



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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JUMP START #575

Nehemiah 2:4- *“Then the king said to me, “what would you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.”*

The book of Nehemiah is a book of prayers. Nehemiah was a man of faith and courage. He was the cup bearer to the Persian king. A cup bearer is more than a butler, he tasted the food that was served the king. If it was poisoned, the cup bearer would die, not the king. The fact that Nehemiah was a foreigner is especially impressive. It shows his character, loyalty and his trustworthiness.

News reached Nehemiah about the condition of Jerusalem. The walls were in ruin. It had been this way for a long time, ever since the Babylonians had attacked the city. Jerusalem was vulnerable without a defense system of walls. This bothered Nehemiah. He was sad over these things. The king noticed. The king asked Nehemiah, “What would you request?”

That’s the background. Now the lesson. Before Nehemiah responded to the king, he prayed to God. What he would request would be important. What he was going to ask the king would involve him leaving and going to Jerusalem. He prayed. We are not told what he prayed. The text doesn’t imply that Nehemiah left the room, and came back later, but rather, right there, in the midst of a conversation, Nehemiah prayed. It’s easy to think that he prayed that God would open the king’s heart to listen and grant the request. He probably prayed for strength and wisdom in knowing what to say to the king. He may have prayed for courage.

What a great lesson found in those simple words, “he prayed to God.” Think about how that would change your day, if you could remember that and as Nehemiah did, in the midst of a conversation, say a prayer, right then, and right there.

- During a meeting at work, where some important decisions are being made, and someone asks for your input, before you answer, you “prayed to God.”
- Before you turn the door knob to enter your teen-agers room and have a discussion about his behavior, you “prayed to God.”
- While you are sitting in the exam room, waiting for the doctor to enter, “you prayed to God.”
- Your spouse asks you about what you want to do this weekend. Before you answer, you pray to God.”
- Before the preacher begins his sermon, “You pray to God.”

Praying in these situations, as Nehemiah experienced, brings God into our lives and reminds us of what we ought to be doing. Sometimes we speak without thinking. We may say too much. We may say things in a tone that turns the conversation hostile. Pray to God.

It could be that if we prayed more and talked less, we'd not get in the problems we do. It could also be if we prayed more, we'd find more open doors of opportunity to lead, teach, and point people to Jesus.

Nehemiah often prays in very short and specific prayers. Necessity of standing before the king would demand such a prayer. The king carried power and often not even the king's wife could talk to him without permission. Nehemiah had to be quick, sure and specific. Rambling on, vague generalities, saying things not thought out, would have killed any opportunity he had. Nehemiah had been thinking about this for some time. When the king asked, he knew what to say. Still, he prayed.

Try Nehemiah's approach today. Pray before you speak. Pray before you answer someone. Pray before you text or send an email. Pray before you talk to your spouse, your boss, the kids. Short prayers. Specific prayers. Prayers to help you know what to say and the right way to say it. Prayers to open the other persons heart. Prayers to open your heart. Prayers to listen. Prayers for strength. Prayers so all will understand. Prayers for your attitude.

You might think, that's a lot of prayers, because I talk to a lot of people today. Yes, it is. You may find your words with a softer edge to them. You may find you thinking more before you speak. You may find yourself in fewer arguments. You may see where the other person is coming from. You may see that prayer is powerful and does things. You may see that bringing God into the discussion changes everything. You may see the need afterward to thank God.

So I prayed to the God of Heaven. Those eight words, change everything. They add so much. They reveal the heart of Nehemiah. They teach and remind us. Those eight words may well be the greatest lesson in the book of Nehemiah. Everything that happened after this, was connected to those eight words. The walls were built, the king granted permission, Nehemiah led, but before all those things, Nehemiah prayed.

So I prayed.....

Roger Shouse