

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY TWELVE

Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39

When you pray, keep these four elements in mind. Spend a period of time in praise, a period of time in thanksgiving, a period of time requesting of God specific things, and then a period of time committing to God the day that is before you.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ANY war camp must vigilantly guard the lines of communication. If a plan leaks, the consequences can be disastrous. So soldiers can't freely make phone calls or send text messages the way civilians can. They can, however, write *letters*. Letters are essential for both those stationed at war and their loved ones at home. They keep the flames of relationship glowing.

Sometimes, families will send dozens of letters without ever receiving a response. The wait is agonizing as they wonder how their friend, their child, their spouse, or their parent is doing. After months of daily checking the mailbox, imagine how light their once-heavy hearts must feel when they finally reach in to find an envelope with the soldier's handwriting on the front.

Sometimes, God is like that caring parent, eager to hear from His children who are far from their heavenly home. Prayer is often like a wartime letter—our lifeline that allows us to praise Him for His holiness, to thank Him for His graciousness, to ask Him to meet our needs, and to commit ourselves to Him.

Prayer keeps the fire of your relationship with God hot. This *Searching the Scriptures* study explores how.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

It may have been some time since your last concentrated prayer. You may even feel ashamed that you don't talk with God more. But He doesn't want you to feel that way. He is eager to talk with you because He loves you. He wants you to respond, not out of duty but because of your delight in Him. If you'd like, use this prayer to help spark a conversation:

Father, thank You for always being there for me, for always caring, for always being eager to listen. Forgive me for the times I've ignored You. I love You, and I want our relationship to flourish. Use my time in Your Word today to draw me closer to You. In Jesus' caring name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

For several decades, the Israelites lived in exile. Not only did they live *physically* far from the land of their religious heritage, but their hearts remained *spiritually* far from God as well. Nehemiah led the people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls, but his *true* goal was to restore the hearts of the people and to rebuild a community who would be faithful to their God.

Two foundational practices for the people of God have always been engaging with His Word and prayer. In *Nehemiah 8*, Nehemiah and the other Jewish leaders reignited a passion for the law of Moses, and then, in *Nehemiah 9*, the people responded in fervent prayer.



Observation: The Prayer of the Penitent

After hearing the proclamation of the Word of God, the people of Israel grieved because they realized how deeply they had disobeyed God. So they “confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors” to Him (*Nehemiah 9:2*). They did this for *three hours (9:3)*! Then they turned to Him in prayer.



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The bulk of the Levites' prayer in *Nehemiah 9:5–38* tells the story of Israel. But Pastor Chuck Swindoll identifies four elements of this prayer: *requests*, *praise*, *commitment*, and *thanksgiving*. Scan through the prayer and match each of these four elements with its corresponding verses in the spaces below. (Note which part of the prayer receives the most attention.)

9:5–6: _____

9:7–31: _____

9:32–37: _____

9:38: _____

According to the prayer's introduction in *9:5–6*, why is God worthy to be praised?

Even though the people of Israel were in a miserable situation, still under the occupation of the Persian government, they began their prayer by saying, "God, there's no other like You." That's the place to start prayer, looking up. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Levites then moved into the heart of the prayer in *9:7–25*. As you read, take note of some of the key things the Levites said God had done for the people of Israel in each act of their story.



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The Levites continued in [Nehemiah 9:26](#) with the grim phrase, “But despite all this” Now, read [9:26–31](#) and summarize how the Israelites had responded to all these things God had done for them throughout their history.

As the prayer concluded in [9:32–37](#), the Levites made their appeal to God. What aspects of God’s character did this prayer emphasize?

In [9:38](#), the people made “a solemn promise” to God. Then, [10:1–27](#) lists the names of all the leaders of Jerusalem who signed the document and committed themselves to this promise. According to [10:28–31](#), what promise did they make?



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Praise, thanksgiving, requests, commitment. These four ingredients seasoned this powerful prayer of the Israelites. For millennia the people of God have used these ingredients to offer powerful prayers whose aromas are pleasing to God.



Interpretation: Powerful Prayer

The prayer recorded in *Nehemiah 9* will always be valuable for the people of God because it demonstrates powerful, effective prayer and models how we can say them. Why is prayer an essential element for a godly life?

In each section of the Israelites' prayer, they appealed to God's faithfulness, to His covenant, and to His promises. What role do these elements of God's character play in prayer?



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Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader prays effectively by . . . because . . .*

Praise is an unusual and an unpopular practice, so we're confused about it. Praise is leaving self out of the way and being occupied in adoration of God. That's praise. Let your praise be heard constantly. May it be a daily, regular, consistent practice. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: A Path for Prayer

Since prayer has always been a high priority for the people of God, Jesus knew His disciples would be eager to hear His thoughts on the topic. They didn't even need to ask. In Jesus' first sermon in the book of Matthew, Jesus directly answered the question, "How do I pray?"

The prayer Jesus demonstrated in [Matthew 6:9–13](#) can be easily memorized and daily used. It also represents an outline for prayer that can adapt with your circumstances. In the spaces below, fill in the basic idea behind Jesus' words in each verse of His prayer. The first one is filled in for you.

6:9: Praise to God the Father

6:10: _____

6:11: _____

6:12: _____

6:13: _____



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How does the prayer of the people of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day address similar concerns to the Lord's Prayer?

Jesus answered the *how* of prayer, and later Paul would answer the *when* of prayer. According to *1 Thessalonians 5:16–18*, when is the appropriate time for followers of Jesus to pray? What does this mean? What kinds of attitudes appropriately accompany prayer?

For Jesus, communion with His Father was always His top priority. Now, let's turn to application where we'll consider how we can pursue a more dynamic prayer life.



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Application: Practicing Prayer

Take some time to reflect on your prayer life. Then, in the space below, write down an assessment. How often do you pray? How much time do you spend in prayer? What do you tend to say when you pray? Do you feel yourself drawing closer to God because of prayer?

Next, use that assessment to motivate you to lean into your relationship with God and His grace. Thankfully, Nehemiah shows us where to start. Pastor Chuck Swindoll calls it “four-dimensional prayer.” In every prayer, we should . . .

- *Look up* to God in praise for who He is.
- *Look back* and remember God’s faithfulness with thanksgiving.
- *Look around* at the present circumstances and make requests known to God.
- *Look ahead* and commit to pursuing God, no matter what the future holds.

How can incorporating four-dimensional praying into your life lead to a more dynamic walk with God?



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What would it look like for you to cultivate a habit of regular prayer? Many believers like to wake up early to pray. Others like to get on their knees before they go to bed. Some pray at the beginning of every hour. Write down a few ideas of your own and *commit* to doing one of them every day for the next seven days.

God loves you. You are His child, and He enjoys hearing from you. He wants to maintain a warm and thriving relationship with you. So run to our Father's open arms in prayer today. And tomorrow. And each day moving forward. Eventually, you will look back and marvel at how much God has done in you, for you, and through you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Put into action what you've learned in this study by writing your own four-dimensional prayer in the space below:

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

