

LIFE GROUP LESSON

Prayer on the Run • Week of September 22

Gathering the harvest is hard work. Though we grew up in different states, my husband and I both recall working in the garden when we were young. Hot summer days – when there are other places you would rather be, other things you would rather be doing – we both learned it is imperative to gather the produce at its peak. Otherwise, all the preparing and planting is wasted. Much like working the fields, transformational prayer requires putting on mud boots and going through the muck and mire to get to the fruit when it's ripe.

Nehemiah knew what needed to be done to bring in a harvest for the returned exiles, and he was willing to put on mud boots and work on behalf of God's people. There came a point for Nehemiah when he realized his mission was greater than serving the king wine. In the fall of 445 BC the returned exiles had been inspired by Nehemiah, and so completed the task of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls in just fifty-two days. Under the leadership of Nehemiah, Ezra, and other faithful servants of God, an incredible (seemingly impossible) feat was accomplished! Why?... because the Lord always strengthens His people when they align with His purpose:

"So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God" (see Nehemiah 6:15-16).

The story of Jerusalem rebuilding is a powerful reminder that with God all things are possible. Followers of Christ are not exempt from mud, pain, hard work, even suffering. Ministry is messy and many would-be followers *give up* on Christ before they *go on* with Christ. As with the returned exiles, perhaps you are experiencing opposition at every turn. Remember, when enemies want to thwart God's work, the faithful press on to taste the goodness of God. As our PLAIN TRUTH states: 'Sometimes we have to go through the muck and mire to get to the fruit.'

Read Nehemiah 9:1-8

God's Word convicted the returned exiles of their past sin (Nehemiah 8:1-9). They recognized that the Lord was right in holding them accountable. But God's Word also reminded them of God's love and encouraged them to celebrate the

Festival of Shelters (8:10-18) just as the LORD had instructed through Moses generations before (see Leviticus 23:33-44).

1. As the exiles reclaim their identity as God's people, they recall God's faithfulness—that He alone is the One who rescued their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. He alone is worthy of worship. How is adoration of God and confession of sin initial steps in prayer, intercession, and rebuilding identity in God?

The wall symbolized God's protection over Jerusalem. Stop and think about God's surrounding wall of protection over you and your family, over your church family, over our nation and our world. Give Him thanks! Worship Him Now—

Read Psalm 48 (NLT) – aloud together if possible!

Recalling God's goodness and His greater purpose can actually motivate us to put on mud boots and get to work – even if we don't feel like it at first. Prayer is part of the harvest-gathering.

2. How does the thought of God's greater purpose motivate you to labor in prayer with greater focus (with a Hebrews 11:1-kind-of-faith)?

How has your prayer life changed since we have been in this sermon-series, PRAYER-ON-THE-RUN? Is your prayer-attitude different? (briefly share with your Life Group)

Just as deep love requires hard work and can get messy, transformational prayer is often a path of muck and mire. Are you willing to put on mud boots and enter the garden of intercessory prayer – going before the throne of God on behalf of others whose salvation is at stake? Jesus put on mud boots for us. After Passover, the same night His suffering began, Jesus entered a grove of olive trees, called Gethsemane, and fell before *Abba* as He surrendered to His Father's will. There, on the ground in the mud, beside gnarled roots of olive trees, Jesus wins victory.

3. Prior to the Garden of Gethsemane, there are many occasions when Jesus speaks on prayer. Read the following excerpts from the New Testament regarding intercessory prayer and what the Lord says about it. What do you learn? Write it down. Better yet, *pray* what you learn, asking the Lord to help you pray more like He does.

Matthew 6:5-6

Luke 10:21-22

Luke 11:9-13

John 15:5-14

Close by reading this excerpt from Richard Foster's book, Prayer—

“This standing between God and people involves a kind of wrestling with God. That is part of our suffering, a little like arguing with our best friend. Tertulian calls it ‘a kind of holy violence to God.’ Like Jacob of old, who wrestled all night with the angel, we refuse to let go until we receive a blessing, not for us but for others. We argue with God so that his justice may be overcome by his mercy. It is only because of our intimacy with God that we can thus wrestle with him.

This intense interaction is not unlike God himself, for, as Donald Bloesch tells us, ‘God even wrestles with himself, seeking to reconcile his holiness, which cannot tolerate sin, with his infinite love for a sinful human race.’ Even so, this wrestling is a hard image for us to accept. We much prefer the image of restful harmony. Our difficulty is due, in part, to our culture's inability to reconcile struggle with love. We assume a loving relationship by its very nature must be peaceful and harmonious, and yet even on a human level those things we care about the most deeply we argue for the most passionately. Struggle is consistent with love, for it is an expression of our caring.” (Prayer – Richard J. Foster, p.225)



Text: Nehemiah 9:1-8

PLAIN TRUTH:

Sometimes you have to go through the _____
and _____ to get to the _____.

1. _____ the standard and you remain in the _____,
_____ the standard and you produce _____.

2. _____ you _____.

3. Transformational prayer is when the _____ enters
the _____ and _____ of others.

One Year Bible Reading

Sept. 22: Isaiah 39:1-41:16, Ephesians 1:1-23, Psalm 66:1-20, Proverbs 23:25-28
Sept. 23: Isaiah 41:17-43:13, Ephesians 2:1-22, Psalm 67:1-7, Proverbs 23:29-35
Sept. 24: Isaiah 43:14-45:10, Ephesians 3:1-21, Psalm 68:1-18, Proverbs 24:1-2
Sept. 25: Isaiah 45:11-48:11, Ephesians 4:1-16, Psalm 68:19-35, Proverbs 24:3-4
Sept. 26: Isaiah 48:12-50:11, Ephesians 4:17-32, Psalm 69:1-18, Proverbs 24:5-6
Sept. 27: Isaiah 51:1-53:12, Ephesians 5:1-33, Psalm 69:19-36, Proverbs 24:7
Sept. 28: Isaiah 54:1-57:14, Ephesians 6:1-24, Psalm 70:1-5, Proverbs 24:8

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