? There were three key words: wisdom, walk, and work. The order of these is extremely important.
 - I cannot be a productive worker for God if I am not walking with God, and I cannot walk with God if I am ignorant of God's will.
 - So, as I am filled with God's **wisdom**, I can **walk** with God and, in turn, I can effectively **work** for God, bearing spiritual fruit.