

Prayer Walks

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Work in Progress / Nehemiah 2:1–10

Nehemiah 1 ends with prayer.

Nehemiah 2 begins with movement.

After months on his knees, Nehemiah now stands before the king. His grief is visible, his fear is real, and the risk is enormous. Yet this moment reveals what prayer has been preparing all along. Prayer was never the destination. It was the pathway. In this week's message, Pastor Brian reminds us that genuine prayer doesn't end with an "amen." It steps forward in obedience, trusting that the God who hears us in private is already at work in public.

Introduction

- If you've been in my office, you've seen that I've got a small collection of medals hanging on my wall.
 - They represent my journey as a runner.
 - Since I got started in this madness later in life, it's not a very impressive collection.
 - But this one stands out to me as the one I'm most proud of.
 - It's from November 12, 2022, the date I ran my very first marathon.
- As you can imagine, you don't just show up at the starting line when you sign up to run 26.2 miles.
 - Sure, you cross the finish line, you get your picture taken, somebody puts a medal around your neck and sticks a bottle of water and a banana in your hand.
 - Believe it or not, running the marathon isn't the hard part.
 - The hard part starts in late July when there are no medals, and nobody cheering you while you either train in the dark or the blistering heat.
 - The hard part is finishing an 18 or 20-mile training run and you have to get your own banana.

- And then the hard part is the waiting...
- Race morning, you have to get there early.
 - The work was done...nothing else can be added.
 - Lingering injuries can't be fixed.
 - You stand there in the starting line, heart rate already escalated with nerves and anxiety and adrenaline running wild.
 - You're packed shoulder to shoulder with hundreds of other runners who are feeling the exact same things.
 - Some stretching. Some nervously chatting or taking selfies.
 - Others silent and locked in.
- Surprisingly, that moment was strangely unsettling.
 - You feel confident and exposed at the same time.
 - Confident because you've prepared.
 - Exposed because once the race begins, there's no hiding.
 - You can't borrow someone else's training.
 - You can't outsource the miles.
 - When the gun goes off (or in the case of the Battlefield marathon, they literally fire an old Civil War canon) all of the preparation has to turn into motion.
- That's the moment Nehemiah finds himself in when chapter 2 opens.
 - Nehemiah chapter 1 is all training.
 - For months he has prayed. He fasted. He confessed sin, both personal and corporate.
 - He remembered who God is and what God has promised.
 - He didn't rush. He didn't force a moment. He waited on the Lord.
 - But waiting doesn't last forever.

- In [Nehemiah 2](#), the moment arrives without announcement.
 - Nehemiah is standing before King Artaxerxes, doing his ordinary job, when the king notices something is wrong.
 - His sadness shows and the king asks the question.
 - And suddenly Nehemiah is no longer in the safety of prayerful preparation.
 - He is standing at the starting line.
- What do you do with all of the preparation, all of the hard work?
 - You put it into action.
 - Despite the risk...
 - That's what prayer is meant to do.
 - Prayer is not an end in itself.
 - It is not a spiritual holding pattern.
 - It is training for obedience.
 - Prayer shapes our desires, sharpens our discernment, and steadies our courage so that when God opens the door, we are ready to walk through it.
 - Back in that marathon corral, the waiting finally ended. The canon sounded. The crowd began to move. And in that moment, all the training turned into a single decision: step forward or stay frozen.
 - As we will see here jumping into chapter 2 - Nehemiah doesn't freeze...
- [Nehemiah 2:1–10](#) shows us what it looks like when prayer walks, when faith leaves the quiet place and steps into public obedience.
 - When fear is present, but faith moves anyway. When preparation gives way to action.
 - Prayer trains us for the moment God says, "Now."

- And when He does, faith doesn't just stay on its knees - faith walks in obedience to Jesus.

Scripture Reading

Nehemiah 2:1-10 ESV

¹ In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

² And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid.

³ I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

⁴ Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

⁵ 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."

⁶ And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.

⁷ And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah,

⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

⁹ Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

¹⁰ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

- As we step into [Nehemiah 2](#), it's important to notice how quickly the moment changes.
 - Chapter 1 moves at the pace of months.
 - Chapter 2 moves at the pace of a single conversation.
 - There's no dramatic buildup, no announcement that the opportunity has arrived.
 - The timing is sudden. The stakes are high.
 - And Nehemiah has no time to retreat or regroup.
- What we see next matters because it corrects a common misunderstanding about faith.
 - We often assume that if we are confident in God's call, we will feel calm when the moment comes.
 - But Nehemiah shows us something far more honest.
 - He has prayed. He has prepared. He is confident in what God has placed on his heart.
 - And yet, when the moment arrives, the text tells us he is afraid.
- Faith has not removed emotion.
 - It has given him a way to move through it.
 - That's where our first truth comes into focus.

Confidence Doesn't Negate Emotion (vv. 1-3)

- When this chapter opens, we first understand just how long Nehemiah has been wrestling with the LORD in prayer over this situation regarding Jerusalem's status.
 - Again, the prayer in chapter 1 makes it sound like Nehemiah just dropped to his knees and figured out what to do without a whole lot of effort.
 - But that's simply not the case.
 - It was five months of spiritual toil - fasting, prayer, long-sleepless nights, many tears shed.
 - So we get to the moment of action here and Nehemiah is showing the signs of this struggle.
- When we find God calling us to do difficult things, it doesn't negate the emotional struggle that we face.
 - There have been a few notable times in my life when God intervened in the direction I was going and made it very clear that I was to go a different direction.
 - It's not that I was going a bad direction - but God made it clear that it was time to head in a different direction.
 - And all of those times were hard...because every time it happened it meant that the circumstances of my life were going to be upended.
 - It meant leaving behind comfort and consistency and stepping into the unknown and uncertainty.
 - But each and every one of those times I've been confident in God's calling - but it didn't make it hurt any less.
- I've had the privilege of seeing our denomination commission career missionaries a few times over the years.
 - Some of our missionaries can stand and the microphone and talk freely about the people they are going to serve.

- But then many of our missionaries have to stand behind a screen, with their voices altered because they're going to a place where their identity cannot be known.
- And while those people are confident in God's calling - his call to action in their lives comes at a tremendous cost and I'm sure that the emotional toll of that calling is beyond belief.
- For Nehemiah's situation, his downcast demeanor was more than just an emotional day at the office - it was potentially a dangerous scenario unfolding.
- We learned at the end of chapter 1 that Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the King.
 - This position was a trusted confidant to the king.
 - He was responsible for ensuring that nobody gained access to the king's wine to prevent potential poisoning.
 - If you wanted to assassinate the king, the cupbearer would be an excellent place to start.
 - That's why the king and the cupbearer had such an important relationship.
 - It would be akin to the chief of the president's secret service detail. That had better be a relationship of trust.
- Because of this, Nehemiah wasn't allowed to have a bad day.
 - This wasn't just court etiquette...it actually had religious implications.
 - For a Zoroastrian king like Artaxerxes, cheerfulness is viewed as gratitude toward the god Ahura Mazda.
 - On the other hand, he would consider sadness a "sign of ingratitude and evil intentions" attributed to the god of evil.
 - As a "weapon of evil," sadness would strike at a core religious value for Zoroastrians"

- That meant you only showed up in the king's presence with a smile on your face.
- You need to know that God has created us as emotional beings.
 - We're not to be mastered by our emotions, but we certainly aren't expected to suppress them either.
 - But even the presence of negative emotions doesn't have to negate the confidence we have in God's plan for our lives.
 - The reality is that sometimes, God calls us to do painful things for him.
- Again, I would call our attention back to our Lord on the night of his betrayal.
 - Emotions were big. Pain was real. Dread was part of his human experience.
 - But nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done.
 - I would never look at Jesus as anything less than 10,000% confident in the Father's will.
 - But still he faced that confidence reeling in the emotions of the moment.
- So Nehemiah takes his swing...if you're a Hamilton fan, then Nehemiah takes his shot here.
 - The king asks him what is wrong and he bares his soul.
 - Why shouldn't I be sad, he says, my homeland is devastated.
 - So the king, in essence asks, "What do you want me to do about it?"
- This is the moment of decision - this is what he's been wrestling with for five months.
 - This is the time to take the step.
 - This is when Indiana Jones steps out onto that invisible walkway over the abyss.

- What do we do when we get to the moment of action?

Nehemiah's use of "arrow prayers" teaches us how to stay connected to the Lord (vv. 4-6)

- If you've never heard term "arrow prayer" then get used to it because Nehemiah is an expert.
 - We've seen Nehemiah engage in the long, protracted season of prayer and fasting.
 - Let's be honest - that's isn't how we always find prayer working itself out in our lives.
 - It's not that there's anything wrong with that - it's just that sort of spiritual exercise takes intentionality and a particular spiritual motivation.
 - It is really something that is for a season.
 - Even Jesus modeled this right before he began his public ministry.
 - He spent 40 days praying and fasting. We don't see that kind of spiritual activity again with Jesus.
 - Instead, what we see with Jesus were momentary "retreats" where Jesus would get away from the crowds - even his disciples - to pray for a few hours.
 - Nehemiah's arrow prayer is the quick check-in during the course of action.
 - It's the prayer that happens when you pragmatically cannot "get away" or take a retreat.
 - It is the prayer that happens in the course of the day.
 - This prayer in v. 4 happens literally in the course of a breath.
 - The king asked a question, "What are you requesting?"

- You can literally imagine Nehemiah taking a deep breath before speaking in v. 5 and his prayer takes place over the moment of that breath.
- Nehemiah knew what God was calling him to do.
 - Everything has been building to this moment.
 - But here was one last check-in before he fires his shot.
- Over the course of these last few weeks, we've mentioned several times how prayer doesn't come natural to us.
 - It is a spiritual discipline that must be modeled, taught, and learned.
 - This kind of arrow prayer is one that may take even more practice because it is intentionally intrusive.
 - It requires us to take a brief mental pause before we take the next step or utter the next phrase.
 - But when you learn to do this, it becomes, I'll go so far as to call it a spiritual superpower.
- What do I mean?
 - Some of ya'll are all about social media...you're posting and commenting and, dare I say, arguing.
 - Here's how an arrow prayer works...
 - You've got an ironclad comment that you're about to own a liberal with.
 - Before you click the button-of-no-return, you simply breathe the following arrow prayer, "Lord, should I post this?"
 - I already know how he's going to answer that prayer...NO! Don't do it. Delete! Abort mission.
 - Maybe you know God is wanting you to have a very serious conversation with somebody - a loved one, a friend, a neighbor.
 - You've been dreading it, putting it off.

- But you can't do it anymore.
- Take the last breath before you form your next sentence to go to the Lord and say, "Guide my speech."
- Before you share the Gospel with someone, before you speak, let your mind form the word, "Lord, open their heart and guide my words."
- Don't stop taking time to pray meaningful, long, heartfelt prayers.
 - Absolutely go to the proverbial prayer closet and take as much time with the Lord as you need.
 - But when you can't pray like that - then don't negate the simple words uttered in a breath between you and the Lord.
- What do we see in Nehemiah's use of arrow prayer?
 - We see that his speech is exactly what it needed to be.
 - I think it even prepared him for this question that he may not have anticipated about the length of his absence.
 - There's no doubt that God provided Nehemiah with courage and clarity of word and thought in this whole interaction.
 - In that moment, God calmed him and this kind of arrow prayer is the conduit by which the Lord provides it.

Acting in faith doesn't mean acting in blindness (vv. 7-8)

- When the king asks Nehemiah what he wants, Nehemiah doesn't answer vaguely.
 - He doesn't say, "Well, I guess I'll just see what God does."
 - He doesn't spiritualize unpreparedness.
 - Instead, Nehemiah asks with clarity and precision.
- He asks for permission, yes. But he also asks for support.
 - Nehemiah requests official letters that will guarantee safe passage through hostile territories.

- He knows the road to Jerusalem is not neutral ground.
- There are governors who would gladly stop him, intimidate him, or worse.
- Faith does not pretend those realities don't exist.
- Faith acknowledges them and plans accordingly.
- When we send missionaries into the field, they go through careful training to prepare them for a host of potential situations.
 - That's not a lack of faith.
 - It is an acknowledgment of the reality of doing God's work in a dangerous, fallen world.
- Nehemiah also asks for timber from the king's forest.
 - Not because Nehemiah lacks trust in God, but because Nehemiah understands something crucial: the work God has called him to do requires resources he does not personally possess.
 - And the only person who can provide those resources is the king.
- This tells us something important. Nehemiah didn't walk into this conversation unprepared.
 - He had clearly thought through what obedience would require.
 - He had counted the cost.
 - He had anticipated obstacles.
 - He had identified what success would actually look like.
 - That's not a lack of faith - that's mature faith.
 - The Bible consistently affirms the value of careful planning and forethought.
 - Proverbs tells us, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty" ([Prov. 21:5](#)).

- Diligence, not impulse, is commended as wisdom.
- Jesus Himself made this point when He asked, “Which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?” ([Luke 14:28](#)).
- Jesus doesn’t mock planning.
- He assumes it. He treats it as common sense.
- Now, planning does not guarantee outcomes.
 - Nehemiah’s plan could have fallen apart.
 - The letters could have been ignored.
 - The timber could have been delayed.
 - Anyone who has tried to obey God for more than five minutes knows that plans often meet resistance, redirection, or revision.
- But the possibility of change does not excuse the absence of preparation.
- If God is calling us to put action to our prayers, to walk in faith, He is not calling us to act with randomness or disorder.
 - Faith does not mean closing our eyes and hoping for the best.
 - Faith means stepping forward thoughtfully, prayerfully, and wisely, trusting God to guide what we cannot control.
 - Faith is not the spiritual equivalent of keeping our fingers crossed.
- That’s why Paul told the church in Corinth, a church known for chaos and spiritual excess, “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” ([1 Cor. 14:33](#)). And just a few verses later, he adds, “All things should be done decently and in order” (v. 40).
- Prayer that walks is prayer that plans.
 - Nehemiah teaches us that trusting God and thinking ahead are not opposites. They are partners.

- Faith doesn't replace wisdom. It walks with it.
- Even careful planning, however, does not insulate us from resistance.

We are called to be faithful in the midst of opposition.

- Nehemiah's journey doesn't get very far before resistance shows up.
 - As soon as he arrives with the king's letters and the king's authority, opposition emerges.
 - Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite hear about Nehemiah's mission, and the text tells us they were "deeply disturbed that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel."
 - That phrase matters.
 - They aren't upset because Nehemiah is reckless.
 - They're upset because he's faithful.
 - His obedience threatens their influence, their control, and the comfortable imbalance they've learned to live with.
 - I don't think it's wrong to say that God is often in the business of disrupting the status quo of his enemies.
 - Nehemiah hasn't built anything yet.
 - He hasn't preached a sermon, rallied the people, or lifted a stone.
 - All he's done is arrive with a clear sense of calling.
 - And that alone is enough to provoke resistance.
- Opposition, then, is not necessarily a sign that something has gone wrong.
 - Often, it's confirmation that something meaningful is underway.
 - When God begins restoring what has been broken, those invested in the brokenness rarely applaud.
- This is where many people lose heart.

- We pray for clarity, God gives direction, we take the first step, and then we're surprised when resistance follows.
- But Nehemiah teaches us that obedience does not create a frictionless path.
- Faithfulness often invites friction.
- The question is not whether opposition will come.
 - The question is whether we will remain faithful when it does.
- Notice how Nehemiah handles the opposition.
 - He stays on track.
 - He doesn't argue or try to persuade them.
 - He doesn't try to win them over.
 - He keeps moving forward, trusting that the same God who opened the door with the king is sufficient to handle the critics on the road.
- There are moments when resistance actually clarifies the importance of the mission.
 - If no one pushes back, it's worth asking whether anything is really changing.
 - But when obedience costs something, when faith disrupts comfortable arrangements, it often means the work matters.
 - [Nehemiah 2](#) reminds us that faithfulness is not measured by ease, but by endurance.
 - God calls His people to walk in obedience even when the path grows narrow and the voices grow loud.
 - It reminds us that prayer is powerful - but it also reminds us that Prayer walks.
 - It calls us away from inaction into faithful obedience.
 - And when it does, opposition often follows.

- But so does the quiet confidence that we are exactly where God has called us to be.

Invitation

- As we close, let's pull this together.
- Nehemiah shows us that prayer is never meant to be an ending point.
 - Chapter 1 trains the heart.
 - Chapter 2 tests the feet.
 - Prayer prepares us for the moment when God says, "Now," and faith must move.
- We've seen that confidence in God does not erase fear.
 - Nehemiah was afraid, and yet he stepped forward anyway.
 - We've seen that staying connected to God doesn't always mean retreating from action.
 - Sometimes it looks like a prayer offered in a single breath before the next sentence is spoken.
 - And we've seen that faith does not abandon wisdom.
 - Obedience plans, prepares, and asks for what the work requires.
 - Finally, we've been reminded that faithfulness will often meet resistance.
 - Opposition does not mean God is absent. Very often, it means God is at work.
- So here's the question this passage leaves us with: What has God been preparing you for?
 - Where has prayer been doing its quiet work in your heart, but obedience has yet to take its first step?
 - Maybe it's a conversation you've been avoiding.

- A calling you've been resisting.
- A step of faith you've been postponing because the timing feels risky or the path feels unclear.
- Just remember, prayer walks...it doesn't just sit.
 - And when it does, God does not promise ease, but He does promise His presence.
 - The same God who guided Nehemiah in the prayer closet was faithful in the throne room, on the road, and in the face of opposition.
- So this morning, if the Lord is calling you to take a step of obedience, don't wait for the fear to disappear.
 - Let faith move anyway.
 - And if you don't yet know Christ, the first step is not something you accomplish, but Someone you trust.
 - Jesus has already done the work. He invites you to walk with Him.
- Let's take a moment now to respond to what God is doing in us.