

## TALL ORDER

NEHEMIAH 1:11b | Now I was cupbearer to the king. | NEHEMIAH 2:1-4 | <sup>1</sup> In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. <sup>2</sup> And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. <sup>3</sup> I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" <sup>4</sup> Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

**C**up-bearing was a tall order. One had to be handsome, jovial, and trained in court etiquette. He had to be the life of the party. And it was party time in Persia.

The month of Nissan marked the start of both the Persian and the Jewish new year. But Nehemiah had nothing to celebrate. His heart was so heavy for Jerusalem that it showed on his face. The king noticed. This was a serious breach of court etiquette. Cupbearers must always suppress their negative emotions and wear a cheerful countenance before the king, especially during celebrations. But today, Nehemiah couldn't mask his sorrow. He just couldn't muster the professional smile.

The king probes. The cupbearer panics. Nehemiah had prayed 120 days to the LORD God of heaven. Now he stands before the lord of the largest empire the world had yet seen. History turns on this one anxious moment. The king had forcefully suspended Jerusalem's restoration several years before, when hostile neighbours accused the city of rebellion (EZRA 4:21). Artaxerxes would not lightly reverse his former decree.

Nehemiah treads softly and wisely. Without naming the city on his heart, he laments the ruin of the site of his

fathers' graves<sup>(:3)</sup>. Persian kings cared deeply about their ancestors' tombs. But Nehemiah is not so petty as to play on the king's sympathy. He too remembers his roots. Do you?

The king's response invites a dialogue: *What are you requesting?* Nehemiah's heart stops just long enough to launch one more prayer to heaven before lodging his appeal with the king<sup>(:4)</sup>.

Nehemiah's career as we know it, is richly punctuated by these little rocket-prayers<sup>(4:9; 6:14; 13:14; 13:22; 13:29; 13:31)</sup>. But he is not like some of us, who only pray panic-prayers, and only in heart-stopping moments. He had already prayed four months, day and night, in anticipation of this crucial hour. He had also prayed that very day *for mercy in the sight of this man*<sup>(1:11)</sup>. Nehemiah's prayer-missiles pierce heaven because they are launched from a heart that prays without ceasing. So it was with Jesus (JN 11:41-42). Is it so with you?

## WALL OF DUTY

■ Pray without ceasing. The pandemic has placed extraordinary demands on our leaders in every sphere. Its sheer unpredictability weighs heavy on their hearts. Pray especially for our pastors. They are public figures. Sometimes, for the sake of church morale, they feel compelled to mask their own emotions as they take care of a bewildering range of needs on the ground. May we empathise. May we give them the space to be authentic. Nothing to hide. Nothing to prove. Denial is dangerous. Triumphalism is foolish. *May our pastors find a new freedom to take the road less travelled: Lament* (KEITH LAI). *May we groan with hope as the Holy Spirit helps us pray beyond our weakness* (ROM 8:26-28).

■ Pray without ceasing. Prayer is God's command. Prayer is our choice. Committing the day to the Lord is good. Participating in 40.Day 2021 is wonderful. Synchronising prayer at 12 noon daily is a step in the right direction. But we can certainly do more. The pandemic is a divine reset for our own good. For one thing, to bring us back to the spiritual discipline of unceasing prayer. Will you strive to live prayerfully

every moment of every day? Being mindful of God in every thought, word, and deed. Being in touch with God always and everywhere. Being in tune with his gentle prods and subtle prompts. *There is no greater indicator of how much one depends on God than one's propensity to pray*

(TJ BETTS).

■ Pray without ceasing. Mothers and grandmothers, will you set a new rhythm in family life, making prayer the dominant business of home affairs? *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful* (COL 4:2).

■ Pray without ceasing. Ultimately, prayer is friendship with God. Pastors, how about doing less in order to do more? Major on discipling a community of faith that eats, sleeps, and breathes prayer. A radical breed that refuses to be silent day or night. A peculiar people who give themselves no rest, and give the Lord no rest UNTIL—

- Until God turns the tide of the pandemic
- Until the Church returns to her first love in the fear of the Lord
- Until the Church loves God by loving Neighbour
- Until the Church gets desperate for a divine visitation
- Until the Lord throws open the heavens and pours out his Spirit
- Until prayer evangelism and power evangelism become the new normal
- Until prodigals come home
- Until nomads stop wandering and start belonging to a local church for accountability and discipleship in community
- Until the 80% unsaved encounters God in unprecedented ways
- Until Singapore turns Godward
- Until we fulfil our Antioch mandate: *a church for every people and the Gospel for every person*

■ Pray without ceasing. *Quick prayers are possible and valid if one has prayed sufficiently beforehand*

(MARVIN BRENEMAN).