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hennie swart

**Under Construction:**  
Constructive Prayer (Neh 1.5-11)

**BEWARE!** BUILDINGS, COMMUNITIES AND  
INDIVIDUALS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

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***Nehemiah 1 (NIV)***

<sup>5</sup>Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup>let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. <sup>7</sup>We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

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**Nehemiah 1 (NIV)**

<sup>8</sup>Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, <sup>9</sup>but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.

<sup>10</sup>"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.

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**Nehemiah 1 (NIV)**

<sup>11</sup>Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

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**Introduction**

"There's much you can do once you've prayed; there's not much you can do until you've prayed."

The prominence of prayer in Nehemiah 1 shows us the importance of prayer in God's construction project; in fact, we're not truly part of His construction project until we pray constructive prayers for His people. Nehemiah prayed:

1. To God, as Scripture reveals Him
2. About the problem, as Scripture reveals it
3. For the solution, as Scripture reveals it

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## Praying to God

1) God, as Scripture reveals Him

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**Deuteronomy 7:** <sup>9</sup>Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today. <sup>12</sup>If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors.

<sup>19</sup>You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the Lord your God brought you out...

<sup>21</sup>... the Lord your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God.

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## Praying to God

- 1) God, as Scripture reveals Him
- 2) God as "Yahweh, the God of heaven"
- 3) God as "the great and awesome God"

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### CS Lewis, Mere Christianity:

"For the trouble is that one part of you is on His side and really agrees with His disapproval of human greed and trickery and exploitation. You may want Him to make an exception in your own case, to let you off this one time; but you know at bottom that unless the power behind the world really and unalterably detests that sort of behaviour, then He cannot be good. On the other hand, we know that if there does exist an absolute goodness it must hate most of what we do. That is the terrible fix we are in. If the universe is not governed by an absolute goodness, then all our efforts are in the long run hopeless. But if it is, then we are making ourselves enemies to that goodness every day, and are not in the least likely to do any better tomorrow, and so our case is hopeless again. We cannot do without it, and we cannot do with it. God is the only comfort, He is also the supreme terror: the thing we most need and the thing we most want to hide from. He is our only possible ally, and we have made ourselves His enemies. Some people talk as if meeting the gaze of absolute goodness would be fun. They need to think again. They are still only playing with religion. Goodness is either the great safety or the great danger—according to the way you react to it. And we have reacted the wrong way.

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### Praying to God

- 1) God, as Scripture reveals Him
- 2) God as "Yahweh, the God of heaven"
- 3) God as "the great and awesome God"
- 4) God Who never sleeps: ears and eyes "open to hear."

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### Praying about the problem

- 1) The problem as Scripture reveals it: sin
- 2) Sin as failing to obey God's Word
- 3) Sin as against God
- 4) Sin as exile from God
- 5) Sin as the ultimate problem
- 6) Sin as the universal problem
- 7) Sin as our personal problem

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### **GK Chesterton:**

In response to newspaper editors' question, "What's wrong with the world," he wrote the following letter:

Dear Sirs  
I am.  
Yours sincerely,  
GK Chesterton

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### **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn:**

"The battle-line between good and evil runs through the heart of every man."

- Other religions idolize some part of creation and demonize another, but Christianity teaches that all creation is the problem and the Creator is the solution.

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### **Praying for the solution**

- 1) Returning from self-imposed spiritual exile so that we can return from God-imposed physical exile.
- 2) Creating an indestructable temple for a lasting sacrifice
- 3) Returning from the conditional to the unconditional nature of the covenant.
- 4) Your servant Moses vs. Your servant Jesus.
- 5) The sent leader, broken temple, ultimate sacrifice, innocent identifier, faithful exile...

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## Conclusion

Our prayers are very important in God's construction project.

Our 'under construction' prayers will only be effective if, like Nehemiah's, they

- are addressed to the God revealed in Scripture,
- attack the problem as defined in Scripture,
- and seek the solution as defined in Scripture.

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