

Vineyard Values Series: Prayer

The Prayer Reflex: Prayer of the Heart

Opening thoughts

Vision of Vineyard Boise

To develop authentic, reproducible, Spirit-filled, Christian disciples.

Values

- Worship
- The Word
- Multiplication
- Prayer
- Ministry
- Stewardship
- Fellowship

Prayer in the book of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1

It was the month of Kislev in the twentieth year. At the time I was in the palace complex at Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, had just arrived from Judah with some fellow Jews. I asked them about the conditions among the Jews there who had survived the exile, and about Jerusalem.

3 They told me, "The exile survivors who are left there in the province are in bad shape. Conditions are appalling. The wall of Jerusalem is still rubble; the city gates are still cinders."

4 When I heard this, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God-of-Heaven.

5-6 I said, "God, God-of-Heaven, the great and awesome God, loyal to his covenant and faithful to those who love him and obey his commands: Look at me, listen to me. Pay attention to this prayer of your servant that I'm praying day and night in intercession for your servants, the People of Israel, confessing the sins of the People of Israel. And I'm including myself, I and my ancestors, among those who have sinned against you.

7-9 "We've treated you like dirt: We haven't done what you told us, haven't followed your commands, and haven't respected the decisions you gave to Moses your servant. All the same, remember the warning you posted to your servant Moses: 'If you betray me, I'll scatter you to the four winds, but if you come back to me and do what I tell you, I'll gather up all these scattered peoples from wherever they ended up and put them back in the place I chose to mark with my Name.'

10-11 "Well, there they are—your servants, your people whom you so powerfully and impressively redeemed. O Master, listen to me, listen to your servant's prayer—and yes, to all your servants who delight in honoring you—and make me successful today so that I get what I want from the king."

I was cupbearer to the king.

Nehemiah 2

1-2 It was the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king. At the hour for serving wine I brought it in and gave it to the king. I had never been hangdog in his presence before, so he asked me, "Why the long face? You're not sick are you? Or are you depressed?"

2-3 That made me all the more agitated. I said, "Long live the king! And why shouldn't I be depressed when the city, the city where all my family is buried, is in ruins and the city gates have been reduced to cinders?"

4-5 The king then asked me, "So what do you want?"

Praying under my breath to the God-of-Heaven, I said, "If it please the king, and if the king thinks well of me, send me to Judah, to the city where my family is buried, so that I can rebuild it."

6 The king, with the queen sitting alongside him, said, "How long will your work take and when would you expect to return?"

I gave him a time, and the king gave his approval to send me.

7-8 Then I said, "If it please the king, provide me with letters to the governors across the Euphrates that authorize my travel through to Judah; and also an order to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, to supply me with timber for the beams of The Temple fortress, the wall of the city, and the house where I'll be living."

8-9 The generous hand of my God was with me in this and the king gave them to me. When I met the governors across The River (the Euphrates) I showed them the king's letters. The king even sent along a cavalry escort.

Nehemiah 4

1-2 When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall he exploded in anger, vilifying the Jews. In the company of his Samaritan cronies and military he let loose: "What are these miserable Jews doing? Do they think they can get everything back to normal overnight? Make building stones out of make-believe?"

3 At his side, Tobiah the Ammonite jumped in and said, "That's right! What do they think they're building? Why, if a fox climbed that wall, it would fall to pieces under his weight."

4-5 Nehemiah prayed, "Oh listen to us, dear God. We're so despised: Boomerang their ridicule on their heads; have their enemies cart them off as war trophies to a land of no return; don't forgive their iniquity, don't wipe away their sin—they've insulted the builders!"

6 We kept at it, repairing and rebuilding the wall. The whole wall was soon joined together and halfway to its intended height because the people had a heart for the work.

7-9 When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repairs of the walls of Jerusalem were going so well—that the breaks in the wall were being fixed—they were absolutely furious. They put their heads together and decided to fight against Jerusalem and create as much trouble as they could. We countered with prayer to our God and set a round-the-clock guard against them.

Nehemiah 5

19 Remember in my favor, O my God,
Everything I've done for these people.

Nehemiah 6

9 They were trying to intimidate us into quitting. They thought, "They'll give up; they'll never finish it."

I prayed, "Give me strength."

10 Then I met secretly with Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, at his house. He said:

Let's meet at the house of God,
inside The Temple;

Let's find safety behind locked doors
because they're coming to kill you,
Yes, coming by night to kill you.

11 I said, "Why would a man like me run for cover? And why would a man like me use The Temple as a hideout? I won't do it."

12-13 I sensed that God hadn't sent this man. The so-called prophecy he spoke to me was the work of Tobiah and Sanballat; they had hired him. He had been hired to scare me off—trick me—a layman, into desecrating The Temple and ruining my good reputation so they could accuse me.

14 "O my God, don't let Tobiah and Sanballat get by with all the mischief they've done. And the same goes for the prophetess Noadiah and the other prophets who have been trying to undermine my confidence."

Nehemiah 13

14 Remember me, O my God, for this. Don't ever forget the devoted work I have done for The Temple of God and its worship.

22 Remember me also for this, my God. Treat me with mercy according to your great and steadfast love.

29 Remember them, O my God, how they defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priests and Levites.

30-31 All in all I cleansed them from everything foreign. I organized the orders of service for the priests and Levites so that each man knew his job. I arranged for a regular supply of altar wood at the appointed times and for the firstfruits.

Remember me, O my God, for good.

Cause of the “Prayer Reflex”

- The “tap on the knee” is trouble
- “Is anyone suffering, let him pray...”
- 12 of the 13 psalms of David that are connected to a specific historical circumstance are tied to circumstances of trouble
- When life comes we have two basic reflexes available – to curse or to pray.
- What helps us develop the “prayer reflex”?

1 Knowing God as ABBA

John 17:6

“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world.”

- The new tetragrammaton Y H V H = A B B A
- Jesus addressed God as Father “Abba” 183 times in the gospels and acts (115 of those times are in John)
- Origin of Abba – first syllables out of a child’s mouth

The Human Language Map

- Language I
Primal speech – the language of personal intimacy and relationship; it is the first language we learn. Not articulate at first. The sounds that pass between parent and infant are incredibly rich in meaning, but they don’t parse well – there are no dictionary entries for them! But the exchange of gurgles, coos, cries and out-of-tune hums trust develops. Parent whispers transform infant screams into grunts of hope. The cornerstone words: mama, papa, abba
- Language II
The language of information, of the school. As we become oriented in a world of objects, the complexity of our vocabulary increases. Sentences are born, intricate expressions, deeper dissertations.
- Language III
The language of motivation and persuasion. Early on we discover that our speech can make all sorts of things happen and can make people move. We are moved by language and use it to move others. This is the language of advertising and politics – smooze, spiel, spin.
- Language II and III are the ascendant, dominating languages of our culture. We are taught very soon to discard the intimacies of language I, although it finds a brief resurgence when we fall in love for the first time. While utilizing all three languages, prayer of the heart is rooted in language I – the language of being and adoration, not of solving equations or selling soap.

- Learning the prayer of the heart is recovering our first language – which is an elemental work of the Spirit in us:

Romans 8:12-16

¹²⁻¹⁴ So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go!

¹⁵⁻¹⁷ This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance!

2 Knowing Abba's Desire for You

- He's not just listening – he intensely desires your presence.

Psalm 45:10-11

"Listen, daughter, don't miss a word: Forget your country, put your home behind you. Be here – the king is wild about you..."

Luke 18:9-14

⁹⁻¹² He told his next story to some who were complacently pleased with themselves over their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people: "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: 'Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.'

¹³ "Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, 'God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.'"

¹⁴ Jesus commented, "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face, but if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself."

Spifire Grill clip...

Practice of prayer of the heart

1 Take words with you

Hosea 14:1-2

“Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. **Take words with you** and return to the Lord...”

Prayer of the heart is...

- Nurtured by *short, simple* prayers
- Unceasing
- All-inclusive (encompasses and includes everything on our mental plate)

Desert Father Abba Macarius was asked, “How should one pray?” The old man said, “There is no need at all to make long discourses; it is enough to stretch out one’s hand and say, ‘Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy.’ And if the conflict grows fiercer, say, ‘Lord, help.’ He knows very well what we need and he shows us mercy.”

John Climacus – “Often it is the simple, repetitious phrases of a little child that our Father in heaven finds most irresistible. Do not strive for verbosity lest your mind be distracted from devotion by a search for words. One phrase on the lips of the tax collector was enough to win God’s mercy; one human request made with faith was enough to save the good thief. When you find satisfaction or compunction in a certain word of your prayer, stop at that point.”

Hear the teaching of Jesus – ultimate instruction in prayer of the heart

Matthew 6

⁵ When you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?

⁶ "Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

⁷⁻¹³ "The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;

Do what's best— as above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
You're in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty!
Yes. Yes. Yes.

Short, Simple Words –

These are simple, easily repeated words that help to slowly empty out our crowded interior lives and create a quiet space where we can dwell with God; a ladder along which the mind can descend into the heart and from there ascend to God.

- Manning's prayer: "Abba, I belong to you."
- Canaanite woman: "Lord, help me." *Kurie, boiethei moi*
- Saint John: "Come Lord Jesus" *Erchou, Kurie Iesou*
- David's prayer: "The Lord is my Shepherd" *Adonai Ro'i*

Psalm 3

¹⁻² God! Look! Enemies past counting! Enemies sprouting like mushrooms,
Mobs of them all around me, roaring their mockery:
"Hah! No help for him from God!"

³⁻⁴ But you, GOD, shield me on all sides;
You ground my feet, you lift my head high;
With all my might I shout up to God,
His answers thunder from the holy mountain.

⁵⁻⁶ I stretch myself out. I sleep.
Then I'm up again—rested, tall and steady,
Fearless before the enemy mobs
Coming at me from all sides.

⁷ Up, GOD! My God, help me!
Slap their faces,
First this cheek, then the other,
Your fist hard in their teeth!

⁸ Real help comes from God.
Your blessing clothes your people!

Psalm 27

¹ Light, space, zest— that's God!
So, with him on my side I'm fearless,
afraid of no one and nothing.

² When vandal hordes ride down
ready to eat me alive,
Those bullies and toughs
fall flat on their faces.

³ When besieged,
I'm calm as a baby.
When all hell breaks loose,
I'm collected and cool.

⁴ I'm asking God for one thing,
only one thing:
To live with him in his house
my whole life long.
I'll contemplate his beauty;
I'll study at his feet.

Psalm 58 (for the election season)

¹⁻² Is this any way to run a country? Is there an honest politician in the house?
Behind the scenes you brew cauldrons of evil,
behind closed doors you make deals with demons.

³⁻⁵ The wicked crawl from the wrong side of the cradle;
their first words out of the womb are lies.
Poison, lethal rattlesnake poison,
drips from their forked tongues—
Deaf to threats, deaf to charm,
decades of wax built up in their ears.

⁶⁻⁹ God, smash their teeth to bits,
leave them toothless tigers.
Let their lives be buckets of water spilled,
all that's left, a damp stain in the sand.
Let them be trampled grass
worn smooth by the traffic.
Let them dissolve into snail slime,
be a miscarried fetus that never sees sunlight.

Before what they cook up is half-done, God,
throw it out with the garbage!

2 Pray in community

The psalms are prayers of a praying community.

- “Our Father...”

Matthew 18:18-20

¹⁸⁻²⁰ "Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there."

Philippians 4:4-9

⁴⁻⁵ Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

⁶⁻⁷ Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

⁸⁻⁹ Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

- That's the fully-developed reflex of prayer;
- That's prayer of the heart...