

Getting God to Choose You

Nehemiah 1:4-9 HCSB When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. (5) I said, LORD God of heaven, the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant with those who love Him and keep His commands, (6) let Your eyes be open and Your ears be attentive to hear Your servant's prayer that I now pray to You day and night for Your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins we have committed against You. Both I and my father's house have sinned. (7) We have acted corruptly toward You and have not kept the commands, statutes, and ordinances You gave Your servant Moses. (8) Please remember what You commanded Your servant Moses: "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. (9) But if you return to Me and carefully observe My commands, even though your exiles were banished to the ends of the earth, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I chose to have My name dwell."

Wise ways

Live a life of integrity (James 3:13-18; 1 Peter 2:12-15)

It takes great courage to stand up to a bloody king. It takes even more courage to face the truth about one's self. It's hard to do the right thing simply because it's right while disregarding the consequences to one's self. That kind of courage, that type of honorable character doesn't just crop up overnight. It takes years of investment and personal discipline. Nehemiah had integrity long before Hashem brought this great task before him.

- **James 3:13-18 HCSB** Who is wise and understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness. (14) But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't brag and lie in defiance of the truth. (15) Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. (16) For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil. (17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy. (18) And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
- **1 Peter 2:12-15 HCSB** Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do evil, they may, by observing your good works, glorify God in a day of visitation. (13) Submit to every human institution because of the Lord, whether to the Emperor as the supreme authority, (14) or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (15) For it is God's will that you, by doing good, silence the ignorance of foolish people.

It's not what we profess but what we practice that is meaningful. The demons profess faith in the existence of God, and they even tremble! Though they have an emotional response to that knowledge it remains insufficient! They remain demons. We must live lives of integrity day after day after day, in the hopes that someday our character will be of such fine mettle that Adonai will choose us for service.

Live a life of prayer (Nehemiah 1:4 cp 2:4; James 5:16; Ephesians 6:18)

- **Nehemiah 1:4 HCSB** When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.
- **Nehemiah 2:4 HCSB** Then the king asked me, "What is your request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven

The humble willingness to invest in his prayer life made all the difference for Nehemiah. Moses jumped the gun. He saw injustice, was rightfully enraged by it, but killed a man in the process. As a result, Adonai had to literally put Moses to pasture for forty years before he was ready to lead our people. Nehemiah on the other hand immediately sat down and combined prayer with fasting.

- **James 5:16 HCSB** Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful.
- **Ephesians 6:18 HCSB** With every prayer and request, pray at all times in the Spirit, and stay alert in this, with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

If there is one area in which our congregation needs work it is in the area of prayer. We must take prayer off the back burner and give it priority in our lives. We must pray privately, but we must also pray corporately. Prayer must be the backbone of our ministry.

Live a life of patience (Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1; Hebrews 10:36; Proverbs 14:15-16; 19:2; 22:3)

- **Nehemiah 1:1 HCSB** The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: During the month of Chislev in the twentieth year, when I was in the fortress city of Susa,
- **Nehemiah 2:1 HCSB** During the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was set before him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had never been sad in his presence,

Nehemiah waited four months before his conversation with the king. Allow me to explain two different aspects to prayer.

- **Hebrews 10:36 HCSB** For you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised.

One aspect of patience is endurance. Whether it be in great building projects or the emotional storms of life, patience in bearing our burdens is required. With love and patience all things possible. With sufficient patience the mulberry leaf becomes a silk gown.

Another aspect of patience can be seen in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 14:15-16 teaches that only simpletons believe everything they are told. The prudent carefully consider their steps. The wise are cautious and avoid danger while fools plunge ahead with great confidence.

Proverbs 19:2 says that zeal without knowledge is not good. A person who moves too quickly may go the wrong way.

Proverbs 22:3 says that a prudent person foresees the danger ahead and takes precautions; the simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.

Patience doesn't only come in the form of endurance. **Patience comes in the form of carefully considering all the facts and all the potential consequences before making decisions that will affect many people.**

Wise words (Psalm 19:14; Proverbs 15:28; 18:2; 1 Corinthians 2:13)

Nehemiah chose his words carefully and wisely, not wanting to overstep his position and cause any suspicion or adverse reaction from the King.

In a project like we are facing, everyone is going to have an opinion on how things must be done. Everyone who loves this congregation has a stake in it and will want things done right. Brothers and sisters that is a recipe for hurt feelings. All of us, but the leadership in particular, must take the following verses to heart.

Before and during each conversation we should pray:

- **Psalms 19:14 HCSB** May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

Let's look at three passages quickly and then draw some conclusions from them.

- **Proverbs 15:28 HCSB** The mind of the righteous person thinks before answering, but the mouth of the wicked blurts out evil things.
- **Proverbs 18:2 HCSB** A fool does not delight in understanding, but only wants to show off his opinions.
- **1 Corinthians 2:13 HCSB** We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.

Derashot:

1. We must carefully think before answering.
2. We must despise blurting out the first thing that pops into our heads.
3. We must delight in truly understanding the total picture, the way the project or the ministry needs are perceived by others.
4. We must set aside our perverse need to share opinions at the wrong time or to the wrong person, even when they are backed by research.
5. We need to remember that souls come before buildings. This is primarily a spiritual endeavor. Each time we speak, whether privately, publicly or in a team meeting, we must keep in mind the spiritual needs of our audience.

Wise Work (Nehemiah 2:11-16; Ezra 8:32; Mark 6:31; 1 Kings 19:4-8, 11; Ezra 4:12; Ephesians 5:19; Psalm 90:17 cf Ephesians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 1 Corinthians 15:58)

Nehemiah planned carefully. He gathered his resources. He developed allies and made arrangements for the security of the resources the king had provided. Then we read:

- **Nehemiah 2:11-16 HCSB** After I arrived in Jerusalem and had been there three days, (12) I got up at night and *took* a few men with me. I didn't tell anyone what my God had laid on my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the one I was riding. (13) I went out at night through the Valley Gate toward the Serpent's Well and the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. (14) I went on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but farther down it became too narrow for my animal to go through. (15) So I went up at night by way of the valley and inspected the wall. Then heading back, I entered through the Valley Gate and returned. (16) The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, for I had not yet told the Jews, priests, nobles, officials, or the rest of those who would be doing the work.

REST. What Nehemiah did during those initial three days is left open to conjecture. Perhaps, like Ezra, he rested and spent time with the community's leaders.¹ Rest is also an important consideration. A lack of appropriate rest caused the prophet Elijah to say some foolish things, even suicidal ideation! We need to remember that even Jesus said:

- **Mark 6:31 HCSB** He said to them, "**Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest a while.**" For many people were coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

Again, returning to the example of the prophet Elijah, when he burnt out, the Lord God made him rest, eat, and drink² before granting him the aural vision of the still small voice.³

PLANNING. Nehemiah would soon demonstrate that he was a hard worker but hard work alone will not ensure success. It must be done in a timely and efficient manner. That takes planning. Praying and trusting God does not mean that research is not necessary. Nehemiah assessed the situation before presenting a plan.

¹ Ezra 8:32

² 1 Kings 19:4-8

³ 1 Kings 19:11

CIRCUMSPECTION. He used a single mount, did not bring along a bunch of security, and did his research at night after everyone else was in bed. He did this so as not to bring undue attention to himself, perhaps bringing opposition too quickly as happened to Ezra.⁴ He showed a lot of wisdom here. Some things are better not publicized before their time.

Derashot: This means that

1. The leadership needs to have all their facts before making grand statements or presenting sweeping visions to the congregation.
2. The congregation must be patient in allowing the leadership to do their research.
3. Things that are yet in the discussion phase should not be presented as fait accompli.
4. As we plan the work, we must delegate so that no one person's resources are exhausted.
5. As work is delegated, each of us must volunteer to do what we can in order to spread the load.

Like Nehemiah, we may face many problems – even opposition. Like our brother, we too must allow our sense of divine direction give us confidence.

The essence of wisdom is to possess the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal and then through discernment choosing the surest means of attaining it.

We must be humbly aware that it is God who has entrusted this project to us and that He is more than capable of giving us the wisdom by which it must be accomplished.

Let our mission be to let our particular corner of God's Kingdom be in good order and well presented.

Conclusion

Ezra began the work but Nehemiah finished it. Others have gone before us and made the existence of this place of worship possible. Let us now take their work and take it to the next level.

In that spirit, I would ask you to stand with me. The Bible says we are to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.⁵ Please read the following scriptural prayer together with me, making it the desire of your hearts.

Congregation reads:

Let the favor of the Lord our God be on us; establish for us the work of our hands! For we are His creation--created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them. – Psalm 90:17; Ephesians 2:10

Zaquen responds:

...God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work. Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. – 2 Corinthians 9:8; 1 Corinthians 15:58

⁴ Ezra 4:12

⁵ Ephesians 5:19