

**HOW TO RESPOND
—— TO THE ——
WORST NEWS EVER**

Know God wants you to mourn.

Nehemiah 1:1-4

Nehemiah had just received what was possibly the worst news ever. He received news that his city had been destroyed. The people were broken physically and spiritually. The city walls were burned and in ruins. This would leave Nehemiah's people completely vulnerable to theft, raids, and other devastating crimes. The Israelites were now feeling the weight of their sin—rejecting God and accepting the worldly culture around them.

Imagine for a moment, if you received this call. Maybe even a call of the loss of a friend or a family member, your parent's divorce, or a crisis that would leave you penniless. How would you respond? The way that we immediately respond to these situations is a good indicator of how we will walk through the remainder of the circumstance. Nehemiah gives us a clear look at a healthy, biblically-grounded way to respond to life's curve balls.

Read the following passage:

*“As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days,
and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”
(Nehemiah 1:4 ESV)*

Notice that Nehemiah urgently began to seek the LORD. He immediately began to weep, mourn, pray, and fast before God. Nehemiah didn't suppress his feelings, emotions, anger, concern, or wounds. Rather, he mourned and grieved. Mourning is essential and necessary in the healing process of a devastating situation. It is when we mourn that we will experience the comfort of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his audience that those who are poor in spirit (the weak and lowly) and those who mourn will be comforted (Matthew 5:3-4). This is still a promise from God to us today.

To weep is a physical response, and is completely appropriate. To mourn is a spiritual response in which our souls are grieved, and this is also necessary. To mourn is also to open ourselves up to be weak. This is a tough, yet beautiful place to be because it is here, in our weakness, that we will encounter the strength of Christ and the weight of his grace. This will lead to a pure, godly, and supernatural strength that will lead and guide us as we endure hard times (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

We must mourn. We must come empty handed. Those who mourn are comforted. Those who mourn are made strong. Do not believe the lie that we have to be strong in devastating situations, even

for the sake of others. We all need to be weak so that Christ can place his strength in us, and that strength will be seen through us giving those around us a hope for moving forward. Let us not also overlook prayer and fasting (the emptying of our physical needs to be filled spiritually). Interestingly enough, Nehemiah's name means, "the comforted." Let us allow God to comfort us when we need it.

Know God's Character.

Nehemiah 1:5

When Nehemiah received the worst news ever, he responded by mourning. Mourning should ultimately lead us to the feet of Jesus and to a deeper understanding of who He is. If God is the only one who can truly comfort, then there must be something about Him that gives us assurance, hope, endurance, peace, and grace. We see these things in God's character. Nehemiah teaches us the importance of remembering God's character.

Read the following:

"And I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments..."

(Nehemiah 1:5 ESV)

Notice how Nehemiah opens his prayer with reflecting on who God is. Why? Knowing who God is reaffirms our belief and confidence in Him. In most cases, when we read about the Old Testament prophets, and even the New Testament apostles, we see that in the midst of their suffering, the first thing they do is call out God's character. Many times when we receive the worst news that we could ever imagine, the first thing we do is doubt God's character. For example, when we experience the loss of the loved one, our natural response may be something like, "God...you are not good. You are not great and awesome. You don't keep your promises. You don't love me." Take a look again at the verse above. Nehemiah knew God's character and relied upon it for solace. Because in these situations God's character is the first thing to go...Nehemiah was reminding us that it is the first thing we need to remember. God desires to comfort. God desires to help. God desires to mourn with you.

The Bible teaches that God knows all things (1 John 3:20). This means that God knew our terrible situation would happen. We tend to consume ourselves with the question, "Why did God do this?" or "Why did God allow this?" What we must remember is that suffering was never God's intended design. Death was not what God wanted for us. God can handle (and even encourages) our tough

questions, because it means we are still pursuing Him. We must also remember that Jesus Himself attributes responsibility of suffering to Satan, and he reaffirms that He came to give life abundantly (John 10:10). God responded to the problem of sin by providing Himself through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as the [only] way to be reconciled to him. Though we suffer in this life in many ways, the hope of Jesus is that death no longer enslaves us.

God solved the sin problem. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is why we can mourn and at the same time, experience the joy of knowing that suffering and death are not the end. But rather it is the beginning of perfection and wholeness. God desires to rebuild the broken (Psalm 34:17-18). God takes the bad things and makes beautiful testimonies of His goodness while He heals us (Romans 8:28). God saves (Psalm 68:20). We need to remember and hold fast to who He is and what He wants for us.

Know God's Word.

Nehemiah 1:8

The Bible is considered to be the Word of God. This Word has always existed and it became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-5). What is a word? Simply put, it is an instrument of communication. God communicated to us through Christ and He continues to communicate through the Word. The Bible is where we hear God speak to us. His character, instruction, wisdom, and purpose are all revealed in the Word. If we desire to have a meaningful relationship with someone, we must know him or her intimately. The Bible is where and how we do this in our relationship to Christ. Nehemiah understood this concept and exemplified it for us.

Read the following:

“Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’”

(Nehemiah 1:8-9 ESV)

When Nehemiah says, “Remember...” he is really pleading with God to act on His promise to deliver those who love Him and bring His people back to the promise land. Nehemiah knows God will come through because he knows God's character to be the “one who keeps his covenant of love...” (Nehemiah 1:5). We can apply this today because God made a covenant of love with us through

Christ on the cross. If we are in Christ, we are free to live in pursuit of this loving God, which is something we were not able to do without God's intervention.

What does this have to do with knowing God's Word? Everything. Notice that Nehemiah is quoting Scripture out of Deuteronomy. Knowing God's Word in the midst of situations of suffering is the key to hearing the Lord clearly. If we are not in the Word while we are suffering, our emotional state will deceive us and cloud our ability to trust that He is good, He is faithful, and that we can trust Him. The Spirit's voice can easily become muffled by emotion if we are not intentionally seeking Him. We need a light in dark times. His word is the lamp unto our feet (Psalm 119:105). The use of a lamp presupposes that it is dark. Jesus says that He is the light of the world (John 8:12).

Let's not walk away from the Word of God. Rather, let's run to it. If we run away from God's Word, we will find ourselves wandering on a path in the dark without any light. By continually fueling our faith with the Word, we will ensure that we have a light to lead the way and Someone to help us endure.

Let the Word speak to you. Let the Word guide you. Let the Word lead you.

Know that You Are Strategic.

Nehemiah 1:11

In the closing of his prayer, Nehemiah reveals to the audience that he was a cup bearer to a historically ruthless, pagan king, Artaxerxes I. This is the same king who ordered the destruction upon Nehemiah's people years earlier (Ezra 4). Nehemiah wants us to see that God has a plan and a strategy for executing His will in our lives, even when life doesn't seem to be going well.

Read the following:

“O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. Now I was cup bearer to the king.”

(Nehemiah 1:11)

Why is this important? The cup bearer to the king was one of the most important roles in the king's court. Nehemiah would literally be putting his life on the line every day by testing the food and drink of the king before the king would partake in it, to be sure that it wasn't poisoned. When Nehemiah

received the news of his city's suffering, he prayed four months for God's wisdom and guidance. This tells us that tough seasons may last a while, but that God will see us through. Nehemiah is finally to the point where he will approach the king with the request to return home and rebuild his city not only physically, but spiritually as well.

If we read Nehemiah 2, we will see that God moved in the heart of king Artaxerxes and allowed Nehemiah to return and rebuild the very land that he destroyed. God *will* move mightily in our suffering *if* we let Him. What Nehemiah is hinting at by revealing his role, is that he played a strategic role in God's will. He wants us to know that we all play a strategic part in God's will. The king was willing to entrust his life everyday to Nehemiah. This speaks volumes about Nehemiah's character, which is also a reflection of God's character. Because Nehemiah had been faithful and obedient, the king not only allowed Nehemiah to return home, but Artaxerxes even financed his trip and supplies. God strategically used Nehemiah as a cup bearer to the king to restore His suffering people.

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus tell us that we are a city on a hill. That is strategic lighting so that all can see who are wandering in the dark. Like Nehemiah, God has placed us strategically where we are to minister to those around us. Like Nehemiah, we too, are called to go help rebuild those are broken and bear their burdens (Galatians 6:2). We are to let the light that is within us shine for those who are wandering in the dark, whether we are directly or indirectly affected by the suffering around us.

We are a part of God's strategy to comfort those in need. We are all a part of God's strategy to bring people to know Him. To know this is to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim, encourage, and equip those in need. This how we can respond to the worst news ever.



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