

# HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

## Four-Dimensional Praying

*Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39*



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

After God's people had heard and obeyed His Word by observing the Feast of Tabernacles (Nehemiah 8:13–18), they met for a time of corporate prayer. The celebration brought them to an understanding of both the holiness of God and the depth of their sins, which led to an expression of deep sorrow and humility. Together they prayed, offering up sincere confession as well as thanksgiving and praise. And they committed to change—to study and obey God's commands from that point forward. The Israelites' example provides guidelines for the discipline of prayer that are meaningful, logical, and relevant for us today.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. General Observations (Nehemiah 9:1–5)

In the previous message, the Israelites faithfully reinstituted the long-forgotten Feast of Tabernacles. On the morning after that memorial celebration, they experienced another unforgettable day of spiritual awakening. To sharpen our understanding and appreciation of the prayer we're about to study, let's pause for a brief overview of three important facts.

First, *this is the longest prayer recorded in the Bible*. It recaps Israel's history, reviewing God's acts of compassion and kindness toward them over the centuries.

Second, *the prayer was uttered in a context of humility and purity*. A strange-looking assembly gathered that morning. From every direction a herd of people clad in scraggly goat's hair and with gaunt faces, empty stomachs, grieving hearts, and dirt-covered heads, came together and raised their voices as one in an outpouring of confession. The Israelites strongly desired to purge themselves of the sin in their assembly as well as in their hearts.

Third, *the prayer reached in four directions*. The Israelites' prayer spanned history from creation to their present day and even looked into the future. First, in Nehemiah 9:5–6, the people looked up in adoration and praise. Second, in



### Quotable

*The very burden  
you're under  
right now was  
given by God. So  
when you lay it  
back on Him,  
it fits.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Nehemiah 9:7–31, they looked back with heartfelt thanksgiving on all that God had done in their past. Third, in 9:32–37, the people looked at their present situation and brought a petition before the Lord. And finally, in 9:38, the prayer concluded with a look ahead and a commitment to future obedience.

### 2. Four-Dimensional Prayer (Nehemiah 9:5–38; 10:29–31, 39)

With this background in mind, let's take a closer look at the structure and purposes of this faith-inspiring prayer, considering each one of its four dimensions.

The first dimension of prayer is *looking up (adoration and praise)*. The Israelites began by praising the “name” of God, which to them was synonymous with the resplendent glory of His being. They praised Him for His exalted position, set on high above the mountains. As they continued, they began to comprehend the grandeur of His peerless sovereignty and praised Him for His matchless creation, which daily heralds His omnipotence, faithfulness, mercy, and love.

The second dimension of prayer is *looking back (reflection and thanksgiving)*. The lengthiest section of the prayer, from Nehemiah 9:7–31, takes us on a whirlwind tour of Israel's past, documenting the hand of God in each event. As though we are on a journey through the landscape of their history, we see the people's prayer carefully retrace the moral and physical wanderings of their forefathers.

The third dimension of prayer is *looking around (petition and confession)*. In this next section, Nehemiah 9:32–37, the Israelites' prayer moved from the past to the present. The people focused again on confession, freely admitting that they were facing hardships because of their sins. And in an impassioned plea, they asked the Lord to enter into the pain they felt as they lived in their own land under the yoke of another nation.

The fourth dimension of prayer is *looking ahead (direction and commitment)*. After considering their current situation and presenting their requests to the Lord, the Israelites began to look toward their future. They remembered the terrible consequences of disobedience suffered by their forefathers and realized that this would be their future as well if they didn't make a drastic change.



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### A CLOSER LOOK

#### *Authentic Prayer*

This section of the longest prayer in the Bible is particularly authentic in its pain and humility. When the suffering we endure as a consequence of our own sin bears down, it's natural to wonder how much the Lord cares about our pain. If it's a result of our own sin, we deserve to hurt, don't we? So why should He care? Like most of us in our weaker moments, the Jews projected their own fleshly attitudes onto God. How easy to forget God's mercy, God's grace. We need to pray honestly and express how we feel (even if it isn't theologically astute). We should dare to pray what we authentically think and feel. If we're doubtful of His love for us, we should tell Him! If we're angry with Him, our heart should express it and confess it. He already knows everything about us. He won't be shocked. We aren't hiding anything from Him.



### LET'S LIVE IT

The Israelites' prayer led directly to obedience. The process of recognizing God's greatness through praise and reflecting on His provision with thankfulness is designed to lead us to a realization of our own sinfulness, dependence on Him, and a deep commitment to change.

**Consider the four dimensions of prayer: praise, thanksgiving, petition, and commitment. How are you doing in these areas? Choose one and write out a specific plan for incorporating it into your life this week.**



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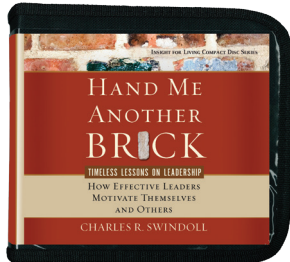
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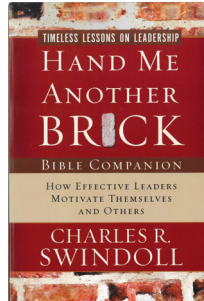
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