

Pray and Work

*So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven (Nehemiah 1:4).
..."let Your servant prosper this day, I pray and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." For I was the king's cupbearer (1:11).
Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven (2:4).
And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me (2:8).*

"Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as if everything depended on you." A quote credited to Saint Augustine, Ignatius and Francis Cardinal Spellman, it is worth repeating.

Everything does depend on God. He wants us to pray. He expects us to work.

Printed above the Ramsey coat of arms is *Ora et Labora*. Dave Ramsey says, "For hundreds of years, the Ramseys have been known for those two things: prayer and work... Pray and work. I think that's what God expects of us. That's the kind of attitude and activity He can bless. God promises to feed the birds, but He doesn't throw worms into their nests." (from *The Legacy Journey*).

Those of us who really like to work sometimes need a reminder that not all work will produce something that is God honoring. It is God working through us that will do that. Instead of not finishing a task or finishing it and realizing that it was not done well, we should go to God first. Regret is having to say, "I wish I had prayed about that."

Pray and work. That is exactly how Nehemiah accomplished the task of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. He first prayed; then set about doing the work God assigned Him to do. At every point along the way - even with hateful opposition - he practiced this principle.

When Nehemiah discovered that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, the gates had been burned with fire and the survivors of the captivity were in great distress, he prayed. He not only prayed. He fasted and prayed. Nehemiah prayed for forgiveness for the children of Israel, he prayed for forgiveness for himself and asked God for mercy as he contemplated his next step.

Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer, an important position in the service of King Artaxerxes. He prayed for mercy before he stood before the king. As the king observed Nehemiah's sadness, he asked the reason why. Before Nehemiah answered the king, he prayed. When the king granted his request to go to Judah to rebuild the wall, Nehemiah knew it was because the good hand of God was upon him.

Nehemiah and his fellows Jews who were rebuilding the wall encountered great and vicious opposition. Nehemiah turned the matter over to God. *"Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and given them as plunder to a land of captivity" (4:4).* The opposition grew and conspired to attack and create confusion. Nehemiah continued to pray and work. *Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night (4:9).* As his brothers' strength began to fail and they became afraid, Nehemiah reminded them who was in charge. *And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your*

brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work (4:14-15). Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. "Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared (4:19-21).

As Nehemiah continued to stand in the gap for his countrymen as the rulers dishonored God with their practice of lending, buying and selling, he asked for God's blessing. *Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people (5:19).* He rebuked the continued opposition from outside the family and continued to work - first asking God for strength. *Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands (6:9b).* He left judgment in God's hand. *My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid (6:14).*

God answered Nehemiah's prayers, He strengthened his hands and under his leadership, the task was completed. *So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days (6:15).*

Pray and work. The order was important. In fifty-two days, Nehemiah and his team rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem. And God received the glory.

And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God (6:16).

Nehemiah had an assignment from God. He took it seriously. He knew it was not his work. It was God's work. He needed God's guidance and protection as he did His work. Since he prayed first, Nehemiah was then not reluctant to ask for God's continued blessing on his work and his life.

"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for its services!" ... "Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me accounting to the greatness of Your mercy!" ... "Remember me, O my God, for good!" (13:14, 22, 31).

Pray and work. Everything does depend on God. He wants us to pray. He expects us to work. He remembers us when we do.

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