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Nehemiah 2:1-10

"Pray, Wait, Move"

September 12, 2018

Good evening. Hey, if you would, why don't you open up your Bibles to the book of Nehemiah? We're going to be in chapter 2 this evening. While you guys are finding your way over there, I encourage you to keep Pastor Jack and Debbie in your prayers as they're finishing up their vacation and will be heading home - that God would bring them home refreshed and continue to use them in the ministries that He's put them into here. I, for one, am looking forward to having our pastor back and hearing him this next Sunday. But like I said, we're going to be in Nehemiah 2 tonight. Let's pray, huh?

I love the book of Nehemiah. How 'bout you guys? It's an awesome book. It has a lot to say, as well, about how we are to live these lives that God has given to us in this time that He's given to us. I love Nehemiah. He's such a great Bible character, so to speak, to look at - this man who started off as a cupbearer, who would become a general contractor and, in the end, end up a governor all because he was willing to make himself available to the LORD; that he was sensitive to the things that God would put on his heart, and he would prayerfully and wholeheartedly rely on the LORD to move and open doors and do things that no one else could do. I love looking at this guy's life and just say, "Lord, I want to be more and more like him." It's a good example for us to seek to follow. Because the days he lived in were pretty difficult days. In 605 B.C., God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to go down to Jerusalem and carry God's people away, captives to Babylon. Now, it was their own fault; they had been disobedient to God, and God was patient with them for years but came to this place to say, "You know what? I need to teach you, and this is the way I'm going to do it." It wouldn't be forever; it would just be for a time that God would have His people there as captives in Babylon. And slowly but surely He would begin to bring them back into the Land, back to Jerusalem to the place where He had put His name. In 535 B.C., it would begin with Zerubbabel. He would lead the first contingency of Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem. Some 50,000 people would begin to lay the foundation of the Temple there. Again, in 457 B.C., this time it would be Ezra who would lead some 2,000 people - Jews - back to Jerusalem, and they begin to re-establish worship there in the Temple. But then this third group would go in 445 B.C., led by Nehemiah, and they would go back to rebuild the walls of the city and bring security back there again for God's people.

In chapter 1 of the book of Nehemiah, we're told of the terrible situation that was going on there in Jerusalem. The people were attacked daily by their enemies, the walls of the city were broken down and in rubble, the gates of the city were burned with fire, and it grieved Nehemiah greatly. It grieved him so much, as God had shown him these things, that it drove him to his knees in prayer to the only One who could help, the LORD, his God. And that is the thing I think about most about Nehemiah - he was a man of prayer. He saw the difficulty and the trouble all around him but didn't allow the despair that he saw to cause him to sit back and say, "There's no use. There's nothing we can do." It drove him to go and to pray and pray and pray that God would do something about this and that God would use him in that situation. I tell you, Nehemiah is a book and a person that we can relate to greatly today in the days in which we live. You might look around and see lots of trouble and difficulty and, in yourself or certainly in this world, find no answers for it. But God would have us to go to Him, that we would be so burdened that we would be driven to our knees and seek the Lord's answer and His power and His abilities to do more than we could think; and that He might, He just might, use us as His people to accomplish great things.

Tonight in chapter 2 Nehemiah gives us the account of how God heard his prayers, how He opened the doors, and He moved to accomplish the seemingly impossible. And it's a wonderful little section; I just wanted to look from verse 1 down through verse 10 this evening. But it's my prayer that God would touch our hearts, would embolden us to rely on Him when all we see around is despair.

So we'll begin here in verse 1 of chapter 2, as Nehemiah writes, "And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before." You know, no matter who you are, you have to deal with some type of authority that is over you. I don't care who you are. Whether it's a child who has to listen to his parents and learn to obey his rules and submit themselves to their authority, or whether you are an employee and have a boss that is over you with rules who is telling you how to do your job and what you should do, you need to submit to them. It doesn't matter who you are. There's always somebody that we're to submit ourselves to. When you drive your car, you need to abide by the rules of the road, or you're going to end up seeing those red lights in the rear view mirror that you dread so badly. You know? It doesn't matter. Even as just a regular citizen, we're to submit to those who we voted into authority over us (or maybe those who we didn't vote for), yet God has put them in

that place of authority in our nation, and we're called to submit to them. Being under authority, I tell you, doesn't agree with us, and it certainly doesn't agree with our flesh. We want to be our own authority. But the Bible tells us that, as believers, we're to submit to those who are in authority over us - both in the church and outside in the world, we're to submit to them as we would the Lord. That's a difficult pill to swallow so many times, isn't it? It's all right. You can admit it. It's hard. It's hard to submit to somebody else because we always think that we have a better answer or a better way. But nonetheless, that's the place that God has set us. So we find ourselves, many times, in a position where we don't like the policies of somebody who's over us. We think that we would be better off being the one in authority and would like to see those things changed. Others who, maybe, we might rather have over us in authority but there's not much we can do about it in the time that we find ourselves. Those things happen to us all the time. And when we find ourselves in that place where we're struggling with submitting to people who are over us, I think we do so so often the struggle is because we think that it hinders us. We feel like our hands are tied, and there's nothing we can do, and we just have to sit and wait for something to change, for our boss to get promoted or to get fired, for that person in government to get voted out or whatever it is. But we feel like there's nothing we can do, everything that we want is just unattainable. And like I said, we feel like we're just hindered by the authority that has been put over us or thrust over us.

But the best thing we can do is take our advice and our model from Nehemiah here. The best thing we can do is pray, knowing that we serve a God who is able to make any changes He desires. And I'd ask you - do you really believe that today? Do you believe that your God can do anything that He wants? I know we think that in our heads, and we say it with our mouths, but our actions have to prove that out. We can't just think it or say it. The way we live our lives needs to prove it - that we really do believe those things, that we serve a God who can do anything He wants. Nothing stands in His way. His desires are going to win out in the end. We need to believe that with our whole heart and live that way. So, too, Nehemiah was in this position where he worked for a heathen king who had absolute authority; he could do whatever he wanted. He could make whatever rule he desired, and nobody was going to stand in his way, at least no one on this earth. He'd make a law or he'd make a policy, and everybody would have to follow it. He could do whatever his heart's desire was. And Nehemiah was underneath this man; as we read here, he was his cupbearer, he was one of his servants. And to top it off, Nehemiah had this great burden that was placed upon his heart as he heard about his people back

in Jerusalem - of the disparity of the city and the trouble that they were all in. He had this burden that caused him to mourn and to pray and to fast for the situation that was going on back home with all of his people there and the condition of the walls and the gates and the enemies all around. And here sat Nehemiah, serving wine to this king with this almost God-complex. Can you imagine the kind of despair that could have been in his heart? Where he would just say, "Gosh, what can I ever do? How could I ever change things? God, why have You put this burden on my heart, when I'm stuck here in Babylon serving wine to this king? You've put me in this place of being under this man's authority." But this was the burden that God had put on his heart. And I think that was the key. This wasn't his own burden; God had set that there. So Nehemiah had great confidence that if God wanted to use him in Jerusalem, God would and could change the heart of this king. Now, I don't know for sure if that's really what he thought - that He would change the heart of the king - or maybe he would just, "Hey, You've got to move this king out and get somebody else in here that has a soft heart toward Jerusalem" (because this king hadn't, this king hadn't any kind of softening towards God's people there, at least none that Nehemiah could see). But yet Nehemiah was convinced that God could do something, and God could use him in that place.

We should live our lives with that same kind of confidence today - living in a world that opposes God and opposes all the things that are of God; many leaders that seem to have their own agenda rather than seeing the position that they've been put in as a place to serve the Lord and to serve His people. We're in that same kind of place that Nehemiah was in, but yet we serve the exact same God, with the same abilities, and we should put our same confidence in Him. You know, in Proverbs 21:1, we read that "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." I love that verse! "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD." Does he have to be saved? Does he have to honor God for God to move the heart of that king? No! He doesn't have to be. God is able to move that man's heart just like He is anyone else's. He can turn them and use them for His purposes, even though they're not a willing participant. Doesn't that give you hope in the days in which we live? It should. We can pray and submit, knowing that nothing stands in the way of our God; that He can move a king's heart like a chess piece on a chess board. And He is doing exactly that. Every move is His will. Every move has a purpose and a plan behind it, and God tells us about those plans that He has for us. And they're always for good; they're never for evil. He wants to give us a hope and a future, we read about there in Jeremiah (29:11). That's the God that we serve. That's the Lord that He says,

"Above everything else, submit yourself to Me, as you're submitting yourself to those who are over you." Nehemiah prayed, and he waited for God to answer because he believed with all of his heart that the answer would come. He didn't know how it would come, he didn't know when it would come, but he believed that God would hear his prayers, and He would answer.

And we see that Nehemiah gives us a time stamp, here in verse 1. He tells us that "it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes," when he was serving wine there to the king. So between verse 1 of chapter 1, where we are told that it was late November/early December there, to verse 1 of chapter 2, where we pick it up here today, he says it was the month of Nisan, which is April on our calendar. So some four months had passed by since he'd heard about this trouble in Jerusalem, since God had put this burden upon his heart for his brethren and the place where God had set His name. Four months of praying and fasting and seeking the LORD. Four months of this very serious situation going on, with no answer from the LORD. Four months of mourning and heartache over what was happening to his people back home. And the LORD hadn't moved one inch as far as Nehemiah could see. But it didn't hinder him; he continued to pray, he continued to trust and to seek the LORD.

Have you ever been in that place, where you pray and you pray, and it seems like nothing changes? We'll pray the whole day long and go, "All right, Lord. What happened? You didn't move." Maybe you'll pray for a couple days or for a week or a month, and it still seems like nothing has changed or maybe even longer than that; yet you get no answer from God. If you've been in that place - maybe you're in that place today - you're not alone. God rarely, in the Scriptures, answers as soon as somebody prays. You don't see that very often. It happens. Certainly it happens. But more times than not, it's not the way that God works. Rarely in the Scriptures do you read that somebody prayed, and the answer came right then. But I've seen it happen. It's happened to me before. But more times than not, it's praying and trusting and relying upon God for days or months or years. There're people I've been praying for for years - since I got saved back in 1986 (yeah, that was a long time ago). There're people I've been praying for - that God would touch their hearts, that they would change their hearts and seek after the Lord. And I'm not giving up yet. There've been times when I thought, "All right! Look it! It's happened! They're moving." And then nothing happens. But my faith isn't in them changing their minds or their hearts; my faith is in the Lord to whom I pray. Waiting and praying. You know, the more you pray and the more you wait, I'm

convinced that God doesn't answer right away, many times for our benefit; that we would be patient and that we would wait on His timing and that we'd realize that His timing is always better than ours, always better than ours. And the waiting is never fun. It's how we wait that makes all the difference as we wait on the Lord. We begin to gain those things like patience, like trust and faith in our God. As we seek and wait on the Lord, we gain insight into the ways of the Lord, in understanding of God's heart and how He works. Such valuable things for us, a people living in a foreign land, seeking to be honorable servants of our God. How are we supposed to do that if we don't live in patience and faith and trust in our God, if we don't know His ways or understand His heart or know how God works? They're such valuable things for us, as God's people and His servants.

Not only that but we have time to prepare to serve the Lord well when He does answer that prayer. Because I'm convinced God answers prayer. He always answers our prayer. Now the answer sometimes isn't what we expect or even what we want. Paul understood that. When we read about him praying again and again and again for this thorn in his flesh, he was wanting deliverance. That's what he was praying for. And the answer came, "No. No. I'm not gonna answer your prayer. Stop praying for that because My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Sometimes we don't get the answer that we're looking for. But nonetheless, God is going to answer. And during that time of waiting, it shouldn't just be, "All right, I'm just gonna wait. I'm gonna sit here and wait." We're given that time to prepare our hearts, to prepare for what God might do, and be ready when He opens a door and be willing to walk through it.

So we read here that it was when Nehemiah was bringing wine to the king when the LORD's answer came to him. And it was at a time when his face was showing the anguish that was on his heart because of what was going on in Judah.

So we read, in verse 2, "Therefore the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.' So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, 'May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?' " Nehemiah stands before this king, brings him his wine, and his face is showing the trouble that his heart is feeling. For months, Nehemiah had been able to hide his emotions as he went to serve the king. But for whatever reason, this day was different. This day, the king was able to see on his face, the face of this cupbearer, that it was not joyful. Nehemiah was able to put on a

joyful face in the days and weeks and months before. But not this day. And though his face was supposed to be joyful, for whatever reason, he just couldn't do it. And although it was a capital offense for any cupbearer or any servant or advisor of the king to be sad in his presence, Nehemiah wasn't able this day to hide the fact that he was grieving for his people and for the city and the conditions there in Jerusalem. It's easy to put on a happy face sometimes. But there're those things that happen in our lives or those burdens that come upon us that you just can't do it sometimes. And that's the place where Nehemiah was. And notice what the king said to him when he noticed Nehemiah's face. "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." And I don't think that this was said with the voice of concern from this king. I'm pretty sure that it wasn't. I don't think you can read this in another version and read, "Oh, Nehemiah, what's wrong, pal? Why so down-in-the-face today? You're not sick, are ya? I'm concerned for ya." That wasn't the way the king spoke these words to Nehemiah. No. It was more like, "Hey, is that a sad face I see on you, cupbearer? I know you're not sick. No. I know what this is. This is sadness of heart. Why are you like this in my presence?" That's more of the tone that this king spoke, as he spoke to Nehemiah. And how do we know that that's how he said it? Well, all you have to do is look at Nehemiah's reaction. His reaction was, "I became dreadfully afraid." I don't think he would have been dreadfully afraid if the king had put his arm around him and said, "Pal, you don't look so good. Why don't you sit down here on the throne and take a little sip of the wine? And maybe that'll help you." I don't think he would be dreadfully afraid if that was the way he said it. No. This king was upset, and he said it with a stern voice. And he writes.....No. This wasn't concern for Nehemiah; he wanted answers.

So he says, in verse 3, " 'May the king live forever!' " (Or, "Long live the king!") But he says, " 'Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?' " And he shares the condition not of his heart only but of his burden, the condition of his people and the city back in Jerusalem. He answers with the truth; not with excuses but with genuine heart's concern for his people, the things that God had put on his heart. And I know he's speaking to the king here, but I can't help but encourage you. You share the things that are on your heart with the Lord when you go to Him in prayer. Don't try and feel like you have to sugarcoat it or put on a happy face before the Lord. He knows your heart, He knows what's going on. He's not like this wicked king. But He's a God who cares for you and knows the burdens of our hearts. And He's got the answers for them. I love that Nehemiah just goes to him

with truth. He doesn't come up with some excuses, "Well, no, no. It really is. I got a stomach thing goin' on." No. He just goes and tells him, "I can't have a happy face today when I know what's going on back home. I'm so burdened for my family." And he answers the king, and I'm sure just waiting to see what reaction would come from this king - the look on his face or the next words that this king would speak. I'm sure it was just moments before the king spoke, but it must have felt like just years to Nehemiah.

But nonetheless you read, in verse 4, it says, "Then the king said to me, 'What do you request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.'" I think that Nehemiah was surprised that he was still standing after he said this to the king, after he bore his heart out to this king. I've gotta wonder if he didn't say these things and then just kind of go, "Okay. What's gonna happen?" But then there he is.....standing. "Wow, okay, I still have my head on my shoulders. This is a good thing." And he hears the words from this king, "What do you request?" The king answers him, "All right. Well, what can I do for you?" What an answer! Those months of prayer. I can't imagine what was going on inside of Nehemiah's heart when he hears these words from the king, when he maybe expected to hear him call for the guards. "Hey, take this man away. Execute him." Instead, he hears these words from this king, "What can I do for you? What do you request?" Nehemiah must have been blown away. But without skipping a beat, we read, he says, "So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king." He threw up a quickie prayer. It certainly wasn't a long prayer. This was a short, sweet prayer that he prayed. Like I said, he just kind of threw up a quickie. It's one of those kinds of prayers that you pray when you're really hungry, and the waiter brings the food to the table. Yeah, you guys know that prayer, right? (Laughing) It's funny - my wife has adopted this new rule when we eat, that when we sit down at the table, we pray; because nobody likes to wait and then when the food gets there, and be awkward, somebody's starting to eat or who's gonna pray or we're hungry, and we wanna eat. When we go to sit down, before the appetizer or the salad, she says, "Let's pray." Because if not, you're hungry. The food comes, and you're throwin' up one of those, "Oh, Lord. Thank You for this food. Bless it to our bodies. Amen." And you're with fork in hand. Nehemiah hears these words from this king, and it's amazing. He says, "I prayed to the LORD, and I said to the king." It certainly was a quick prayer.

I think we have a lot to learn about prayer. It's something I think that we misunderstand a great deal as believers. There's a lot of misunderstanding, I think, about how we should pray and what we should pray and what the position of our bodies should be when we pray. You know, I think prayer should be very simple. It shouldn't be misunderstood. I think we would do well just to keep it simple. It's not about the words that we use. It has nothing to do with the position of our bodies. And, as we see here, it certainly has nothing to do with the length of our prayers. Do you remember when the disciples saw Jesus walking on water, that we read about over there during that storm in Matthew 14? You remember the story. They began to scream like little girls, "It's a ghost!" They were afraid, seeing this image walking out across the water. But then they said to one another, "That's the Lord!" And it was Peter who spoke up and said, "Lord, if that's You, call me out there on the water to You." And that's exactly what God did. And Peter did pretty well. He steps out of the boat, and he starts to walk on the water out toward the Lord. And he did well for a while. I don't know how many steps he took. But we're told that at one point, he saw the wind and the waves, and he became afraid, and he began to sink. And remember, these were strong winds and waves, and here goes Peter underneath the water. And we're told that as he began to sink, he cried out (sort of a prayer, I guess), calling out to the Lord, and his prayer was, if you would remember, "Oh Creator of heaven and earth, the One who is the Sustainer of all life, full of grace and love, I beseech thee and Your tender mercies, if it be Your will, save Your humble servant." You remember that? I don't remember which version it is, but..... (Laughing) No. That wasn't his prayer. He was in trouble, he had a need, and his prayer was, and his cry to the Lord was, "Lord, save me!" Three little words. He didn't say, "Oh, no, I gotta put my hands together, I gotta....." No. He was in trouble, and he cried out to the Lord. And these three words saved him as the Lord reached out and grabbed him and pulled him up, and they were back in the boat. No long prayers. Just three little words. Jesus wasn't slack in teaching His disciples about prayer. You know, you can read in Matthew 6:7. It says Jesus says to them, "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them." He says, "For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." Revolutionary, isn't that, toward our prayers? You know, we're not there to inform God of what's going on when we pray. Now I'm not saying it's wrong to pray for situations or for people or specifically for things that they're going through. I'm not saying that's wrong. But don't think that you're informing God of anything. It's okay to do that. It's okay to pour your heart out to the Lord in prayer. But know this.....that God knows your needs before you ask

Him. That would cause you to go to Him even more, shouldn't it? I know some people who've taken that and said, "Well, why do we even need to pray? If God knows our needs, and He's gonna answer, and He's gonna do what's best for us, why should I even pray?" I don't know, I don't get that at all. It makes me want to go to Him all the more. It makes me want to unload on Him my burdens, to cast my cares upon Him because I know He cares for me (1 Peter 5:7), and I know that He has the perfect answer. Don't get me wrong. There're still times when I'll go to the Lord and say, "God, this is what's going on, and can You do this, and can You do that? Would You do this, please?" And again, I'm not faulting you if you go and pray, "God, heal this person, meet my need," or do whatever those things, even if you do it in a specific way. But do it with the understanding that God already knows what you're going through, and He has the perfect answer for your situation. You don't need long prayers and vain repetition, thinking that if I pray and pray and pray, God will hear me. No. He hears you, and He knows what's going on. He just longs for you to come and spend time with Him in that intimate place before His throne, that place that He's given to those who put their trust in Him, that special place that God gives to His children, this place of coming boldly before His throne of grace, finding help in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Much words won't get your prayer heard, and it certainly won't make it get answered any sooner. It's the attitude of our heart that God is looking for and looking at. If we love the Lord and rely on His goodness and His love for us, on His sacrifice for our lives, then God will hear our prayers. That's the only prerequisite. Hey, do you trust the Lord for your very life, for your salvation? If you do, God will hear you. He loves you! And He loves to hear from you. So spend that time with Him, and take the time to pray and then listen and wait and prepare for God to answer because His answer will come, and it'll be in His time, and it'll be perfect.

So we read that he "prayed to the God of heaven." I don't know what he prayed. "All right, LORD. I'm trusting You. Here we go." I don't know. Maybe it was even shorter than that. And he said to the king, verse 5, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I want to go to Judah and rebuild." I like Nehemiah. He didn't try to butter up the king or manipulate him with an explanation of how this move would be beneficial to his kingdom. "You know, king, I've got this burden for Jerusalem because I think it'll really help your kingdom. You'll have an outpost there. I can go there and be your frontman, out there in front of everything. I think this would be really good for ya. Maybe you can see things my way and decide to send me out." I like that Nehemiah didn't depend on that; he didn't depend on his own ways or trying to manipulate the situation. He

had seen God open up this door, and he was walking through it in faith; not with his own wisdom or his own plans. I love that about this guy. And he says to the king, "King, I want to go rebuild," and the king says....and, "What do I request? If it's okay with you, I'd like to go home. I want to go and rebuild." What a man of faith! What a man of trust in God! And though he stands before this king who is all-powerful as far as the men on the earth go, he realizes he's standing in the presence of His God, and God is swinging open a door for him, and he's gonna walk through it.

Look at verse 6 here. It says, "Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), 'How long will your journey be? And when will you return?' So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time." The king looks at the queen and says, "Okay. How long you gonna be gone?" Can you imagine the look on Nehemiah's face? Not only was his head still on his shoulders, but the king said, "What do you want me to do?" and he says, "I want to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild." And the answer he gets back from the king is, "All right, how long is it going to take you?" I can just imagine the joy that was in his heart, the rejoicing that was going on there, realizing what God was doing at this moment. Sometimes we can be so surprised when God answers prayer, when the Lord comes through in the most awesome way, just at the right time. But we really shouldn't be. I can't help but think about back there, as prayers were going up for Peter in Acts 12. You remember that James had just been killed, and Herod said, "Wow, that pleased the Jews. It's puttin' me on their good side. If one dead apostle is good, two will be better." And he goes and has Peter arrested, and the church gathers together in a house. They locked the doors and windows, so to speak, and they began to pray and pray for Peter's release because in the morning, he was going to be put to death. And as they were praying, you know the story there, the angel of the Lord came and woke Peter up. He had to actually wake him up, you know, kick him on the side. "Come on, Pete. Time to go." And he got up, and he walked out of the gates as they opened up for him, and he realized, "Wow, the Lord got me out of jail!" And he went to the house where they were praying. As he knocked on the door, a young servant girl named Rhoda came to the door and said, "Who is it?" They were afraid. They thought they were the next going to be arrested. And he says, "It's Peter. Let me in." And in her excitement, she just runs back to the room to go tell everybody, "Hey, Peter's at the door!" and she gets ridiculed by all these men of faith who are praying, asking God for deliverance. "What're you talkin' about, Peter's at the door? We're havin' a prayer meeting here, Rhoda! That's why we're here." And they began to even make fun of her. "Maybe it's his ghost." I don't

know. Come on. And he continues to knock, as you would imagine. "Come on, guys. Let me in!" And he comes in and opens the door. They weren't expecting God to answer that prayer, at least not then, not so quickly. I don't know if Nehemiah was expecting this to happen at this time, when he went in there and wasn't able to control his emotions that were on his face. But it's just so awesome to pray and trust in God and wait and then begin to see these doors start to open; and one after another after another begins to open. And you just begin to walk through them as the Lord opens up that place. Honestly, I don't know if he was surprised at this answer of this king. But nonetheless, I think Nehemiah was ready to walk through them because I really don't think he was that surprised; I really think he was expecting God to do something. He just didn't know what God was going to do or when He was going to do it.

And I know that he expected it because look at verse 7. The king asked him, "How long are you going to be on your journey?" and he tells him. And then Nehemiah says, "Furthermore I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy.' And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me." See, he was expecting God to answer because he was making plans. He wasn't just sitting and waiting on the LORD to do something; he was planning and preparing for the time that God would answer. And that's the key word - he knew that God would answer. Not if He was going to. But when He did. And he was ready to move when the LORD answered him. And he's got such great answers for the king. "Well, king, I'm gonna be gone about this long." And then he says, "And I'll also need some traveling letters because I gotta get through some territories, and they're gonna want to know what authority has let me come this far. So if you give me some letters that'll get me through those places. I'm also gonna need your Home Depot card. I'm gonna need a lot of lumber." Oh, I know you ladies are going, "Oh, no. A man with a Home Depot card in his hand. Big trouble." But he says, "Hey, I'm gonna need a lot of wood. I got gates, I got walls, I got temple. I've got a house I've gotta live in. I'm gonna need a lot of stuff, king. Can you give me letters so I can get all this wood and this lumber and the things that I need from the keeper of your forest?" Nehemiah had some 800 miles to travel, and he needed a lot of stuff to go with him. And Nehemiah writes, "And the king gave me everything I asked for." Why? "According to the good hand of my God upon me."

Man, I want to know the prayer, that quickie that he threw up. Don't you? I want to know what he prayed right there. Because all of a sudden, all these things are open. But I guess it really doesn't matter what that prayer was. I guess we don't need to know what it was or what he said. Better yet, I want to trust God the way Nehemiah did. I want to be that bold when God opens up a door. I want to be prepared to do the things that God has put upon my heart, to meet needs that I see around me. I want to be trusting enough in my God and have the discernment to see these doors open and then recognize them and go through them. I mean, he had everything laid out, and he was ready when the time came. And he gives all the credit to his God; nothing to this king. He understood very well that this was the hand of his God - his good God - that was upon him. "The king gave me everything I asked for, according to the good hand of my God that is upon me." Do you believe God's hand is upon you for good? Do you believe that He's set out good works for you to walk in beforehand? (Ephesians 2:10). He knows what's coming in your life. He knows the difficulties, and He knows the trouble; but He also knows the victory and the places where He's going to be with you and use you in a glorious way. That's the God that we serve. And I want to trust my God the way Nehemiah did.

And God didn't stop there. Look at verse 9. Nehemiah writes, "Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me." It's interesting to me that when Ezra was putting everything together for his trip back to Jerusalem (back in Ezra 8), when he was taking those 2,000 folks back with him, he determined that he would not ask the king for any help. We read, there in Ezra 8:22 (Ezra is saying), "For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, 'The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him.'" See, Ezra said, "I'm determined I'm not gonna ask the king for anything because I've been tellin' the king how God is gonna be with us, how He's going to protect us; that I don't need his help because God is with those who seek Him." Those were Ezra's words. But whether Nehemiah requested the king do it or the king just provided it, he sent those escorts with him - captains of the army and horsemen - to go with Nehemiah and the people that were going with him to go and rebuild. So who was right? Was it Ezra or was it Nehemiah? Should Nehemiah have accepted or asked for the soldiers' protection? Or should Ezra have done that? I tell you they both were because they both trusted the LORD to provide the things that they needed. However God chose to provide it, they were trusting that God would just provide. And I think that's so important for us to understand.

I think this is key. We should trust in the LORD with all of our heart, lean not on our own understanding; but in all our ways acknowledge Him, knowing that He will direct our path (Proverbs 3:5-6). So you don't lean on your own understanding. Don't say, "Well, I think this is how God's gonna protect me," or, "This is how God's gonna answer the prayer," or, "This is how God's going to handle this situation." Don't have it in your head already how God is going to do something because then you take the chance of missing out on what God might do. You're sick or somebody is struggling physically with some kind of ailment, and you pray, "God, touch them, heal them, You're our Great Physician." And if you're just focused on, "Hey, my God is going to touch him and heal him, I don't need to go to doctors, or I don't need to use medicine or any of those things," and you count that out and say, "Well, that's not the way my God is gonna work," you may just miss what God has for you. Or maybe it's vice versa - you put all your trust in the doctors and the medicines; which I wholeheartedly believe that that was God's doing - that's His grace upon us. I don't think man is smart enough on his own to come up with those kinds of things that men have come up with, the treatments and the medicines. And God can certainly use those to help us and heal us in our time of need.

But if you put all your trust in that and don't think or hope that God could just, with a word, take away any issues that we have in our flesh, you could miss that. I think about Naaman, back there in 2 Kings 5. You remember that guy. He was the commander of the army of Syria. Quite a guy, with a lot of responsibility; but he was a leper. But he heard about this prophet, Elisha, that could heal him (from a slave girl that was working at his house that they had got in some raids), and he went to go and meet this man of God. He loaded up camels full of gifts and clothes and gold and silver to pay this man of God to heal him. And when he got to his door, Elisha wouldn't even come out and see him. He just sent his servant out because they were all upset, "Oh, my gosh, this guy's coming. How're we gonna heal him? He's not gonna get healed, and we're gonna be destroyed." And Elisha said, "Just send him to me. I'll handle it." But he wouldn't go out and even see this man, this commander of the army of Syria. He just sent his servant out, and the servant said, "Hey, my master said, 'Go dip seven times in the Jordan, you'll be healed.'" And you know. Naaman went away mad. He was furious. And he said, "You know what? This isn't what I expected. I thought this man of God would come out, he would say some words over me, he'd wave his hands, and I'd be healed. But I don't need to go dip in the Jordan. It's a dirty old river. We crossed it on our way here. We've got cleaner rivers and waters back in Syria." And he went home angry.....until they got to the Jordan, and one of his servants said, "Hey, you

know what? What do you have to lose? Why don't you just go and do what the man said?" And, reluctantly, Naaman went in and began to dip in the Jordan River. One, two, three.....nothing changed. He was still leprous. Four, five, six.....and I imagine on that sixth time, he looked at that servant who told him, "Why don't you just do it?" and said, "You wait till I get out of here." (Laughing) "I'm gonna take off your head!" But then he went down the seventh time and came up, and his skin was like new, and he was healed. He came that close to missing it because he expected God to do something in a certain way. Man, I tell you - don't put your own expectations on the Lord. Allow Him to be God. Acknowledge Him in all of your ways. Don't lean on your own understanding. Let Him direct your paths. And I tell you, you're going to end up in the perfect place at the right time. He's able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

We'll end here in verse 10, where it says, "When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it," (heard what was going on), "they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel." Something to remember. When you set out to serve the Lord, there's always going to be opposition. And here're a couple of guys that are going to cause Nehemiah a lot of trouble in the months to come. So just realize - when you set your heart on God, there's always going to be opposition. There's going to be those who are going to come and say, "Why are you praying? Why are you seeking God? Really? You think that's gonna help you at all?" There's always going to be those who come and try to discourage you. But when you walk through those doors that the Lord has opened for you, putting your confidence in Him - not in yourself - man, it's easy to thwart those attacks. Heck no. I've seen what God could do. I've prayed, and He's answered my prayers. I'm sticking with Him. I'm going to continue to walk with Him no matter what comes my way. Because you'll know that God will always come through. What an awesome example God gives to us here in these verses in Nehemiah. Waiting upon the Lord. I tell you, it's good for you as a believer. You know, back in Daniel 9:25, you read this, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times." See, what we read here in Nehemiah 2 in these verses that we just went over, the king gave this command, "Go and rebuild Jerusalem," and that marks the beginning of those 483 years that Daniel spoke of when he spoke about these seventy weeks of Daniel. It began here when Artaxerxes says, "Go and rebuild" and gave Nehemiah the green light. And it ends, to the day, with Jesus entering into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, showing

Himself to be Prince and our Messiah. See, God's timing is always perfect. Nehemiah prayed and prayed, and God waited until the right time for Him to answer. Because God has a plan. He knows the end from the beginning. Not just for the history and His plans for this world but for you. For you! God knows the plans that He has for you. And what a joy it is to pray and to wait and to move as God leads and answers our prayers. I hope you're excited about prayer. I hope you're excited about spending time with your God. I hope you're expecting Him to answer and that you're preparing yourself to move as He opens doors for you. Because that's the God you serve, that's the God who saved your life and the One who we're longing to see face-to-face. It's gonna happen. It's coming. But until then, let's be Nehemiahs. Let's go and build the kingdom of God, one heart and one soul at a time.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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