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How God will work through us people

The subject of this conference is: "Medicine, technology and the whole person".

When you read the bible you do not find a clear explanation of technique and medical care. In the Old Testament, you can read about hygienic measures and about ill people who were cured in a miraculous way like Naâman from Syria. And we read about old people who at the end of their lives knew they were going to die and before they died they blessed their children and then they died quietly trusting in the love of God like Abraham, Isaak and Jacob.

In the book of Nehemiah who lived in the fifth century before the birth of Christ we read how a person asks the guidance of God in his daily work. And is this way of living not helping us how we should use technique in the way we treat our patients?

The book Nehemiah was written between 445 and 420 B.C

Nehemiah was a Jew and an important servant of the king of Persia. Many years earlier the Persians had defeated the Babylonians. The Babylonian army had overcome Judah and they took most of the Jews to Babylonia and forced them to live there. This is called the Babylonian exile and lasted for about 70 years. The Persian king who had defeated the Babylonians allowed the Jews to go back to their own country. Nehemiah's brother and some other men came from Judah to visit Nehemiah. He asked them for news and his brother gave him bad news. The Jews who had come back from exile were not happy and the walls of the city were just heaps of stones. The people from other nations who lived near Jerusalem opposed the Jews. They did not want the Jews to build the city again. This news made Nehemiah very sad. He was sad for many days and he did not eat.

In the first chapter, Nehemiah starts his prayer in worshipping God. Nehemiah was far away from Judah. So he could not easily help his people. But he knew that the God of heaven could do everything. Nehemiah prayed to God for help. But he also wanted to do something himself, although he was far away from Judah. He was working in the palace of the king of Persia. That king was powerful. He ruled many countries, including Judah. So, Nehemiah's job gave him the opportunity to speak to his great king. Nehemiah was very careful and very wise. He asked God to help him so that he could say the right thing to the king. But Nehemiah had to wait 4 months before he got his opportunity, when he could serve wine for the king. During these 4 months Nehemiah kept on praying.

In the end, he felt confident about what God wanted him to say. Nehemiah looked sad when he served the wine to the king. The king asked Nehemiah why he was sad. So Nehemiah told the king the bad news about Jerusalem. Nehemiah chose his words carefully. The king asked Nehemiah what he wanted. This was Nehemiah's opportunity, so he prayed. But he only had a moment for his prayer. Then Nehemiah told the king what he wanted to do. He asked the king to send him to Judah so that he could build the walls of Jerusalem. Again Nehemiah was very bold to say this.

But he believed that God had heard his prayers. So he was confident. Nehemiah was an important servant to the king. Now he was asking the king to send him to Judah.

Judah was 4 months walk from Persia. So he would be away from the king for a long time. The king knew that Nehemiah was a good and loyal servant. So the king asked Nehemiah how long he would be away from the palace. Nehemiah worked out how long the journey would take and the king agreed to send Nehemiah to Judah. Then after a long journey Nehemiah came to Jerusalem. He rested three days in Jerusalem. Nehemiah needed to find out the size of the task. But he did not want his enemies to know his plans. So after three days he went out at night. He took only a few people with him. Maybe they were men who knew Jerusalem well. Nehemiah did not tell anyone else what he was doing. He went all round the city. He saw that the city was a ruin. He saw that fire had burned the gates. At one place there was so much rubbish that there was no room for his horse to pass. Now he knew that the task to build the city again was a big task. Nehemiah saw that the whole city was in a bad state and the people's relationship with God was also in a bad state. The most important building in Jerusalem was the temple. The Jews had rebuilt the temple about 70 years before Nehemiah arrived. The first temple which Solomon built was a splendid building. But this later temple was much poorer. Some priests were living in the area. But they were neglecting their special work for God. The people did not know God's law. And the people were doing many things that the bible told them not to do. There were not many other buildings in the city. Most Jews who returned to Judah were living in the villages. Jerusalem was a dangerous place to live. The Jews had many enemies and there was no security in the city. It had no defences. Many Jews had tried to make agreements with their enemies. Nehemiah saw that the city needed strong walls and this was the most important task. The walls would make the city a safe place to live. When the walls were complete people would be able to move into the city. There the Jews could live in a place that was separate from the other nations. The priests could start their special work for the temple again. And the people would learn God's law. But without walls the Jews would become even weaker. Their enemies would become stronger. The priests would be unable to work for God. And nobody would maintain the temple.

Chapter 2, verse 17 till 21:

Then I said to all the Jews: "You know that we have much difficulty. Jerusalem is a ruin and fire has burned its gates. Let us build the wall of Jerusalem. Then we will not still be ashamed. Then I told them how God had looked after me. Also I told them what the king had said to me. And they replied: "Let us start and build."

So they prepared themselves to do this good work.

But Samballat from Horon, Tobiah from Ammon and Geshem an Arab heard about our plan. They laughed at us and they insulted us. They said: "You should not be doing such a thing. You are plotting against the king." Then I replied: "The God of heaven will give us success. We are his servants and we will begin to build.

But you are not citizens of Jerusalem. You have no legal authority here. You have no right to any part of Jerusalem."

Nehemiah told the people in the city about his plan. First, he reminded them of the sad truth. Their city was a ruin. And they could not be a strong nation while Jerusalem was in such a bad state. So he encouraged them to help him to rebuild the walls. Then he told them some good news. He told them that God wanted them to rebuild the city walls. This was not merely Nehemiah's plan. Nehemiah was confident that God had sent him to lead the people in this task. Already God was looking after Nehemiah. And even the king had sent him to do this task. This was really good news. So the people agreed that they should start to build the walls. The people prepared to build the walls. But then their enemies heard about their plans.

These enemies could not easily attack the Jews because the king had sent Nehemiah. The king was powerful. If Nehemiah's enemies fought Nehemiah, the king would oppose them. So instead the enemies laughed at the Jews. They pretended that they would tell lies to the king about the Jews. They would say that the Jews were the enemies of the king. But Nehemiah was confident. He knew that it was God's plan to rebuild Jerusalem. So God would help them. The real God of heaven was on their side. God would not let their enemies stop the work.

In chapter 3, we read about the people who were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Many of them were the leaders of families, but only a few were important in the local region. They were not builders and they had no special skills to do the work. But they realised that Nehemiah was right. And they were willing to work hard.

They lived many centuries ago but they did an important job for God.

God cares about all sorts of people. And he is pleased when they serve him well.

Nehemiah was a good leader but he could not build the walls alone. He needed many people to help him. He was pleased with their work. So he recorded their names and the jobs that they did. These people deserved honour. Their families had returned to Judah from exile. They were God's own people. And they worked hard to do God's work. Nehemiah organised the work carefully. He gave each person responsibility for one section of the wall. The first people that Nehemiah wrote about were the chief priest and the other priests. They did not think that they were too important to help. They were good models to the rest of the people. And after 52 days the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt and the enemies of the Jews were silent.

What we learn from Nehemiah that whatever he did he prayed first to God to help him ?

We can also ask God's guidance in our daily life.

God has made plain promises to us in the Gospel and we have every right to claim those promises in prayer.

God has promised forgiveness of sins, the hope of eternal life, strength to overcome temptation and blessings in raising our families.

We have every right to believe God will keep his promises if we live to serve Him.

So, in our daily life, when we are busy with our patients, we can ask God for guidance. Should we use a special technique for a patient or should we just avoid that technique.

We can bring all these questions in prayer for God in the assurance that God will guide us in taking the good decision.