

Nehemiah 6:1-14 — "How You Pray When You Serve God & Enemies Distract & Oppose You!"

"The more you focus on yourself, the more distracted you will be from the proper path. The more you know Him and commune with Him, the more the Spirit will make you like Him. The more you are like Him, the better you will understand His utter sufficiency for all of life's difficulties. And that is the only way to know real satisfaction." [John MacArthur]

"The biggest impact of the Coronavirus pandemic for those semi-sequestered in their homes is probably not the fear of contracting COVID-19, but the ever-present *distraction* of it." [David McKinley]

Praying when enemies oppose you, attack you, ridicule you and slander you:

- I cried to my God for help (Ps 18.6)!
- O God, hasten to my help (Ps 71.12)!

Three waves of exiles who return back to the land of Israel (after 70-year captivity in Babylon):

- There are about 97,000 Exiles/Jews who return to Israel = they are the remnant
 1. 1st wave = 50,000 returned under Zerubbabel in 536BC (Ezra 1-2)
 2. 2nd wave = 5,000 returned under Ezra in 458BC (Ezra 7.1-10)
 3. 3rd wave = and now about 42,000 return under **Nehemiah** in 444 BC*** (Nehemiah 1-7)

- In Nehemiah we learn that God loves to raise up and use men who simply live & walk by faith!
- The POINT of NEHEMIAH? Seemingly impossible things are done THRU Prayer & Hard Work.
 - Ezra - rebuild the **Temple**; Nehemiah 1-7 rebuilding the **Walls**
 - Neh 1-2 - return to Israel under Nehemiah (3rd wave)
 - Neh 3 - workers & their work
 - Neh 4 - opposition to their work
 - Neh 5 - strife among the workers
 - **Neh 6 - attacks against Nehemiah personally** [*where we'll focus tonight!*]

Christian: are *you ready* to face verbal attacks, misrepresentation and defamation from enemies of the gospel?

- What if your company dives head-long into this social justice, this Black Lives Matter movement, indeed, this Inclusive, LGBT+ agenda — and they demand that you participate, or cooperate, or compromise in some clear way in your workplace?
- What if a child, or a parent, or a relative is fed up with your zeal for God and they try to discredit you, humiliate you, shame you, defile you, distract you? They slander you to others.
- What if something in the world (event, circumstance, pandemic, politics) distracts you and your attention/focus OFF of God and onto a never-ending journey of pursuit. And you leave the ULTIMATE thing to pursue OTHER things. What do you do & how do you then pray?
- What if down the road officials come to power that are even more hostile to Christ and His exclusive Gospel. And someone writes a letter about you, accusing you, slandering you, misrepresenting, or threatening you? You will suffer greatly, unless you give in & compromise & sin.

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- What if someone comes to you and says: you must stop your proclaiming of this gospel, or I will hurt you, imprison you, or kill you?
 - WHAT WILL YOU DO? HOW DO YOU PRAY?

THESIS — From Nehemiah 6 we will see how enemies oppose & distract & revile God’s people. We’ll see the attacks in 3 ways & also learn *how to pray when enemies oppose you personally.*

Nehemiah was doing a work, serving God & opponents came after him with 3 tactics:

3 tactics:

1. enemies want to **DISTRACT YOU** (1-4)
2. enemies want to **DISCOURAGE YOU** (5-9)
3. enemies want to **DEFILE YOU** (10-14)

I. ENEMIES WANT TO *DISTRACT YOU!* (1-4)

II. ENEMIES WANT TO *DISCOURAGE YOU!* (5-9)

A. v.9b - The Prayer: Now, O God, strengthen my hands! [only 4 words in Hebrew.]

1. Short = O GOD!
2. Urgent = NOW!
3. Desperate = Strengthen! HELP!

Prayer can be:

1. Short — Listen!
2. Urgent — Need you Now!
3. Desperate — I can’t do this!
4. Simple — not super complex!
5. Believing — Trust God!

We must do what Nehemiah did – pray for God’s strength, His power in our lives. We cannot overcome the slander and fear of our enemies in our own strength. It is said, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God. (David Guzik)

III. ENEMIES WANT TO *DEFILE YOU!* (10-14)

A. v.14 - Nehemiah’s prayer: “Remember...”

1. **Praying to God!** (14a) - remember O my God... > **Remember! (7x in Nehemiah!).**
 - a) asking God to “Remember” is asking God to “act” >> O God, rise up and Act!
 - b) 6:14 - a prayer asking God to remember them: take action & judge them for their evil scheming.
 - c) Psalm 74:18-23; Psalm 137:7-9 (remember: is “calling God to covenant faithfulness”); Jeremiah 15:15.
2. **Trusting in God!** (14b)
3. **Standing on God!** (14c) - They are trying to Frighten me [frighten me; scare me; cause me to fear]

Note the close parallels between this in Nehemiah 6 & 2 Timothy 2:

2 Timothy 2:1ff

1. Don't be **DISTRACTED** (4)
 2. Don't be **DEFILED**/disqualified (5)
 3. Don't be **DISCOURAGED** (6)
- you need to be **STRONG** in the grace that is in **CHRIST** (2.1-7)

Nehemiah's Prayers:

1. Nehemiah was mourning the state of Jerusalem (ch.1)
2. The King asked why he was so sad and the king said: "What would you wanna do?" (v.4) and Nehemiah **PRAYED TO GOD** (v.4b)
3. Sanballat became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews and Tobiah the Ammonite spoke evil of them >> but Nehemiah prayed: "Hear o God how we are despised. Return their reproach on their own heads (Chapter 4.4)
4. So Sanballat, Tobiah and others conspired against Nehemiah and the Jews to fight against it. but in 4.9 - we prayed to our God.
5. But this man of prayer encouraged the people of God with the character of God (in NEH 4.14)
6. Nehemiah did **NOT** demand the governor's food allowance and he prayed:" O GOD, remember me for good" (chapter 5)
7. But then again in chapter 6, the enemy plots evil and Nehemiah prays: "O GOD, Strengthen my hands!"
8. Then in Nehemiah 8, they read the book of the Law and Ezra blesses the LORD and all the people praise God (vv.1-8)
9. Nehemiah reminds the people to not grieve because the **JOY** of the Lord is their strength (Neh 8.10)
10. And for 1/4 of the day they read from the Law and for 1/4 of the day they confessed/prayed and worshiped the LORD (NEH 9)
11. Nehemiah helped restore the Tithe offering and prayed for God to remember him and his deeds (NEH 13.14)
12. Nehemiah helped restore the Sabbath day and asked **GOD** to remember him and have compassion on Him (NEH 13.22)
13. Nehemiah strongly commanded **NO** mixed marriages with foreigners and he prayed that God would remember those sinful priests because they have defiled the priesthood (NEH 13.29)
14. But Nehemiah did bring great purification and arranged for the duties and work of the Levites in their order — and he asked **GOD** to remember him for good (NEH 13.31)

How did Nehemiah handle opposition (lessons from the book of Nehemiah):

1. When ridiculed, he prayed & persevered (4.4-6)
2. when threatened, he prayed & watched (4.9)
3. when discouraged, he prayed & remembered God's power (4.13-15)
4. when tempted to be tricked, he maintained priorities (6.1-4)
5. when rumors came, he prayed & lived holy & denied the charge (6.5-9)
6. when threatened, he prayed, trusted God & worked hard (6.10-14)

RISE UP O MEN OF GOD!

Rise up, O men of God!
 Have done with lesser things.
 Give heart and mind and soul and strength
 to serve the King of kings.

Rise up, O men of God!
 The church for you doth wait,
 her strength unequal to her task;
 rise up, and make her great!

Rise up, O men of God!
 The kingdom tarries long.
 Bring in the day of brotherhood
 and end the night of wrong.

Lift high the cross of Christ!
 Tread where his feet have trod.
 As brothers of the Son of Man,
 rise up, O men of God!

A CHARGE TO KEEP I HAVE

A charge to keep I have,
 A God to glorify,
 A never-dying soul to save,
 And fit it for the sky.

Arm me with jealous care,
 As in Thy sight to live;
 And O Thy servant, Lord, prepare
 A strict account to give!

To serve the present age,
 My calling to fulfill:
 O may it all my powers engage
 To do my Master's will!

Help me to watch and pray,
 And on Thyself rely,
 Assured, if I my trust betray,
 I shall for ever die.

GIVE ME ONE PURE AND HOLY PASSION

Give me one pure and holy passion.
 Give me one magnificent obsession.
 Give me one glorious ambition for my life:
 To know and follow hard after You.

To know and follow hard after You,
 To grow as Your disciple in the Truth,
 This world is empty, pale, and poor
 Compared to knowing You my Lord.
 Lead me on, and I will run after You.
 Lead me on, and I will run after You.

The Plague of Busyness

Geoffrey R. Kirkland

How often do we hear: “I’m too busy” or “I don’t have time for that” or “I have too much going on today!” Undoubtedly you’ve heard others say that but you have probably also said that yourself – perhaps even today! Nothing is inherently sinful with being busy. But busyness can take our minds off of Christ, cloud our hearts from meditating on Him, distract us from serving our local church, and prevent us from communing with God in prayer and study of His Word. I ask you: has the busyness in your life become a plague that has caused you to lose your wonder of God’s magnificence, the privilege of bathing in Jesus’ ravishing and redeeming love, and the supernatural power available to you through the power, filling, and fellowship with the Spirit?

How Busy is Too Busy?

You’re busy. I’m busy. Everyone is busy. But how busy is too busy? How do you know whether you’re too busy? Is it possible to even tell? Perhaps you reflect on the recent past and wonder where your awe of God went. It may be that you ponder the past year of your life and contemplate how it happened that you’ve distanced yourself from your local church. You’re not as involved as you once were. You’re not meeting with anyone for discipleship and accountability. You do read the Bible – but it can become quite rushed. You do pray – but it often seems cold, lifeless, powerless, and just doing it to ‘do it.’ Ever been there? How busy are you? How much do you have going on in life? With what do you busy yourself? Perhaps a simple way of thinking of this: I’m too busy when I don’t intentionally make time to meditate on Scripture and actively invest in my local church.

What Occupies My Time?

What occupies your twenty-four hours of the day? Everyone has the same amount of time. The question is: with *what* do you fill it? Sleep? Eating? Work? Health programs? Sports? TV? Social media? Commuting? Take inventory and consider how you spend every *minute* of every *hour* of every *day*? Do you redeem it for Christ? We should! Our blessed Lord tells us to redeem the time because the days are evil. Every minute we live is a gracious gift from our God for us to live for *His supreme glory* and not *our narcissistic pleasures*. Let us live for Christ! Do you watch TV for one hour per day? Do you invest 5-10 hours per week in sports? Do you go to the gym and work out daily for an hour? Do you peruse Facebook or other social media with consistency? Consider. Think. Meditate. *Don’t be too busy to examine how busy you really are.* What occupies your time and your hours? Be specific and be honest.

What are My Priorities?

You do what’s important to you. You make time for what *you* deem the priority. A man who worships sports will do anything and everything to get home in time to watch ‘that game’ or to go to that ‘event’. There are many parents who so indulge their children in the ‘god of game’ that they spend hours each day playing sports to the neglect of spiritual instruction, family worship, and praising God in the home. This is not to pit sports and spirituality against each other. But often the god of sports has triumphed in our hearts and removed Christ from the ravishing delight of centrality in our minds. Do you prioritize sleep? Do you sleep your weekends away? Do you prioritize movies and entertainment? Do you stay up late watching certain things that you can’t arise early the next morning to awaken the dawn with your praises to God’s most worthy Name? Do you work so long and so hard that you’re unwilling to exert energy to go to the prayer meeting of your local church? Everyone has priorities and everyone makes time to do what is important to them. Examine your heart and your life.

Guarding from the Distraction of Busyness.

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Good things that become God things are sinful things. When something that is good becomes a heart-craving and a ‘need’ in someone’s life, that good thing has become an idol, and thus, it is a god-thing. There are many things that occupy our hearts – many, if not all, of which are profitable and good. But when ‘things’ and ‘stuff’ and ‘good blessings’ crowd our lives, occupy our hearts, distract us from Christ, usurp all our energies, we have veered off course and are in need to stop, consider what has gone wrong, and make adjustments. Praise God for His clear Word that guides us as believers to guard our hearts, manage our time well, and live maximally for Christ’s glory! Let us never forget that in Jesus’ parable of the soils, the third soil that he describes – the seed that was sown among thorns – lives a life ‘distracted with other things’. It’s not only sinful things that keep people out of heaven. It’s good things that become god things that prevent multitudes from entering heaven.

The Nonnegotiable Priorities.

So what can we do? How can we take inventory and guard our hearts, our lives, and our time? Here are some guiding thoughts and some essential priorities to ensure that we have in our lives. Whatever else a child of God may neglect, let him not neglect these important, nonnegotiable priorities. I’ll list four.

1) HEARING FROM GOD BY READING SCRIPTURE.

You probably don’t go most days without eating food. In fact, like most of us, you probably eat multiple meals a day. You need it! You enjoy it! You take pleasure in it! How much more must man live not by physical bread for our bodies but by the spiritual food – the Bread of Heaven – for our souls. To live a healthy, flourishing, joy-filled, Christ-centered life, all believers must hear from God as they read Holy Scripture. Eternal life is to know God and to know Christ! Knowing God comes as we allow the Word of God to dwell richly within us. Let us put off anything that crowds out our private, intimate times of hearing from God as we read, study, examine, apply, and memorize His precious Word. Like an eye-gripping, beautiful garden, God’s Word has sweet flowers of delight, sweet fragrances of divine comfort, and endless buds to stop and consider, look at, and smell and enjoy to the fullest! Let us hear from God by reading His Word.

2) COMMUNING WITH GOD IN EARNEST PRAYER.

No Christian grows apart from prayer. What a man is on his knees before God, that is what he really is, and no other. A man may have riches, prosperity, prestige, fame, and influence but if he has not regular, fervent, prioritized, and heart-warming times of fellowship with God in prayer, he has much to learn in the Christian journey. Prayer is the holy incense that takes the sacrifice of our lives up to heaven. Prayer is the soul’s converse with heaven. To neglect prayer is to forfeit strength. To minimize prayer is to depend on self. To abandon prayer is to welcome backsliding. A man falls on his knees in private before he falls into great sin in public. A man who does not pray in private is on the highway to backsliding and sinful living. Let us wage war with the devil, with temptation, yes indeed, with our own hearts and fleshly desires! Let us commune with our gracious Father, our merciful Savior, and our comforting Spirit! Let us approach God’s holy throne as Christ Himself always intercedes for us as the Spirit of God takes our prayers to God for us.

3) INVOLVING YOURSELF RELENTLESSLY TO YOUR LOCAL CHURCH.

To follow Christ as one’s Head means that the Christian joins himself to Christ’s body, the Church. Just as a bodily limb cannot live severed from the body, so impossible is it for a Christian to live severed from a local assembly of believers. Don’t allow the busyness of life – sports, TV, social media, laziness, work, vacations – seize you from the precious Bride of Christ! You need the Church! A local church should reside as the centerpoint of the believer’s life. Biblically, what we observe in Acts is that the believers made the community of believers, preaching, evangelism, and prayer the nucleus, the hub, the priority, the nonnegotiable priority in their lives. God used it. He matured them. They suffered much! He was glorified. Whatever you do: mortify the temptation and part with the thought that you don’t need Christ’s Church! You do!

4) MEDITATING ON TRUTH & EXAMINING YOUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION.

In an astounding verse at the end of 2 Corinthians, Paul writes to a *church of believers* and pastorally exhorts them to ‘examine themselves and see whether they’re in the faith’ (13.5). Believers must take spiritual inventory regularly. Where is there sin? Where am I being tempted? Where am I loving self more than loving Christ? Where are my idols? Am I hiding any sin at all in a private corner of my life? Am I loving the brethren? Am I walking in obedience to the truth as I practice righteousness? Am I believing the truth about Christ while submitting to Him and following Him? Let us examine our souls.