

Growing Courage

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[0 : 0 0] just stand in prayer for another moment please let's pray father we give you unqualified an unqualified invitation and an unqualified permission for you to speak into our heart into the center of who we are to not only speak into our heart but to make yourself real to us through the gospel and to do that important work in us that needs to be done so that we will be fit for heaven father we ask that you will do this gentle but important work in our lives this morning and we ask this in the name of jesus your son and our savior amen please be seated so i uh i i like to read and uh one of my favorite characters in fiction is uh the michael connelly novels uh featuring harry bosch but he's also written a couple of others that feature other people and and this whole genre of books and some of you read probably books in this genre or if you don't read books in this genre you watch movies in this genre and in fact bosch it's actually something that um supreme court of canada and uh and uh parliament should take to heart one of his lines for harry bosch is either everyone matters or no nobody matters uh which is a pretty good line and and what happens in those novels is uh he's concerned for justice and it doesn't matter to him whether the person who's murdered has been a multi-millionaire or a street person he wants to see justice done for them and part of what drives the books is not only of course is he trying to figure out the murderer and not only is this is he in a sense matching wits with the murderer but he's also matching wits with the police department the bureaucrats uh who time and time again are just concerned for their own career or for the institution and don't really care that justice is done for the person who's been murdered and there's a variety of things like this in spy novels and thrillers and often a lot of private eye novels are connected to the same thing the police are not particularly or some police aren't interested in justice they just want an easy conviction they want to have an easy life they want to get promotions and uh and it's a very very popular genre in north america and probably in other cultures as well and you know when we read those i can't imagine that a single person reads that wishing they could be like one of those bureaucrats who would frustrate justice like we read those novels because we want to be like harry bosch we we want to be uh like jack reacher we want to be like i'm going to stop mentioning characters that's who we want to be like um you know courage is still on one level courage is mocked in our culture but on the other hand there still is i think a residual sense that we wish that we would be courageous like if it came up uh i think almost everybody in canada would say that um back in um back in the days of the underground railroad bringing people who are escaping slavery out of the slave states into canada i think every canadian would wish that if we had been alive then we would help with the underground railroad if we'd been an americans we would risk our lives to help slaves escape that's i think everybody would wish that that's what they were like i think every canadian unless you're unbelievably anti-semitic would would say you know if if we were alive in europe uh during uh the holocaust uh we we we we would be people who would protect jews we would hide church we i think that's our our church would say that would be our hope that if we were back in time our church would be a sanctuary for jewish people um sort of coming up to a bit of an anniversary about it but i i think all of us would wish that if we were back in time in birmingham alabama you would hope that i wasn't one of the ministers telling martin luther king to be quiet and he deserved to be in jail you would want me to be with martin luther king in jail that's what canadians want we want to be courage courageous for things which are very good and very important um so the question is are people who are courageous do they just not have any fear is there something unique about them in that regard they're sort of almost um uh you know how some people just don't pick up social cues they just don't pick up the the cues that should make them afraid or is there something else going on what we're about to look at is a story and if you're watching this if you're sort of trying to figure out what the christian faith is for 2400 years over 2400 years people have been reading this story and at the heart of this story one of the hearts of this

story is how you grow courage so let's look at it to see how it is that we would grow courage store courage up in us that we would be that type of person that when the time comes we would take that courageous step we would stand up against the bullies we would stand up against the bureaucracy we would make our voice heard for that which is really good for people so let's see how the story goes it's a nehemiah said people have been reading it for 2400 years whether or not you view it as the scripture it should still be of interest to you that for 2400 years people have been reading this story uh it's if jesus carries it's very unlikely that anything written today will be read in 2400 years that those tweets or instagram posts or tiktok posts are going to be still looked at in 2400 years this has legs in terms of how people have gone to it time and time again and so here's how the story goes the words uh nehemiah chapter 1 verse 1 the words of nehemiah the son of hakaliah now it happened in the month of chislev i'm going to fill you in on what some of these things mean in a moment it happened in the month of chislev in the 20th year as i was in susa the citadel that han and i one of my brothers came with certain men from judah and i asked him them concerning the jewish people who escaped who had survived the exile and concerning jerusalem and they said to me and they would have been shaking their head they would look down the remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame the wall of jerusalem is broken down and its gates are destroyed by fire now just a bit of a context now for this this story about 140 years prior to this the jewish people that were still alive in the southern kingdom of judah nebuchadnezzar uh the emperor of babylon uh they uh destroyed jerusalem like destroyed destroyed jerusalem they took all of the treasures away and um they uh carried most of the people away into exile back into babylon back into babylon and so on one level for 140 years uh jerusalem has uh been destroyed the walls had been destroyed and um and the gates had been burned uh and then if you go back and you read ezra nehemiah which is sort of really one story you'll you'll see that you know quite a few decades earlier uh there's a miracle and and the persian emperor uh invites jewish people to return to the homeland uh and then you'll see there's all and this this is going to launch a hundred years of enmity enmity against the jewish people uh if you go back from ezra right to the end of nehemiah it encompasses a that a single story in in in episodes of over a hundred years of enmity and so there there have been other things to try to rebuild the city and everything and they they failed and now we have this nehemiah fellow uh hearing about this now there's just one other thing i i need i need to to say um if i don't know how many of you have been to africa and i'm sure it would also be true if those of you who've gone to south america and latin america and uh probably large parts of asia uh people poor poor people don't have walls like poor defenseless people don't have walls around their houses but if you can manage any type of financial resource whatsoever and you have a house you put a wall around it and you put a wall around it because of uh if you don't there's just constant thievery and uh and there's often constant threats of violence and in in many of those countries the police can actually be the source of the thievery or the source of the violence but the justice can be very very intermittent and so there has to be in a sense a sense of caring for yourselves just a you know a bit of an aside the things that are going on in our culture right now uh are undermining public confidence that we should give the majority of power to the police and the state to protect us maybe not as much here in ottawa we're still a very safe city but there's trends in in in jurisprudence and in laws and in politics that are undermining public confidence uh that the state is going to actually protect us in in other words if this continues you will see walls around our houses so we can't fully appreciate this my guess is if i was speaking i was in rwanda just a month or two ago i'm guessing that i spoke in rwanda they would just see it as the most obvious thing in the world that if there's something precious and important it's not a wall around it it's it means you're open to perpetual danger perpetual thievery perpetual abuse and so this is a big deal and so um how how does how does he respond and uh how on earth is this story well this is setting the story for the courage that's going to be required of nehemiah to do something about in fact the whole book of nehemiah is about acts of courage after acts of courage after acts of courage um actually i'm going to say one other thing that people don't always real about realize about nehemiah and it might be part of what's going to uh his his his um his sense of shame uh that's going to come out later is that he's almost definitely a eunuch um he probably couldn't have had this position without being castrated and uh and that that's a very problematic thing for jewish people back in those days in terms of even your status so this is a man who's not a perfect complete whole man that even uh the other jewish people are going to look at him a little bit askance and yet god's going to use him and he's going to have remarkable courage so let's see what happens next verse four um 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 and i said and now from verses 5 to 11a we're going to hear his prayer and i said oh lord god of heaven the great and awesome god who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that i now pray before you day and night for the people of israel your servants confessing the sins of the people of israel which we have sinned against you even i and my father's house have sinned

now um i've been a part of several organizing uh groups in ottawa in fact i've been involved in lots of organizing groups in in ottawa and in in canada uh over the last decades and occasionally i've been a part of a group that's wanted to make a type of public apology and in every case i've argued against the public apology because in every case i've said that it's not honest it's cynical i think i've had a little bit more persuasive words than that but you see it would be the easiest thing in the world for me to confess to sins that the irish people might have done that protestants might have done to catholics in ireland uh 120 years ago i could and then you point out some other i can confess that all day it takes no virtue whatsoever to confess sins that other people have done and if that almost every time something like that's done it's a type of virtue posturing or it's a it's a type of cynical attempt to try to manipulate people the the test of a character is to say i've done this i've done this wrong like in in every case i in one of the cases it was about apologizing to the lgbtq plus community and i i've said to the people listen if you want to get up and begin by saying i confess that for many years i was prejudiced against gays and lesbians and i've had a change of heart and i i repent of how i've talked and joked about them i think that would be a very powerful and moving thing but if you just want to get up and make a generic thing and it's pretty obvious you don't actually think you're guilty like how is that a christian thing so what's really interesting here about nehemiah's prayer is it it sounds as if and he is he's confessing the sins of his people but he's also saying in a sense it's me it's me it's me oh lord standing in need of prayer in fact and and this is definitely the case i i've known many people who've reached very very high levels of not many i've known some people have reached high levels of wealth or high levels in government and it is not the case that people get lots of promotions do it by doing compromised things it's not the case that everybody does it but we all know that many who go who climb climb a greasy pole do it by stepping on the heads of others and nehemiah we're going to discover at the end of this little thing has written risen to a very prestigious position in the in in in the in the kingdom the the empire of persia and i can well imagine that he is thinking when he's doing that is you know what not only have the of my forbearer sin but the things i've had to do in terms of idolatry and other types of things that violate the law to reach my position of prominence and my wealth and my comfort i'm i'm guilty i'm guilty you know it's one of the things that we can pray for ourselves that takes courage in this day and age is to actually just acknowledge that to own when i for me to own when i've done something wrong for you to own when you've done something wrong increasingly takes courage now some of you might have noticed it's going to get a little bit more puzzling that there's this odd mixture of intimacy and and legalism which is going on in his prayer you know here we've broken your commandments and rules yet on the other hand this let your eyes be looking at me and your ears hearing me so what's going on well let's just finish that little bit of the prayer there's this odd mixture of apparent legalism and religiosity and and yet intimacy well verse seven we have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments the statutes the rules that you commanded through your servant mooses remember the word that you commanded your servant mooses

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 the heavens from there i will gather them and bring them to the place that i have chosen to make my name dwell there now that's a sort of a puzzling thing eh uh here's the thing if over at coffee time uh you get talking to somebody and you say oh uh in fact actually we're going to have we're going to have matt and amy come up in a little bit and i'm going to i'm going to ask them how long they're married uh they i did it at eight and and they both knew the answer to the question by the way so they're not going to get in trouble unless they just all of a sudden speaking to everybody they have a bit of a brain dead moment that happens to people but if you were to talk to somebody and say oh how the two of you married and uh and and and the and the woman said you know what this guy every time i spoke he obeyed what i wanted him to do and he obeyed me and he obeyed me and he obeyed me no matter what i asked him to do he obeyed me so i thought i'd marry him you'd go like that's weird

what a stupid reason to get married but if you were to talk at a coffee hour and you say you know i don't see your i know this can be painful for people especially on mother's day and if you were to say uh haven't seen your your husband around for a month and then they started to cry and they said you know i i really really really really love him i still love him but he just keeps doing things that disrespect me that dishonor me that he knows that i don't want that are just ruining the relationship he's he's selfish and self-centered and he you know he flirts with other women and it just it breaks my heart that he's doing those things and and and we're having a time apart and i'm not sure if the marriage is going to survive and then they share with you you know i really hope i really hope he turns i really hope because i love him i really hope he he comes to his senses and he's willing to take the counseling he's willing to take some type of you know maybe have a mentor and and he can apologize and and he you know he can start acting in a way that so you see here's the thing in a sense all religion and spirituality is like the woman who says this guy obeyed me and obeyed me obeyed me and i decided to marry him that's in a sense what all religion and spirituality is what this text is about isn't about legalism it's about an intimate marriage in the sense an intimate covenant between god and his people and just as in a marriage the the marriage comes about out of love and there's a desire for intimacy and and and if you have language like this we all recognize that language is what breaks a marriage what breaks a relationship what breaks a family and that's the language we see here and if we listen to it as if it's talking about religion what we're actually hearing is a is something very counter cultural because all religion basically says obey me and obey me and obey me until finally i accept you and that's why so many people in our culture say they're nuns now they don't want to have anything to do with religion because on an intuitive level they understand that that's just ridiculous but this is the exact opposite of that it begins with an act of love it's it's all about love and with within love there's a way of you know if louise at like there's some things that louise is at we're having some a mother's day thing later on the afternoon she's asked me to reorganize things in the in the backyard because we're having some family members over and if i don't do it if i just spend my time i don't know eating chocolate watching youtube videos and don't do it she'll be mad at me and if she tells you

[20 : 18] next sunday you'll say you go girl you're right to be mad at him you asked him to do that and he didn't do it and so what we see here is is a picture of intimacy god's desire for intimacy and even what we're seeing is something from the book of deuteronomy and and other places throughout the old testament where where god says listen i at the end of the day it doesn't give my heart any pleasure to see you you know ruin your lives and walk away from me and if you no matter how far away you are if you turn to me it will be it will be exactly like what jesus says in the parable of of the prodigal son where the father sees the son from a great distance and he runs towards him that's the heart of god that's the heart of the god that's been revealed here in the word that's his heart towards you and me we make the smallest turn and he runs to you because he loves you now there's another surprise because there's a word here that uh that happens just at the end of the prayer which often people think of as a fearsome thing a sign a a bug in in christianity that if we could get rid of it it would improve matters but it's actually not a bug it's actually a feature and it's a very important feature a profoundly important feature which is very unique to the to the to the christian faith to the gospel look what happens in verse 10 they are your servants and your people he's still praying right they are your servants and your people whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand oh lord let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants listen to this who delight to fear your name doesn't that sound for many canadians that just sounds masochistic delight to fear what but nehemiah this is like the this is like the the um you know all of the prayers been building up to this we delight i want to delight to fear your name and so he says and give success to your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man now i was the cupbearer to the king now why on earth would the bible and this by the way isn't just some you know old testament thing if you go back you use a word search you'll see that it's a new testament virtue as well i think it's in acts 9 where it says the church grew and the people they they grew in the power of the holy spirit and the fear of god and the gospel spread so it's a new testament virtue and what's at the very heart of it there's lots of aspects about it but at the very heart of it is boundaries so one of the problems that couples can have and i shared with you a couple of weeks ago how i ruined my wife's birthday uh one year and part of the reason i ruined her birthday was because i thought that what i liked was what she liked and i wasn't able to realize that louise is louise and george is george and we're different and i can start to have who i am blur into who she is right that's one of the problems we can have with kids parents with kids is that you sort

of think you know maybe because when you were growing up you didn't get to play piano play baseball climb climb mountains and so you want your kids to do that and but frankly your kid would actually just like to to read a book quietly but you you you don't get where you begin and end and where your kid begins and end and you get it all mixed up and confused and if you do that with a human being that you can see a constant problem is is how you do that with god whom you can't see and so that's you see why if you go back and you look at what the psalms and the proverbs and the old testament the new testament talk about the fear of

god the very heart of the fear of god is a growing knowledge of where for me if i'm talking about myself is where george begins and ends and where god begins and ends and i never confuse myself with god that i have in a sense a strong the fear you see that's why the fear has a very odd combination on one hand it can sometimes be translated as as awe and on the other hand it's also a type of fear is just like it's i i feel terrible when i confuse myself with my wife and i in a sense i have a fear that i i don't want to do that again and so with god there's this growing desire to not mix up me with god and at the same time the more that you recognize god is distinct from you the more you can long and yearn for him and want to be in awe of him and that's what they're doing they're delighting to fear and they know that god has his own purposes and it and part of that was you know for them to be judged for the things that they've done which were validly wrong but nehemiah is is is praying himself into a delight to understand where he begins and ends and where god begins and ends and to know that that is good that is good at the deepest level so just here's a couple of things before we go on any further i um if you could put up the uh the first point because people might want you'll notice here by the end he he asked for success and all of us struggle with uh not all the time but have struggled at different times with the fact that we prayed and prayed and prayed and god didn't doesn't say yes to what we want but here's the first thing to understand about biblical prayer is that biblical prayer is a means of grace biblical prayer is a means of grace and i sorry i'm going to put some of you to sleep for a moment but one of the best illustrations of a means of grace can be seen if you look at the story of jesus turning water into wine and i can have the handy people in the room make stone basins that can hold water and and you can make the same number that jesus made and you can pour water into them and you can move them whatever it is 80 feet or 100 feet or however long they move them and you can do that all day you can do that next week you can do the week after that and it'll never the water will never turn into wine because putting water in a stone basin and moving the stone basin is not how you make wine just not how it goes right but why is that a means of grace you see this illustrates what a means of grace is is that jesus asks us to do things and if he asks us to do things and we do it and and often what he asks us to do are counterintuitive it doesn't really make any sense but if we do what he asks us to do he makes the wine that's why it's a means of grace he does something in us that we can't accomplish by our own intelligence so you know why do we read the bible listen i'll just be honest for a lot of us a lot of us find large parts of the bible unbelievably boring and unhelpful and in fact if you talk honestly to christians they'll be honest that they might not have read the bible all week but they've read christian books during the week because frankly c.s lewis is such a better writer than mark or isaiah he's way better you know but reading c.s lewis isn't a means of grace word and you read his word and he makes the wine you know prayer is a means of grace he asks you to pray about certain things and you do it it's there's going to be changes that happen in your life meeting together on a sunday morning let me tell you social psychologists and all the smarty smart people with pointy heads and or big head all that men and women they'll tell you there's a whole lot of better ways to build community

and to create social change and meeting together on a sunday morning but those aren't means of grace you know the lord's supper a means of grace giving to the giving to the ministry of the church financially that's a means of grace and prayer is a means of grace and if you could put up the next point when you pray according to his word the lord is slowly fitting you for the new heavens and the new earth you see that's the heart of all of the means of grace a few years ago i preached on the book of colossians and i kept using the example of a of a of a of a of a cut rose and and in a sense all human beings apart from christ are like a cut rose they we can look very very beautiful and very very pretty but we're cut off from life and we're dying and in a sense what happens is when all if all human beings are cut roses apart from christ and they all think up their plans and they all think up the things to do all they're really thinking of doing it all keeps them within the realm of being a dead rose a cut rose but the fact the matter is is here we listen to the wisdom of the world as to how to be

a better cut rose but he wants to turn you into sequoia tree with deep roots sequoia tree is the biggest tree that's what he wants to do with you yeah yeah yeah yeah so you're reading you know the the latest little pop christian author and i'm a good pop christian author i'm not putting them down i mean maybe someday god will help me to write a pop christian book it'll be my retirement fund finally or something like that it'll you know i'll write a book on five love languages i get one idea and i can write 75 books on one idea and just rake in the money or something you know and and um and and and but but but god is doing something different and so we often evaluate you see this is one of the things about our prayers and stuff and when god says no we're evaluating everything within the frame of this world but god is doing something within you when you're actually starting to learn how to listen to what he says about prayer and take it to heart that what he's doing is he's forming you he's fitting you for the new heaven and the new earth it doesn't mean he's not going to say no to things that you're asking for but he has a whole other bigger game in mind with you if you could put up the next point very briefly when you pray according to his word the low the lord bestows on you the gift of causality i'm not going to say anything more much more about that but that's one of the things that god does you in prayer he wants you to pray and he he weaves your prayers in the things that he does in the world and he wants you to pray for big things that's sort of the the next thing if you put up the fourth point that would be very helpful when you pray according to his word he forms you to right size the world to right size the world you might notice at the end of his prayer he talking he needs to talk to the emperor of persia and he calls him this man here's one of the things we need to remember the supreme court of canada they are just men and women justin trudeau just a man the people who own the 10 biggest or 100 biggest companies in the world they're just owned by men and women and part of the problem we have as christians is that people seem big and god seems small and what biblical prayer when we learn to start to listen to how the bible is teaching us to pray one of the means of grace that god is doing within us is helping us to right size the world to actually go from living in a fantasy world as if and i'm not picking on justin trudeau if pierre paul averro was the prime minister of canada i would use him as an example as well this is not a political comment okay i what is he's just a man and god is the creator and sustainer of the whole world and when you actually start to to live in a world where you understand that there is a god that does exist the triune god that does exist and that by being saved by faith in christ that you become his child that he is now your father in heaven and the holy spirit helps you to pray and that jesus is the one who redeemed you and he is in a sense your elder brother on one level and that your father loves you and you can pour out your heart to him and he wants you to pray for big things he wants you to pray for the end of euthanasia in this country i could go on these other types of things he wants you to pray for the end of them and he wants you to pray for a long time he doesn't want you to think that somehow or another these human beings control the world and are going to bring the world to where they want it to go that's just not true nehemiah's prayer is the real world well let's we still haven't got to the courage i have just a couple of minutes let's look what happens so he's prayed chapter 2 verse 1 in the month of nisan in the 20th 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 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 there's a couple of things in this in the story if you look at the months he's been praying for four months every day he fasts and prays and says today lord help me to say this four months and now the time has come and he's afraid for two reasons this emperor is obviously the type of guy who doesn't like sad people around him you know he might say something like i don't know if i want to be around sad people i'll be around my kids or something like that i don't know what he'd say something he'd probably make some type of rude joke right he just wants happy people around him we all probably know people like that i remember reading a a guy who's an an expert on you know leadership and attitude and all of that type of stuff and he would just unselfconsciously tell himself tell people that you know when his two kids or his couple of three or four kids two kids or whatever were in the room with him and his wife and one of them was really really sad he'd say listen we're having a great time here we don't want a sad person like you around you should go to your room until you change your attitude what what are in this way to raise your kids and he got applause i was listening to a live talk really i can just imagine saying to my wife you're feeling grumpy the rest of us are having a good time you go to your room until you've improved your attitude that would fly like a lead balloon let me tell you anyway and if you said it around about your wife nobody would be clapping by the way i don't know why they think you can say that to your kids anyway so i guess this emperor

is one of these guys but here's the really big thing and this is where the courage is that if you go back and read ezra chapter four you'll see that artaxerxes sometime before this people in the region of jerusalem had said listen they're trying to rebuild the wall and you need to know that if they rebuild the wall this is going to be an act of rebellion and sedition against you they're doing this to kick you out of the region and take all of the capital and to build themselves up as a nation in opposition to you and you need to stop it and artaxerxes did the research and said you're right powerful kings have been there you better stop building the wall because i don't want a revolution and nehemiah is praying that he can go to this grumpy guy who wants everybody to be happy and says by the way can you give me money so i can rebuild the wall in jerusalem that requires courage that requires great courage that's why he's afraid so just very very briefly look look at look at what happens verse three i said to the king let the king live forever good way to begin let the king live forever why should not my face be sad when the city the place of my father's graves lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire he doesn't say by the way our disease it was your order that knocked down the walls and burned the gates uh that were starting to be rebuilt then the king said to me and here's the miracle this is why he is this man the king said to me what are you requesting what what are you requesting so i prayed to the god of heaven and i said to the king if it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in your sight that you send me to judah to the city of my father's graves that i may rebuild it and the king said to me the quitting sitting beside him how long will you be gone when will you return so it pleased this the king to send me when i had given him a time and i said to the king if it pleases the king let letters be given me to the governors of the province beyond the river that they may let me pass through until i come to judah and a letter to asaph the keeper of the king's forest that he may give me timber to make beams look what he wants the beams for so that for the gates of the fortress of the temple and for the wall of the city and for the house that i shall occupy and the king granted me what i asked for the good hand of my god was upon me next few verses show how it's the beginning of a big battle he's going to have with some enemies so just a couple of things if you could put up the the so if you could put up the the first um the point that would be very helpful when you pray according to his word the lord is storing up courage in you for those times when you are afraid when you pray according to his word the lord is storing up courage in you for those times when you are afraid see what's happening in biblical prayer is you're praying after his heart you know i i'm willing to bet a hundred dollars that the people in holland who are betraying the jews weren't praying every day that god would rescue the jews see that's how biblical prayer becomes a bit of a means of grace you know if if you wish that your loved one would come to a saving faith in christ but you never pray for them to come to a saving faith in christ it's going to be far harder for you to bear witness to jesus when an opportunity comes to bear witness to jesus and and so what's happening is it's not just that you're praying for something but as you're praying for something that god really wants you to pray for you're aligning yourself with his will you're you're starting to have his heart form your heart he's you're starting to have his perspective form your perspective you're starting to see this man and by the way by saying this man is it's not it's not diminishing him he is just a man it doesn't mean you don't love him and care for him but he's just a man he's not a god he's he's not immortal he's not always right and so as you pray what's happening is that the lord is storing up within you the courage so that when you are have that moment that you can say something and you're afraid the fear doesn't win you're still afraid but you take the step

[40 : 31] and by the way this is even more throughout all of this actually just put up the final point very briefly uh it was a very small thing but i just wanted to make you notice that prayer and thinking are not the same thing but they are natural and necessary partners for four months he was also thinking right he had a very detailed plan i need lumber for this this this this but but but here's the thing all the way through the old testament there's this constant riddle here we have this thing that nehemiah's acknowledged that he's a sinner and yet he wants favor from god and in every in in a sense what you're discover discussing here is favoritism so why is it that what god is doing isn't favoritism but something different and in a sense what happens all the way through the old testament all of these talks about yes i'm a sinner show favor to me you're showing favor to me and i'm a sinner it's not reinforcing that god just shows favoritism where he says in a sense you know i like jewish people but it sucks to be persian i like jewish people but it sucks to be egyptian that's not what's going on especially as as we see that god's desire is that others become part of the covenant people it's posing a riddle that only the cross will solve because you see the riddle is how is it that god is actually showing grace to me that's not unjust even though i'm a sinner and uh you

know there's this image um if you think about the cross for a second on one level of course it goes straight up and down straight up and down so in a sense it's doing something god and human beings but also it goes sideways it goes back in time and forward in time that the death of jesus on one hand is something that takes place in history but because he's more than just a man he is the son of man and we are made in his image what he does for us is something that can stand for people before and behind and and so what we see in the in the cross is is that it's only god's grace in jesus that that means that what we see here is profound love and mercy and grace not not unjust favoritism because in in the cross the things that i have done wrong are judged in him he takes my place and the and those are punishments that i deserve and that i couldn't withstand but they fall on him because he he loves me and he he offered to do it do this for me and that when i put my hand in his he not only is jesus and in a sense dealing with all that i've ever done that's wrong and it it falls on him but at the same time there's something in a sense electric that happens spiritual that happens when you put your hands in the hand of christ that god's favor that he deserves is bestowed to me and so all of the demands of justice are met in the person of jesus but mercy and grace triumph over justice not by making justice injustice but by meeting the full demands of justice and then going even before and so it is that we on this side of the cross of all people should be able to pray to god how we have sinned and how wonderful how grateful we are for what christ has done for us and a desire to pray according to his word and to know that as we pray according to his word as we follow this sometimes incomprehensible means of grace that not only is the lord fitting us for the new heaven and the new earth but he is also storing up within us the courage to confront evil to not bow to evil but to confront it and to stand in its presence wonderful line in closing about martin luther king he because he was on his knees before god that he could stand before tyrants lord that's what i want i invite you to stand let's bow our heads in prayer father uh you know how much we're afraid of different things and still you love us you know the things we've done wrong still you love us we thank you for jesus we ask lord that the gospel would become more real to our hearts that as the gospel becomes more real to our hearts who jesus is and what he did for us on the cross that father we will do what he asked us to do and that as we do what he asked us to do will we trust lord help us to trust more and more that as we do what he wants us to do whether it's financial generosity to the church whether it's spending time in prayer whether it's part being part of a good local church whatever it is father that you have asked us to do help us to trust that as we do these things that you have asked us to do that you are making that new wine within us that it is a means of grace and we ask this in the name of jesus your son and our savior amen