

HONEST CONFESSION

NEHEMIAH 9:6-31 | You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. ⁷ You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. ⁸ You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land.... And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.¹⁶ "But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. ¹⁷ They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck ²⁷ Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. ²⁸ But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. ²⁹ And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. ³⁰ Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. ³¹ Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

Nehemiah 9 is neither a wish list nor a sin list. It's a biblical model of communal confession and corporate intercession. Churches and believers should put this into practice from generation to generation. The prayer has six parts:

One, they confess the sovereignty and providence of God the Creator (:6). All prayer should begin by

exalting God. Jesus modelled this in the Lord's Prayer. *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.* Prayer is a way of 'hallowing' or 'sanctifying' God's great name on earth as it is in heaven.

Two, they acknowledge God's mighty acts of salvation across history. From the call of Abraham to the Exodus. From the guiding pillars to the giving of the Law. From provision in the desert to prosperity in the Land (:7-25). Thus before breathing a word about their needs, they acknowledge God's past faithfulness and magnanimity.

Three, they confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors (:16-29). God doesn't punish us for the sins of our forebears (EZE 18). Then why confess them? Because evil has an unearthly power and propensity to reproduce itself in succeeding generations. Children tend to repeat the sins of their fathers even if they don't know about them. Confession with repentance is the circuit breaker.

Four, they acknowledge God's righteous judgment (:27-34). Every sin affects, not just the sinner, but countless others too. Adam's disobedience affected the whole human race. Achan's sin brought humiliation and defeat on all Israel (JOSH 7). David's affair with Bathsheba produced ripple effects leading up to a civil war (2 SAM 11-18). Every sin, private or public, has communal and generational ramifications. We are all connected.

Five, they take full responsibility for the sins of their ancestors as well as their own (:32-37). It's easy to confess the sins of others, especially the departed. But to stop there defeats the purpose. We are all in this together. *We have acted wickedly. We are slaves... because of our sins* (:33, 36-37).

Six, they acknowledge God's mercy, forbearance, and forgiveness (:19, 27-31). Biblical confession deals ruthlessly with sin. But there is also a clear expression of hope in the character of God who is always *gracious and merciful* and *ready to forgive* (:17, 31).

WALL OF DUTY

■ Remember God's sovereignty. Acknowledge his great faithfulness

and magnanimity towards your biological and spiritual family, past and present. Acknowledge his mighty acts of salvation and mercy, his forbearance and forgiveness. In identificational repentance, own up to recurring patterns of sin, personal or communal, private or public. Break the circuit! Declare: This family will not let sin control the way we live. We will not give in to our sinful desires. Instead, we will give ourselves completely to God and do what is right for his glory (ROM 6:12-13).

■ Remember God's righteous judgment. Recent incidents have spotlighted the issue of racism in our city. *Findings from the 2020 wave of the World Values Survey showed that more Singaporeans perceived the presence of racist behaviour in the community compared to the 2012 wave* (DR MATHEW MATTHEWS). Be honest. There is a degree of racial prejudice in each of us. Examine yourself in the fear of the Lord. Confess. Repent:

- Have I come to grips with the gravity of racism? It not only breaches the law of Singapore, it also violates the Law of Love. It is an affront to God who created all humans in his image and bestowed intrinsic worth on each and every one. Racism mocks God who, through Christ, includes every tribe and tongue in his offer of salvation to fallen humanity. There is no race discrimination (ROM 3:22-23). Heaven is multi-racial (REV 7:9-10).

- Have I in thought, word, or deed despised, excluded, or mistreated others because of their race?

- Have I denied others equal opportunity on the basis of race?

- Have I ever seen someone being victimised by racism and failed to speak up or take action?

- Have I ever stood up for a victim of racism and paid the price for it? Would I do it again regardless of consequences?

- Will I love God by loving my neighbour as myself—regardless of his or her race, language, or religion?