

Micah Challenge →

tearfund

Session 4



GLOBAL EDITION

EDITED BY: JASON FILETA



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Session Four

Justice and Prayer: Changing the World through Prayer

“Prayer makes your heart bigger, until it is capable of containing the gift of God himself. Prayer begets faith, faith begets love, and love begets service on behalf of the poor.”

- Mother Teresa

“We are to change the world through prayer.”

- Richard J. Foster

Definitions

Cupbearer: Nehemiah's role for King Artaxerxes. The position of cupbearer was one of the most trusted positions in the court, as the cupbearer was the one who tested and made sure that all of the king's food and drink weren't poisoned before he consumed them. As a result of this role, Nehemiah was in a place of great influence with the king.

Intercessory Prayer: The act of praying to God on behalf of others.

In All Things Pray by Mari Williams

Prayer is at the core of the kingdom task of seeking justice. Prayer allows us to share our heart with God, but also to hear God's heart. He instructs us through prayer, and we become concerned with the things he is concerned with. The prayers of the communities Tearfund works with, its committed supporters and those of staff and partners underpin everything we do.

Sometimes this prayer can be very specific. A particular need arises, and prayer is mobilised. Like in Nigeria, when a group of young people, inspired after following the Live Justly course to do more to care for their environment, decided to create recycled shopping bags from used plastic banners found on the streets of their city. To move forward with this initiative, called 'Go Green Nigeria bags', permission was needed from a state agency. The young people submitted a request for permission, but it was denied. The officials were suspicious of the young people's intentions and were not sure of the benefits of supporting the initiative. Though frustrated and disappointed, the young people didn't give up. Instead, they turned to prayer, asking God to change the hearts of the state officials and grant them the permission needed. After several weeks of prayer, a second meeting was scheduled with the state officials. Permission was granted! God had answered prayers and touched the hearts of the state officials. 'Go Green Nigeria bags' could begin.

At other times our prayers for justice are more general and more global, such as prayers to end hunger. As part of a campaign to end hunger called 'Enough food for everyone IF', Tearfund mobilised thousands of people to pray in advance of the 2013 G8 Summit that was to be held in Northern Ireland. People were encouraged to set a reminder to pray at 1.08pm every day for the one in eight people going to bed hungry every night. Tim Magowan, Tearfund Director for Northern Ireland remembers the challenge: "What started as a simple idea from a pastor in Northern Ireland, grew to thousands of people around the UK and Ireland praying each day at 1.08pm for the end of hunger. Together, our voices raised in prayer, spoken out at events and channelled through campaign cards, played an important role in challenging the G8 leaders to bring help and hope to hungry people".

As a result of people's prayers, campaign actions and lobbying, governments pledged extra money to tackle hunger. And much more progress than we expected was made in the fight against the corporate tax dodging which causes so much poverty, injustice and hunger in our world.

Sometimes, prayers are answered quickly. At other times, we need to persevere for months, or years, as we cry out to God for change. But at all times, God hears our prayers and is faithful. And as we come before him in prayer, he uses those prayers to change us, and change the world.

Passionate Prayer for Justice by Dr. Alita Ram

We live in a broken world. A world marred by pain and suffering. A world in which one human being can use his or her power to abuse another in the most terrible of ways.

In this broken world, we are called by God to be salt and light, to act and live in ways that bring about justice, and to **pray** for his kingdom to come.

There is no situation that is beyond the intervention of God. There are no hurts so deep that God cannot heal. There are no circumstances that are so dark and painful that God cannot break in and bring restoration. And for these things, **we must pray**.

I lead an organisation called ACT – the Association for Christian Thoughtfulness – in Mumbai, India. As part of our work we care for and counsel those who have suffered abuse. And we envision, train and empower churches in our city to do the same. Our church partners have identified and counselled numerous survivors of trauma and abuse, not only within the community outside the church, but also within the church. We, and our church partners, also carry out advocacy on behalf of victims of abuse.

Some of the women and girls we work with have been trafficked and sold into the sex trade. Others have been abused by people in their own families.

Prayer is the bedrock of all we do. At the beginning of each week our staff team comes together to ask for God's guidance, to pray for one another, and to pray for the women and girls we are serving. As we go into the dark and oppressive places to meet with the women and girls, we know we need the Holy Spirit's covering and protection, and so we have prayer partners praying for us at the exact time we are engaging in this work. Once a month we have a day of prayer and fasting as a staff team.

We pray for each of the women in our care. Our prayer is that they will be able to integrate safely back into supportive communities. We pray for their protection and healing – physical, mental and emotional. We pray they will understand God’s love for them, and that they come to know the Lord. And we pray that local churches will rise up and take responsibility to welcome these women and girls back into their communities, and to love and protect them.

We have seen God at work in the most powerful of ways, even in the darkest of circumstances. Shanthi’s story is one example. Shanthi was fifteen years old when her mother noticed her enlarged belly, and realised that she was around six months pregnant. A forty-year-old married man had manipulated Shanthi into a sexual relationship, with promises that he would marry her. Shanthi believed his promise. She had no idea that she was pregnant. Her mother got extremely angry when she discovered the pregnancy and in her anger told her daughter to leave the home. Shanthi then ran away.

Later that day, her mother began to worry about Shanthi, and called on one of ACT’s volunteers to help her. They visited the police station and reported Shanthi as missing. The police found Shanthi in her friend’s home and took her to a Government Shelter Home for children who are victims of abuse and violence. ACT provides counselling services there. During the counselling sessions, the full horror of Shanthi’s past emerged. Her alcoholic father had repeatedly raped her since she was thirteen years old. She had also been repeatedly raped by her elder brother. She had tried telling her mother, who did not believe her. Shanthi’s cries for help were silenced and the abuse continued until the day she was discovered to be six months pregnant.

But despite the darkness and suffering in Shanthi’s life, God has worked powerfully in her. The ACT team and their prayer partners began to pray for Shanthi, and she received counselling and care from ACT. The local church rallied around her, helping her to file a case against the forty-year-old man, with the help of ACT’s partner legal organization. This case is currently ongoing.

Shanthi has since given birth and has given the baby for adoption. She has completed her high school diploma and has hope for the future. Through prayer and counselling she has worked through the trauma and knows that there is a God, who heals and restores. Even in these desperate circumstances, God has intervened and answered prayers. God is the only one who can bring the complete healing and restoration that these women and girls need.

Prayer is central to what we do and who we are. We hear stories of abuse day after day. Women who have not only been abused by people in positions of power entrusted to care for them, but then also forced to stay quiet for fear of causing embarrassment. But **God is the God of justice, and he hears the prayers of his people for those suffering and abused.**

We pray so that we can experience God's grace and understand his purposes in our lives and in the lives of the people we serve. We pray so that he will intervene and bring healing and restoration to those in need, and so that we might become more like him.

We sometimes face huge discouragements. Women with whom we have been working for years return to a life of prostitution and abuse. When this happens, we get on our knees and pray. We ask God for strength, courage, endurance and grace to continue in the work.

Prayer also changes us. It is easy to become self-righteous. Spending time with God reminds us that we are what we are, only by his grace.

Read Nehemiah 1 Together

Nehemiah's Prayer

- 1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa,
- 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.
- 3 They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."
- 4 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.
- 5 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,
- 6 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.
- 7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.
- 8 Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,
- 9 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.'
- 10 They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.
- 11 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.

Read Nehemiah 5 Together

Nehemiah Helps the Poor

- 1 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews.
- 2 Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.”
- 3 Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.”
- 4 Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards.
- 5 Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.”
- 6 When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.
- 7 I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them
- 8 and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.
- 9 So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?”
- 10 I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest!
- 11 Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them - one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.”

- 12 “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.” Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised.
- 13 I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!” At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.
- 14 Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year - twelve years - neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.
- 15 But the earlier governors - those preceding me - placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.
- 16 Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.
- 17 Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.
- 18 Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.
- 19 Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.

Questions for Discussion

1. Are there things you pray for daily?
2. Do you pray about “big” issues like hunger, slavery, extreme poverty? What do those prayers look like?
3. How does Nehemiah’s prayer life empower him to have confidence in pursuing justice for God’s people? How can we pray in the same way for our context?
4. Share a time when your prayers were clearly answered.
5. What is God saying to you, and what are you going to do about it?

Together

Print off, cut out from newspapers or draw pictures that represent strength, power and wealth: pictures of politicians, corporate logos, etc. Then do the same with pictures that represent the most vulnerable people and places in our world: children, widows, a map of a poor community, etc. As a group look at these pictures side by side. Pray that the vulnerable might influence the powerful and that the powerful will use their strength to seek justice for the vulnerable. Pray specifically for your leaders and the decisions they make that impact poor and vulnerable people in your country and around the world.

Solo Work

Begin writing your long-term action plan. From this session onwards you will continue to add to your personal action plan. All of your action commitments should be measurable and time-bound. You'll eventually share this action plan with your group to help remind you of your commitments.

Begin with a prayer commitment. Challenge yourself to pray about an issue that seems too big or too overwhelming, and pray daily for a month. This will train you to come to God persistently and prayerfully in the face of injustice. Additionally, consider one way in which you will mobilise your community to be in prayer? Keep working on your creative expression.

Prayer

Lord, give me the dedication of Nehemiah to see justice done even in the face of adversity. Draw me close to you, and your heart, and your concerns. Give me sensitive ears and eyes, to hear and see injustice, and the courage to respond.

END

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