

What We Need is an Extreme Makeover - #1

(The First of 3 Messages from Nehemiah)

By Iverna Tompkins

As transcribed by Jane Vaughn

We have learned what happens in the natural is often a *key* for us in understanding what's happening in the spiritual realm. Too frequently, those special *keys* are left dangling unnoticed on God's keychain and seem to be unimportant. In other words, we miss many things by not realizing or acknowledging that God is saying something to us prophetically through the weather or other natural happenings. Whatever God plans to do, He begins by speaking to His people, but if we don't listen, He allows the world to do it to get our attention.

One of the interesting things we currently can observe in our world is the major emphasis on "*extreme makeovers*." Can we be honest enough to admit what is needed in the church today is an extreme makeover? God is quite capable of doing that for us and with us. I imagine everyone has seen one of the programs (unless you're too spiritual to turn on the box ☺) that performs and reveals these makeovers – whether it's the homes that are completely made-over or the women (I think men just don't admit the need! ☺). Whatever the specific situation – the subject is a person or something that is in *dire need of an exchange* from where it is to where it *wishes someone else* would put them! Do you understand that – clearly? I think that's where we are today as the people of God. We know we need to change certain things, personally and corporately – we need to grow up – but figure we're unable to or it's just too hard to effect what is needed. We want someone else to wave their "magic wand" or say the perfect prayer over us and bring about the necessary changes – the makeovers.

Another thing we do today is to miss the incredible depth of meaning in certain common sayings, like: "Promises! Promises! Promises!" To that, I can only say, "Yes! It's time for us to pick them up – to receive what God has promised!" Or, here's another common statement we hear today – "Learn to think outside the box!" Anyone who's ever been in business knows that means "Try a little creativity." "Don't get locked into these four walls." "You were hired to accomplish this, so do that, then more!"

In the church, we have been so boxed in by: "God called me to be – 'this.'" Or, "God called me to be – 'that.'" When people say to me, "What *are* you in the Body of Christ?" I usually respond, "I don't know, I think I'm a hole-plugger! Wherever there's a hole, I try to fill it!" ☺ I'm simply unimpressed with titles or labels. Know this: when God called you, He never intended for you to put a ceiling over your ministry! That is so limiting! One limitation I see today is the way we confine our thinking to our *tiny* world. I don't care if you have a church of 2000, 5000, or even 10,000 – that's merely a *tiny* piece of the whole!

I believe God is trying to *enlarge* our thinking – so that He might *enlarge* our anointing – so that He might *enlarge* our influence! As long as we only see *our* church, or even *the* Church – we still are thinking very small. Our *thinking* needs a makeover!

We are going to look at the Book of Nehemiah. There is evidence to support that at one time, Ezra and Nehemiah together formed a single Book. If so, that larger Book covered a period of 110 years. Nehemiah alone covers approximately 11 years. It describes a time when the Persian culture had reached it's zenith. Both Greece and Rome had just begun to flourish with all their pomp and power. The Jews, meanwhile, were struggling for mere existence. Now, if you think I gave you that information as a history lesson, you missed the whole point! Remember our principle of observing in the natural to understand the spiritual. Let's notice then the essential similarities to today.

I hear Pastors and leaders say, "*If only...*" and then they may continue this way: "*If only* we had the money! We have the vision; we just don't have the pro-vision!" Or, "If only we had the *influence...*" When we get excited about the power of the Lord and stand before our own people, we remind them: "Remember, we're not the tail; we're the head!" (Deut.28:13,44) Take a look around, Church. That **is** a

promise of God – but it isn't happening right now! We're not the head! The Church of Jesus Christ certainly is not leading this society today! We're not making the *impact* that we need to be making. Our *influence* is not what it ought to be. And the reason we're not? Let's look into the Book of Nehemiah and find out.

Chapter 1, verse 1. It is interesting to me that even these opening words carry a great deal of meaning for us – if we will discover it: “*the words of Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah*” (vs.1a). Seemingly nothing but biographical, those two phrases hold great revelation! Everything in the Bible says something to us if we simply look carefully enough. Here in verse 1, we find the importance is related to the meanings of those two names. Hacaliah (Nehemiah's father) has 2 distinct meanings. First, it means “waiting on Yah” (or Jehovah). The second meaning is “Yah enlightens.” We actually could stop right there and preach for an hour! But there is more! Nehemiah's name means, “the comfort of God.” If we put the two names together, we see that Nehemiah – the comfort of God – was born to one who knew how to wait on God and be enlightened by God. Selah.

You and I will never have divine enlightenment until we learn to wait – on God! And – our comfort comes through that enlightenment.

What a heritage! Can that be said of *our* children? Not *only* about the children from our loins – but I'm talking about our “spiritual children” – those with whom we have had some sphere of Christian influence. Can it be said that **we waited on God until we were enlightened** – and were then able to *impart* to them so they could be the very *comfort of God* to society? What an awesome thought – and challenge!

This is a good example of never quickly passing over individual words in Scripture. If a specific word is there – *probably* – there's a specific reason! ☺ We must remember God was and is The Author, divinely inspiring His human writers to select specific words to exactly communicate what He wanted us to know. If we learn to look carefully at what is there in print – just as we can observe what's occurring naturally in our world – we will be able to *feel* what I call the “nudgings” of the Holy Spirit. He'll prompt us saying, “There's a lesson here. Take a look at what it means.”

Let's look together to unearth some more of God's “hidden treasures” from Nehemiah. It really is like searching for gold. We can skirt around the edges, knowing there must be more than we can see on the surface, but we have to dig to discover the mother lode. Sometimes, we may even have to dig deeply and it could take us awhile to find the real wealth, but the rewards are always worth it.

The text continues: Nehemiah – this comfort of God – “*in the citadel of Susa*” (vs.1b, NIV). Now that too is so easy to skip over. Our goal is to get to the “meat” of the Word and this seems to be informative, but not so important. We've just, however, been given two prime t-bone steaks! Hello? This is meaty if we allow our Teacher, the Holy Spirit (Jn.14:26), to show us a few things.

I want you to see where this man is in life. We often speak of Nehemiah as being the “layman.” He had no title, no special credentials. He wasn't in the priesthood. But I prefer to think of him as a “Kingdom-man” instead of as a “layman.” Kingdom men and women do not slough off any opportunity by simply saying, “It's not my call.” Anything we can do to be a blessing in the Kingdom of God is our calling! Nehemiah says, “I was in the citadel,” or, “I was in the *palace* in Susa.” When you first look at it superficially, who cares? Well, I care! And you will too by the time I finish unwrapping this. ☺ I care, because what this says about Nehemiah is, in our colloquial speech, “he had it made.” Historians tell us he was a wealthy man. This is not a poor little struggling person whose desire is to become somebody big. Nehemiah isn't looking for a title. This is a man who already has a very important *position*. He is privileged. He lives in the palace. How good can it get?

Verse 2 – “*Hanani, one of my brothers,*” – we presume this is a biological brother – “*came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.*” Why would Nehemiah care about how things were in another land when they were so

far removed from his own existence? Allow me to be very candid. All too often, it's the man or woman with a *little church* and a *small influence* who really cares about others. It's not the one who has "made it big." That's just the awful truth. When you try to get the big important ones to attend a meeting, they don't identify that they need you. They don't need anything outside their own walls. They don't need the city-wide meeting – they don't need to join some support group or prayer group – they don't need teachings – they just do not "need." They are self-contained. "We have 5000 people and we have everything we need. Bless your little heart, you 'puny little nothing.' I hope you can survive till Jesus comes and then you'll be rewarded for whatever it is you do!" ☺ Okay, that was meant to elicit a smile-reaction, even a chuckle, but if we could be honest, we would admit it **is** the way the "biggies" (living in the palace) treat the "little guys."

The "little guys." They have no clout – only small acceptance – and equally small respect. All too often, the way they are greeted is: "How many do you actually have there?" "What denomination are you affiliated with?" People really don't like it when I answer that question because I usually say, "All of them. I'm affiliated with all of them – whether they know it or not!" ☺ That's because I'm a firm believer in the *Kingdom of God* – and I'm praying, "THY Kingdom come and THY will be done!"

People may say, "You are such a little drop in the bucket!" That may be true, but I know it won't get full without me! ☺ We each have our place and until we can grasp the bigger picture of God, we tend to join those who look down on us – in thought – in attitude – in concept of ourselves – and think, "Well, I'm not very important you know..." No, I don't know! Why aren't you important? If you're really not important, you're a real waste of God's time! "Well, I don't... I - I don't want to have *pride*. I just want to be *humble*" (see Jas.4:6; 1Pet.5:5). That's not humility – that's self-degradation! "There's no condemnation in Christ Jesus" (Rom.8:1). If you're waiting until you get to live in the palace before you try to influence anyone, there's no hope for you – or them! **Influence is because of God working in and through you, not what you can muster up for yourself!** We merely need to surrender to **His** purposes and allow Him to do what He wants with our lives – large or small congregations – a little hut in the bush of Africa – or someplace in a palace. What matters is that surrender to God (see 1Sam.15:22; Ps.51:16,17) and fulfilling our assigned place in His Kingdom, to the best of our ability – honestly.

"I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem" (vs.2b). Why would Nehemiah ask about the remnant? How long has it been since *you* asked? Will we really care about one another or are we just going to compare notes? "How're things going where you're from (wherever *that* is)?" "What's the latest thing you've found out?" "How many young people do you have?" Oh. "Do you still sing from the hymnal?" Tsk-tsk.

Nehemiah has a real concern for **all** of God's people – those who returned to rebuild in the Promised Land as well as those who remained in the land of their captivity. If I could get that across to us, including me, if we could maintain that perspective of genuine caring, there's no telling what God could or would begin to do! If we really, honestly cared about the people in our own fellowships – and people in other fellowships – about the people in the Kingdom of God – about Believers everywhere – we could be so influential! I don't think we have an inkling, not even a faint idea of what God could accomplish in our land!

If we merely consider the Body of Christ in our own nation – what do you think *could* happen if we stopped fighting each other? What if we stopped arguing over manmade, denominational issues? What if we found agreement on biblical, doctrinal issues concerning Who God is and how He has provided for us through His Son Jesus? What if we came together in unity? Oh my! Do you know why our warfare arrows are so dull? It's because we just keep battling each other! Our arrows aren't sharp enough to fight the devil – we just keep shooting them at one another! "Do you believe what I believe?" "Is your doctrinal stance the same as mine?" We fight over the craziest things! And then we piously claim, "I'm deep in God. I'm so – 'spiritual.' I remember back when I was immature..." The Lord must say to us, "You don't have to remember back very far!" ☺

So, Nehemiah says to his brother, “*How are things? What’s going on now – now that they’re back in the Land? How is it there?*” “How is it in the Body of Christ?” He doesn’t know. He’s been sheltered in the palace – haven’t you – uh, wasn’t he? It’s so safe to stay in our comfortable little worlds – where we’re loved and appreciated and understood (at least as much as we’ve revealed the “real me!”). And we’re panicked to step outside our little protective walls. “I wouldn’t know how to talk to *them*. They’re – Presbyterian.” ☺ “Oh, no!” “Well you know I couldn’t really fellowship there because they don’t understand the Holy Spirit as *I* know Him.” You might be surprised – very surprised – at how many Holy Spirit-filled leaders and laymen God has out there – who don’t have to wear a sign or have a title or paint it on their bumper stickers. “Let your bumper sticker so shine...!” ☺

“*How are things back there?*” Now, here’s their report. Verse 3: “*They said to me, ‘those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace.’*”

I don’t think in my lifetime (over 75 years) that I have ever seen another period of time when I could say the same thing so honestly about the Body of Christ in general as I can today. Oh yes, there are pockets of Revival here and there, and I can and do preach all the positives we can note. But right now, I want us to be honest enough to see that there’s been great *disgrace* in the Church-universal. We preach one thing – and live quite another! We talk peace – and take tranquilizers to deal with our stress levels. We talk power – and we don’t even trust our God to handle our smallest troubles! Prayer to God, seeking His resources and power to meet our biggest needs, seems to be very low on our list of priorities.

Hanani said, “Things are real bad, Nehemiah. *The wall of Jerusalem (vs.3b) is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire.*” We can identify with that! That’s what’s wrong with the Kingdom today.

Why is it that Revivals are never sustained? Why do they not endure? Why does a Revival hit and then lasts only 6 years? 7 years? And then all that great enthusiasm for God wanes away. I can tell you what *man’s rationale* is, given in explanation – “Well, that’s the timing of God.” Or, “The purpose of God was fulfilled.” “Revival has come and that’s the history of Revivals. They come and they go.” I know it’s repeatedly historical in the church. I’m asking “Why is that so?”

What would happen if a Revival continued on and didn’t die away? And why is it that they are not sustained endlessly? I believe the answer to those questions is because, for the most part, we don’t actually understand the purpose of Revival. God’s purpose for Revival is to **re-ignite His people** so *we* will “go to all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk.16:15). That’s the purpose of Revival – to revive! – to rekindle! – to set *believers* on fire once again! But the truth is when Revival comes, instead of fulfilling His purposes, God’s people tend to lean back, fold their arms, and enjoy the excitement saying, “Isn’t this wonderful!” “My, my, my. I see crutches being thrown away – blind eyes opened – deaf ears unplugged. Oh, I tell you! We have seen the miracles of God!” Really? You have seen them, but *do they work through you?*

Remember the little woman that worked her way through the crowd to get to the hem of Jesus’ garment? (Mt.9:20). As soon as she touched it – what happened? *Instantly, her issues were dealt with!* We’re so afraid of *issues* today. “Oh, when you pick up the newspaper you just have to wonder where this nation is going.” Don’t wonder! Read the end of The Book! He spells it out – “*the path of the just is as a shining light that shineth more and more*” – and more and more and more – “*unto the perfect day*” (Pr.4:18). His Light continues shining unless, of course, **we**, the just, the righteous believers stop at some imagined stop sign and insist that everyone else do the same!

It’s very frightening to be the leader of a church where the Holy Spirit dares to take you at your word and decides to take over. Oh, how we can sing – “Lord, I give You my life...” “I give You my church...” “I give You everything...” And then He says, “Alright! It’s about time!” ☺ But then He doesn’t follow *our* book! He allows things *we never* would! He inspires His people in expressive worship! Do you know that people do really strange things under the influence of His Spirit? And it can be *so* embarrassing! ☺ Oh, tell the truth! You’ve seen it! Who’s in control? You? or Him?

We like exciting things of the Spirit to happen in our services – but oh, we love this one – “*decently and in order*” (1Cor.14:40). And it *should* be in God’s order. But I want to remind you that the verse starts out with: “*Let it all be done...*” ☺ As long as we want to be in control, the Lord will allow that. I know that is true. I’ve walked with Him all but 2 stubborn years of my life and I know He allows us to take over – any time we want. To my disgrace, I’ve taken over so many times throughout the years.

I’ve gone down a few *spiritual blind alleys* because I was in control. Not fun. By the way, the Lord never goes with you down a blind alley. ☺ He just patiently waits at the place where you veered from His course. Isaiah says, “*The Lord waiteth for thee, that He may be gracious unto thee*” (Is.30:18). That just means, “The Lord outwaits thee!” ☺ He knows there’s no place for us to go – that detour-path is a dead-end! So, however long it takes of “doing my own thing,” (which, by the way, is one definition for *rebellion!*) when I come back to the very spot I left, He’s still there. “Hi there, Iverna.” ☺ “I knew you’d return.” The tendency then is to spend the next 5 years apologizing. ☺ Hello? And if you do that, if you stay stuck there, you’ve lost your power. Repent and get back to serving Him again.

“*How are things?*” Nehemiah inquired. “How are things out there? What can I do?” Verse 3. “Well, the *walls are broken*; but they’re still there. The *gates are burned* – they’re not hung, they’re removed.” You see, Church, that’s a picture of society in general – today. The protection has been broken down because of our often-warring with one another. How can you protect me if you’re fighting me? How can I protect you? And yet, listen to our conversation: “Have you heard about Brother So-and-So?” “Have you heard about...?” “I heard a thing the other day about Such-and-Such a church. You think that’s true?” “What’s your reason in asking?” “Well, I just want to prove if it’s true. I wouldn’t want to *spread it* – if it’s not true!” ☺

Business was conducted at the gates to the city but now there’s no place there. The church has moved out from the realm of influence in our communities. In an effort to stay pure and uncontaminated by the worldliness all around us, we have shunned the whole and turned inward. And in so doing – by removing ourselves from the corruption of the political fray, by avoiding certain portions of the social strata (high or low), by not getting involved in “issues” and only participating in “Christian” activities – we have allowed the walls of righteousness to crumble and the gates of justice to be removed.

Because the walls were not high enough and the gates were not in place – there were no gatekeepers – no praisers – no worshippers – and all that has to be there and in place – because these “safeguards” were missing, anyone *could* come in – and did! All throughout church history – any time the walls are not solid and the gates are not in place – it’s like a swinging door to every kind of hypocrisy and pretense and copycat counterfeit ministry – in and out – in and out – until the church world looked putrid as the whole. And the people of God are not mature enough to discern *the real* from the *counterfeit!* They’re confused like babes easily tricked into embracing the enemy’s fake or counterfeit. Here’s your first clue – the counterfeit is louder!

And so we shun the world lest we become contaminated. And the world was very satisfied to allow us our seclusion. They weren’t curious about us. There was nothing to be curious about! We weren’t out there loving them! We weren’t salt or light! (Mt.5:13,14). Jesus ate with sinners – worked on the Sabbath – healed on the Sabbath. He was a “Kingdom man!” We are not known in the hospitals or schools – only in church!

And yet, we watch our nation – our society – failing and falling apart, growing darker and darker, filthier still, and we stand back and say, “Isn’t it terrible?” YES!! It is terrible! The *walls are broken*. The *gates* are removed because ***we’re so afraid of contamination we’ve given up illumination!*** And we are the only Light they have!

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world ... a city...” – you’re My city – “a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid!” (Mt.5:14). How come we hide? Because we are so safe inside – wherever that little

building is God gave you. We're so safe inside our four walls. We're known *there*. People expect us to be *there*.

When we were children we used to say to one another, "I double dare you." Did you ever hear that? Well – I double dare *YOU* to get out into the world! I double dare you to just step out and breathe in society! You don't have to take Scriptures and put them in your spiritual gun – "The Bible says...The Bible says...!" shooting verses out like bullets. That'll just turn people off. And that's what they *expect* from us – to shoot scriptures **at** them. We've done it so often in the past. What if we just went out there and built them a new house? What if we just loved on them? People that are loved have a certain beauty about them, have you ever noticed that?

I remember years ago in our church. There was a young single man and none of the girls would date him. He was kind of, uh – a "nerd." ☺ Finally, a new gal came in among our young people and she didn't realize he was a "nerd" because we didn't get to her in time. ☺ But she started dating him and ultimately they were married. The man actually began to look different. He had the right kind of hair cut and she'd help dress him more stylishly. WOW! Now you heard: "How'd I miss him?" ☺ That's because you didn't know how to love him into it! Are you okay? And so we have to realize that *all of the taint of society is fixable unless it's evil from the enemy and then it's destroyable!*

It takes the Holy Spirit's discernment to know which is what because too often, we try to cast out that which is fixable. "Love covers" what? Just a multitude of "missing the mark" – a multitude of sins (1Pet.4:8). A number of years ago, the world came out with a song – "What the world needs now, is love, sweet love." That's a song the church should hear – and sing!

We're so defensive, offering God our excuses: "They don't – you know – we've tried. We've tried to reach..." No – we've tried to get them to come to our churches! "We can't clean the fish until they're caught!" And we can't catch them with an empty hook! So if, per chance, they should happen to come to one of our services, will there be enough bait to entice them to stay? Or, would they just yawn with the rest of the group? ☺ I'm just asking us some hard questions. Hard but necessary to respond to if we really want to *change*.

I really think it's time to think outside of the box – *in church!* How about you? What are you doing to excite people about God? The church has the most exciting truth! We have the Word of God – the Presence of the Lord – the Power of the Holy Spirit. Church ought to be the most exciting place to prepare people so we can kick them out – and back into the world as lights and salt! (Mt.5:13-16). We're not trying to build them and keep them or own them or lock them to the pew. We're supposed to bring them in, clean them up, get them ready, and throw them back into the fray – taught and trained and equipped to be witnesses to the power of God! (Ac.1:8).

If you read it correctly from the Greek in Matthew 13, when Jesus was talking about the seed being sown – He was talking about *men* – people – *you* are the seed! In Luke (8:4-15), Jesus referred to the *Word* as being sown, but in Matthew, we are the seed. He says, "I'm going to scatter you out there in the world. I *need* you out there." But we prefer our protected positions in the church: "Not us! We're staying in the envelope! It's real scary out there! What if You plant us somewhere and they don't like it?" So what?

You see, Jesus didn't take anything negative as a "personal" assault. Paul didn't take anything "personally." He was kicked out of every country he ever ministered in. "Oh! Here we go again! And how do we go out of this one? Out on a raft or..." Oh, that God would help us to come to a place where not every little sigh of disapproval uproots us. "Well, I gave it my all." ::*whine*:: "I just...We did everything we could. We fasted. We prayed. We solicited the community." ::*sob*:: "and then they talked against us." Oh! That's a *good* thing! ☺ Because before they talked against you, they didn't even know you were alive! ☺

Nehemiah inquired about the conditions. He found out it wasn't really good out there. Chapter 1, verse 4 – “*When I heard these things,*” Nehemiah says, “*I sat down and wept.*” Oh, thank God for men who will weep! Thank God for women who care enough about someone else's calamity to literally weep before God.

Ones who will weep about all of the rumors that have gone forth about “this church,” and “that group” and “the other” – you know what I mean: “That's why I understand Such-and-Such a church fell apart.” “No, kidding! That was a pretty big church, wasn't it?” “Yeah. They...” “WOW! What happened?” “Well, I understand... you know, there was a misappropriation of funds and the pastor got involved in a morals thing...”

What's our response to that? Are we like Hezekiah when he heard the wrath of God was going to come? (see 2Kgs.20:19). Is our response “Thank God it isn't going to happen in *my* day?” “Thank God it didn't happen in *my* church?” Or, even more subtly, “I knew there was something wrong there!” Oh, be careful!! Oh, my darling brothers and sisters. Be very careful! Because if that is true, that you knew it ahead of time, you **really** missed God! If you knew – back then, before it became public, and you did *nothing* – you are guilty! And if you didn't know and you're pretending you knew – you're lying! That's simple. “I just knew it! I just knew...” You did not. ☺

Oh, God, give us hearts that we'll weep for our brothers and sisters who fall! “Rejoice not against me, oh mine enemy, when I fall I shall arise!” (Mic.7:8). So, sadly the church says, “Not if we can help it!”

It's amazing what we do or say because we think we're *protecting* our church. “Never have *that* Sister in to speak. I'll tell you what happened in the past...” Oh, if true intercession would come back to the church! I'm not talking about our – I do want to be careful here, but this is so descriptive – our “dinky little prayer meetings” ☺ Too often what we call “prayer meetings” are just a time where we come together and someone leads in a glorious prayer and we all say, “Amen.” Don't you know we have outgrown that? Don't you know the Holy Spirit wants to put into us, into you and me, the heart of the Father? Then we will know how *He's* feeling about a thing.

When I hear various things, rumors, the first prayer I have is, “God, what do You think about this?” There would be far more people restored if the Body of Christ would *allow* restoration instead of simply praying for it. We have a part to play in re-building broken walls.

“Ezekiel. What do you see?” (Ezk.37:1,2). “The church is a mess. The Kingdom is a mess. It's all dried up – just dry bones.” “Well, prophesy, Ezekiel.” (Ezk.37:4). If *we*, today, prophesied at that point, we'd send them straight to hell! ☺ “Ground – suck 'em in!” ☺ That may seem funny in the light of day, but – isn't there an element of truth in what I'm saying? We don't want anyone around who has a *known* flaw. If a person holds to the principle of “Don't tell – don't admit that you have a problem or ever did” – if they hold to that stance, then, okay we'll still bless them. But, if they are foolish enough to confess ☺ and put that thing, that failing, right out in the open – “and they're still going to *our* church – oh, please!”

God's going to break your heart, Sir. Lady, God is going to put His passion and compassion in you. And by the way men, I don't know how the church adopted this idea that the women are the intercessors. Read the Good Book! The most powerful intercessors were *men*. Of course, we females can and we will and we're heard – but God's plan is for all of us to come before His throne of grace – to *boldly* come with our intercession (Heb.4:16). But God has a special ear to hear men pray. All through The Book, when men prayed, God's ear was listening. I would say that's especially true in our American culture where men have abdicated that placement before Him. He is waiting for *men* to intercede.

I remember a time when I was teaching a group of pastors from the New Testament – where it says, “*I would that men everywhere would lift up holy hands and pray*” (1Tim.2:8). Now I had been fairly certain that actually meant “I would that *mortals* everywhere would lift up holy hands,” but I dutifully checked it out in the Greek resources. To my utter surprise, I discovered it means MEN – male! I cried out, “God!

Don't You want women to pray and lift up holy hands?" He said, "Of course, but I knew *you* would!" ☺ It's just our nature to ask – "Help!! I need You, Lord! Do something about this!" We sometimes mistakenly consider our "praying" as more like giving God a "Honey-do" list. ☺

Upon hearing the condition of his people, Nehemiah instantly *identified* with them! "Why do you care so much, Nehemiah? You've got it made. You're well-esteemed. The King's cupbearer is an incredibly trusted soul. Everyone knows your name. You belong to the best class."

He says, "You don't understand. I've learned to weep with those who weep – and rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom.12:15). If my brother falls, it's as though I have fallen. And I will do everything I can to restore him (2Cor.5:18,19; Gal.6:1). If my sister trips..." We say, "There but for the grace of God go I." That can be a very pride-filled statement, you know. It is true, however. There but for the grace of God goes *you*! Some years ago, I was being accused of doing something I hadn't done and I was really complaining to the Lord. "Lord, this is not right!" He said, "I've forgiven you of more than you've ever been accused!" ☺ I sheepishly said, "You're right. Let's not talk about it anymore." ☺

Nehemiah says, "*Something needs to be done – an extreme makeover has to take place!*"

Do you know the secret to praying and getting an answer? It's in our willingness to be a part of the solution, otherwise our prayer is just empty words. But when we pray along with the heart of God, it's like we're saying: "If You can use me, this little drop – if You can use this – whatever You have put within me, Lord – if in any way I can be utilized to be a part of this restoration or healing or building up those walls – I say, 'YES LORD!!'" And if you cannot pray as a part of the answer, for Jesus' sake, don't be a part of further tearing something down!

Verse 4. "*I cried,*" Nehemiah said. "*I fasted. I empathized.*" Why is it that we don't pray powerful prayers? Why is it that we pray, but if we were honest we would have to admit we don't really expect Him to actually answer our prayers. We're just shocked when an answer does come: "What?! WOW! I didn't know You really could do that!"

I used to *not* pray until I figured out how God could do it. That's the truth – sad, but true. Or, I would pray a certain pattern: "Dear Lord, in Jesus' Name..." Or, I'd pray an exact prayer-formula – "Oh, Father, in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit..." I wasn't quite sure which One to pray to then! ☺ Now, I just throw it up there and let Them figure it out! ☺ Or I would pray an absolutely definitive solution: "I pray that You'll move on Brother So-and-So to talk to Sister So-and-So to move on the young people to adapt this..." And then when I'd get through, the Lord would simplify it all and say, "Why don't I just do what's needed? I don't need your pattern. My ways far *exceed*... (Eph.3:20) My thinking is so much greater than yours" (Is.55:8,9). "Oh, Lord, is there a better way than I planned? ☺ You mean, You could just do it - do it? You don't have to work up to it?" ☺

You see, we really don't believe... although we carry the lie in our pockets – "In God – we trust." If we truly *trusted* what He's promised, there'd be no walls broken down, and all the gates would be in place – because that's what He has promised! And I believe I'm going to live to see it! I believe that we're tired enough of the shattered situation, talking one thing and being another, that we're ready to get serious with our God. We're ready to come back to Him in humility and say, "God, You said..."

And **that was** Nehemiah's prayer. He said, "*God, I remind You of the covenant* (vs.5). I remind You that it was Your idea, not ours. I remind You that You promised! I remind You, Lord, that You are a faithful (1Thes.5:24), omnipotent God! There's nothing too difficult for You (Lk.1:37; Mt.19:26) and I am bringing back before You what You have already promised to me. And I'm asking You to fulfill it now!"

THAT, Sir, is faith – in action! That is obedience – praying the Word. That's being involved with God – **then** you're really interceding for others. Then we can expect exceeding and abundantly above all...(Eph.3:20).

The word “trust” in the Hebrew is /bawtakh/. It means “to be bold, to be secure, to feel safe, to be careless (without care), to be confident and to live in confidence.” That says to me, the walls were put back. That says to me, the gates are in place. When that happens, in the church, love will flow again and we’ll really mean what we’ve been singing to one another for years – “I love you with the love of the Lord...” only now we’ll mean it!

And when the leader says, “Now just find someone and show them God’s love” – it won’t be “kissie pooh” time! ☺ It’ll be a time of “How can I bless you?” “How can I pray for you?” “How is it going where you are?” “What’s God promised you that I can help you claim?” “What do we need to agree on together?”

Oh, church – you’re being challenged. Not just by this preacher, but by the Holy Spirit of God! Think outside the box! Let’s begin to claim what really belongs to us! Let’s pray, “God, You said it – and I want it!”