



NEHEMIAH

RESTORING THE RUBBLE

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR C3 CHURCH



CHRIST
COMMUNITY CHURCH

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How to use this Guide

This guide is intended to give you some background and insight to the book of Nehemiah to help prepare you for where we're going throughout this series. We've included some suggested questions to consider in community group or for your own personal growth. However, you are encouraged to include your own questions and consider the implications of trusting God's word together as a Community Group sent on Jesus' mission to make disciples.

A Brief History

When Babylon's soldiers marched out of Jerusalem in 586 BC, they left a desolate city behind them. Its magnificent temple, built by Solomon four hundred years earlier, was reduced to heaps of fallen masonry and charred timber. The city's gates, and all its important buildings, were enveloped in flames. Its strong walls were demolished to ensure the impoverished citizens could not organize another revolt such as the one recently attempted by the hapless Zedekiah. Only the poorest of Jerusalem's people were left behind, the rest led off as captives to distant Babylon.

As the despondent exiles tramped the thousand miles of desert highway their steps were heavy; a burning city was behind them and an unknown future lay ahead. Worst of all were tormenting thoughts that their present desolation, frequently threatened by the sensitive and courageous Jeremiah, was the chastising hand of God. The punishment inflicted by Nebuchadnezzar was dwarfed by the intensity of their guilt and despair. If God was against them, who could be for them?

Yet, all was not lost. The time would come when Isaiah's prophetic word would come gloriously true; their iniquity pardoned, they would emerge from exile as people refined by suffering. Across the centuries, Israel had been led by great people. Although costly, Abraham obeyed God and a new race was born, a people destined to make their unique mark on world history. Overcoming adversity, Joseph saved not only his own people but other nations as well. Moses, another imperiled by hardship, led the Israelites to freedom. Other great leaders had followed in their steps.

Joshua conquered a hostile country. Gideon raised an unlikely army. David established a city. Solomon built a temple.

But to the despondent exiles such echoes of the past seemed but taunting memories of a remote story. Their blinded king, shackled and humiliated, was alongside them as they trudged the long road to an alien land. Yet, though they could scarcely have believed it, better days were ahead. God prepares new leaders for fresh challenges.

In distant Babylon they were not alone; men and women were equipped for crucial service. Ezekiel's ministry confronted the exiles with higher standards and unfailing resources. In a pagan environment, the stories of Daniel and his companions recalled enduring values. The God who was chastising them would raise up an unknown Persian prince to be their deliverer.

The Israelite people would return to their war-torn land and begin again—and with resourceful leaders to inspire them. Challenged by new prophets, God's people would think again about noble things. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi brought persuasive truths to the returned people. In God's strength, Zerubbabel organized the rebuilding of a temple. Ezra proclaimed the centrality of God's Word, and Nehemiah made possible the rebuilding of those broken walls. In every generation God equips trusted servants for effective leadership.¹

¹ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 13–14). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Outline of Nehemiah

- I. Restoring the Rubble** (chaps. 1–6)
 - A. Nehemiah's prayer voiced (chap. 1)
 - B. Nehemiah's prayer answered (2:1–8)
 - C. Nehemiah's preparation for the work (2:9–20)
 - D. Nehemiah's delegation of the work (chap. 3)
 - E. Nehemiah's reactions to opposition (chap. 4)
 - F. Nehemiah's handling of internal problems (5:1–13)
 - G. Nehemiah's service as governor (5:14–19)
 - H. Nehemiah's response to opposition (6:1–14)
 - I. Nehemiah's completion of the project (6:15–19)

- II. Restoring the People** (chaps. 7–13)
 - A. The security of the city (7:1–3)
 - B. The census of the returnees (7:4–73a)
 - C. The ministry of Ezra (7:73b–10:39)
 - D. The list of Judean residents (11:1–12:26)
 - E. The dedication of the wall (12:27–47)
 - F. The reforms under Nehemiah (chap. 13)²

² Getz, G. A. (1985). Nehemiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 674). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Who was Nehemiah?

Nehemiah's memoirs preserve his indelible character. The fact that such a wide variety of gifts, expertise, and achievement are crowded into the narrow compass of one life is ample evidence of Nehemiah's qualities as one of Israel's most outstanding leaders. His leadership qualities are as necessary and relevant today as in the fifth century BC.

Nehemiah was a leader with ***infinite compassion***. On hearing of his people's needs he 'sat down and wept ... mourned and fasted and prayed' (1:4). Love matters most in leadership. The loveless leader achieves little of significance. Jerusalem's plight was a thousand miles from Susa's palace but, because he loved them, the anguish of his people reduced everything else in his life to items of lesser importance.

Nehemiah was a leader ***under greater authority***. Bewildered as to the right and best course of action in crisis, he sought God for direction (1:5–11). Leaders must be led. In his daily work he was used to receiving the orders of a Persian king, but his greatest priority was to stand as a submissive servant in the audience chamber of God. He recognized that it was more important patiently to discern God's will than to rush to the help of God's people.

Nehemiah was a leader of ***transparent integrity***. Coming before God's throne, he speedily recognized his iniquities and longed to confess them. He did not merely acknowledge the nation's sins; he lingered in God's presence to identify his own (1:6). He was not someone who acknowledged himself worse than others in the place of prayer but acted as better than others when he left it. He was not only honest before God but also toward others. When Judah's deprived people complained of injustice, he did not act as a man totally detached and free from blame. However innocently, he had participated in money-lending (5:10) along with others and did nothing to conceal his personal involvement in an issue which must be put right.

Nehemiah was a leader with a ***vision for something great***. Believers with vision have 'a deep dissatisfaction with what *is* and a clear grasp of what *could be*'. God planted within this leader's heart (2:12) a strategy which

could transform Jerusalem's destiny, relieving its people of ignominy (1:3), insecurity and poverty. Nehemiah became indignant about the city's appalling degradation and could not be at peace until an alternative prospect began to form in his mind.

Nehemiah was a leader ***aware of his own vulnerability***. Leaders are not perfect; they all have some point of weakness at which they are on the threshold of possible danger. Sensitive, dependent, honest and venturesome, Nehemiah discovered his potential for crippling fear (2:2). Good leaders do not allow themselves to become so enamored with their assignments that they forget their temptations. Many a good work has been damaged if not ruined because the leaders have been so busy instructing others that they have ignored a primary leadership obligation, 'Keep watch over yourselves'.

Nehemiah was a leader with ***the ability to inspire others***. The rebuilding of demolished walls could not be attempted without galvanizing a unified team, so the task must begin with effective recruitment. Jerusalem's citizens were aware of incipient opposition, and identifying with a new leader could prove dangerous. As a good leader, Nehemiah spoke realistically of the problems, convincingly of the answer and confidently of the resources (2:17, 20).

Nehemiah was a leader who recognized ***the necessity and advantages of delegation***. He could oversee the project but was totally incapable of executing it himself. He made sure that responsibility for each section of the wall was entrusted to responsible co-workers (3:1–22), and they in turn recruited their partners who, under agreed leadership, 'worked with all their heart' (4:6).

Nehemiah was a leader who ***did not baulk at adversities***. He knew the necessity of perseverance. Difficulties were bound to arise and, within a very short time, external hostility was matched by internal pessimism (4:1–12).

Nehemiah was a leader with ***sensitive adaptability***. Things do not always go as well as we hope. When problems arise, the effective leader regards them not as intimidating deterrents but as creative opportunities. After hearing the complaints of despondent and endangered workers,

undaunted Nehemiah emerged with a five-point plan. He mustered local protection squads (4:13), reminded them of their spiritual defenses (4:14), divided the team into builders and protectors (4:15–18), organized a plan whereby a mobile brigade of troops could be rapidly dispatched to any vulnerable part of the wall (4:19–20) and ensured that everyone in the city was guaranteed twenty-four hour protection (4:21–22).

Nehemiah was a leader ***prepared to make personal sacrifices***. He had surrendered his luxurious lifestyle and personal safety on leaving Persia; once in Jerusalem he had to forfeit the comfort of necessary relaxation and undisturbed sleep (4:23). He continued to be harassed by known enemies with insidious schemes to destroy him (6:1–9), treacherous friends who valued money more than loyalty (6:10–13), corrupt religious leaders intent on misusing spiritual gifts (6:14), and community leaders whose allegiance to their governor was neither wholehearted nor sincere (6:17–19). Like the apostle Paul centuries later he was ‘hard pressed on every side, but not crushed ... persecuted, but not abandoned’.

Nehemiah was a leader with ***the ability to enlist dependable colleagues***. Once the wall was rebuilt, practical arrangements must be made for the oversight of its spiritual, social and military needs (7:1–2). The governor chose partners with moral ‘integrity’ and spiritual commitment. In the work of community administration, he wanted people alongside him who ‘feared God’ (7:1–2) rather than those who pleased others, colleagues who were utterly ‘trustworthy’ (13:12) and not corrupted by materialistic ambitions.

Nehemiah was a leader who ***anticipated the next challenge***. Any achievement for the Lord will be promptly tested in one way or another. The governor knew that the newly secured city must be adequately defended and quickly populated (7:3–5; 11:1–24). His reliable colleagues were required to implement arrangements for the protection of the residents: guards must be appointed at the main points of access and detailed instructions given about appropriate times for opening and closing the gates. A sparsely occupied city could easily be attacked. The enemies who wanted to destroy it during the building operation were unlikely to lose interest in it. He quickly made imaginative plans for recruiting new citizens to take up residence in Jerusalem. Good leaders have the ability to think ahead to identify possible areas of difficulty and be alert enough to develop fresh opportunities for expansion and progress.

Nehemiah was a leader blessed with **enviable tenacity**. He overcame many daunting discouragements which might have ruined another man, but God enabled him to endure even when things seemed at their worst. He coped with a precarious employer (2:1–3), hostile neighbors (2:10, 19), insulting opponents (4:1–3), determined adversaries (4:7–8), disheartened colleagues (4:10), terrified partners (4:11–12), loveless officials (5:1–13), persistent enemies (6:1–11), false prophets (6:12–14), disloyal priests (13:4–9, 28), avaricious traders (13:15–22), and disobedient believers (13:23–27). During a period when he went back to Persia, standards rapidly declined and spiritual and ethical principles were gradually abandoned.

On his return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to take up the task again with firm resolution to bring a wayward people back into the will of God. Buffeted by trials, committed leaders may be temporarily disillusioned but, following the teaching and example of the perfect leader, they put their ‘hand to the plough’ and refuse to ‘look back’. William Carey suffered innumerable hardships during an outstanding missionary career. In later years he shared his secret with his nephew. Disclaiming every other gift, he said, ‘I can plod. That is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything.’ Dedicated leaders never give up.³

³ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God’s Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 22–25). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Nehemiah's View of God

Nehemiah's contemporaries needed to be reminded of *the reality of God's uniqueness*. In the post-exilic period there was an understandable sense of wistfulness. Judah had lost her political freedom (an issue not ignored in this book, 9:36–37) and could no longer pledge her allegiance to her own king. Although recently rebuilt, the temple lacked the impressiveness of Solomon's magnificent construction. Things were certainly not the same, but Nehemiah emphasizes the continuity of the great realities still at the heart of Israel's faith. Most of all, God was on their side. He had not changed, and throughout the narrative the author warms to his primary theme of the greatness of God (9:32), a message for dispirited people in every generation.

God is *universally sovereign*. The 'God of heaven' (1:5; 2:4, 20) was a divine title in Persian religion but Nehemiah uses it as dramatic apologetic: the Lord Yahweh, he alone (9:6) is God of heaven, not Ahura-Mazda, the non-existent 'god' of his Persian contemporaries. Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem's distress whilst living in distant Susa but God is in control of the entire world and is shaping the destiny of his people wherever they are, guiding an unknown cupbearer into his sovereign purposes.

God is *totally reliable*. The God 'who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands' (1:5; 9:32). He is true to his promises (9:8). The events leading up to the threatened exile were a stark illustration of Israel's disloyalty. They had not honored their covenant obligations but, as Isaiah's message assured them, they were disciplined though not abandoned. His 'unfailing love' would not be shaken nor would his 'covenant of peace be removed'.

God is *utterly holy*. The first word of those who are burdened with grief (1:3–4) is to acknowledge that their greatest need is not immediate relief from present trouble but eternal forgiveness. Nehemiah confesses that he is a sinner whose personal life is set in the wider context of human rebellion, past and present (1:6–7; 9:2). Once forgiven, God's people do not shape their moral standards by contemporary, variable ethical norms. They live not to win human approval but according to the pattern of God's holiness. They must be holy because he is holy. Nehemiah was

determined to do everything in life ‘out of reverence for God’ (5:15) and others treasured the same ambition (7:2).

God is *compassionately merciful*. When he entered into a covenant with them, God knew that his people would fail him and warned them of the serious consequences of their inevitable transgressions. They would be ‘exiled ... at the farthest horizon’ but, if they returned to him in penitence, he would bring them back to the land he had given them as a token of his mercy (1:8–9). Time without number they grieved him, but he pardoned their offences and restored them (9:16–19, 26–31). He is, literally, ‘a God of forgivenesses’ (9:17).

God is *uniquely powerful*. He encounters no difficulties in accomplishing his purposes for them. The God who created the universe (9:6), who enabled childless Abraham to become the ‘father of a multitude’ (9:7) and ‘redeemed’ (1:10) his oppressed people from Egyptian slavery by his ‘great strength’ and ‘mighty hand’ (Exodus language) could certainly bring the exiles home. Moreover, his deliverances are not restricted to the outstanding events of their history but are markedly evident in everyday life when his people are threatened by powers too strong for them. On days when they felt totally overwhelmed by their enemies, their God would ‘fight’ for them (4:20). Finding their true joy in their spiritual resources (8:12, 17), their physical strength would be perpetually renewed (8:10).

God is *infinitely gracious*. Nehemiah’s project was given royal approval, not because he was in the right place at the right time, but because ‘the gracious hand’ of his God (2:8, 18) was upon him. He does not deal with individuals or communities as they deserve but desires and designs things for their highest good.

God is *intimately near*. The transcendent ‘God of heaven’ is not detached and distant; he draws close to his dependent people and keeps on putting (2:12, present tense) the right and best things into their hearts. When they are in danger, he makes them sensitive to his promptings (6:12), and when they are uncertain of the way ahead, he reveals his will to them (7:5).

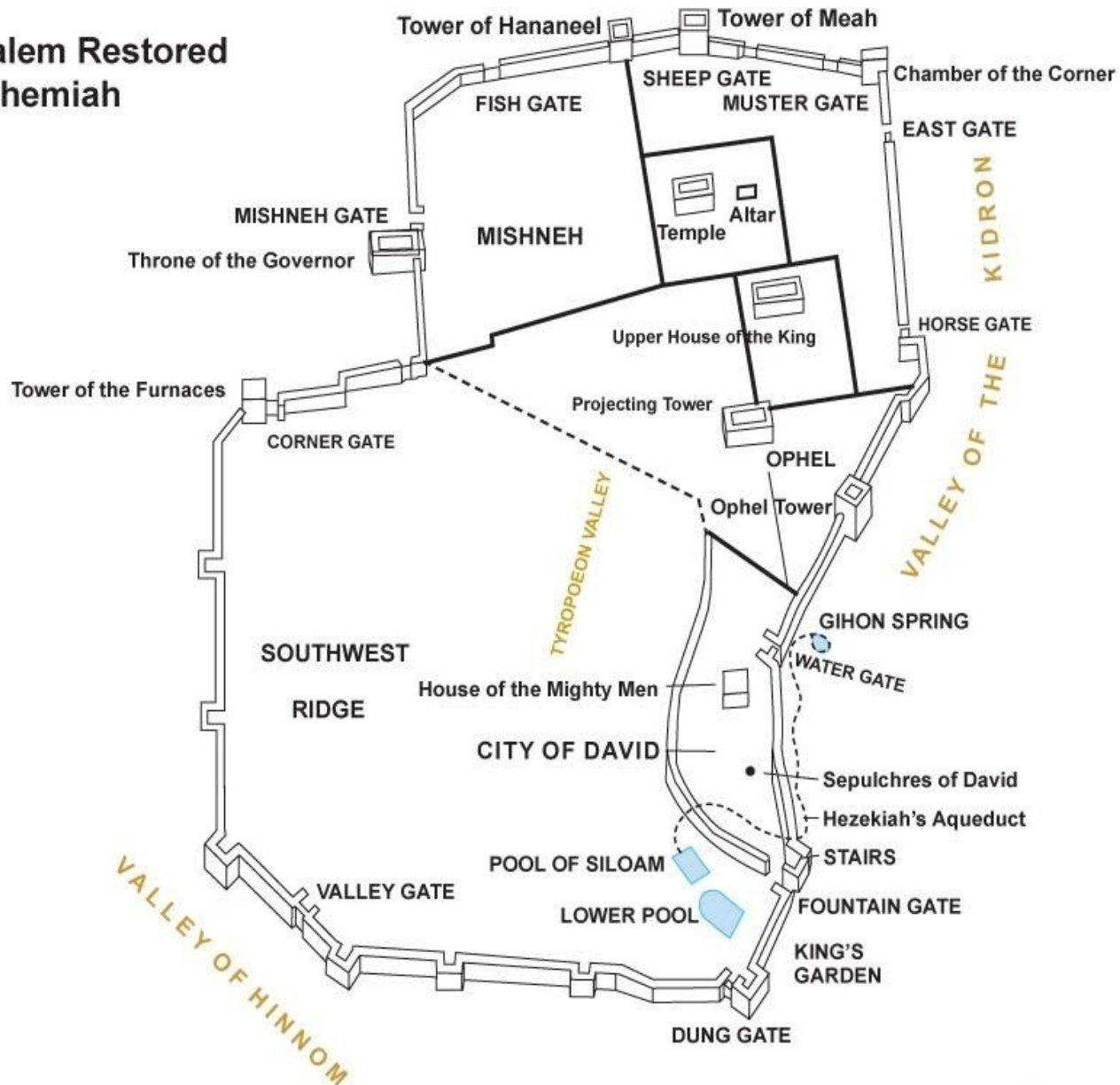
God is *completely just*. Like many of God's servants across the centuries, Nehemiah was plagued by bitter opposition. He and his contemporaries had to know that a day would come when life's wrongs would be put right, when evil people will be brought before the bar of God's judgment. His enemies had not merely insulted Nehemiah; they had despised God (4:4–5; 6:12). But their righteous God was aware of Israel's sins as well as those of their enemies. If they ignored his command to love their neighbors and robbed the poor (5:1–13), they too would experience his severe judgment (9:33). Ezekiel told his contemporaries that the people of Sodom came under divine condemnation not only on account of their sexual obscenities but because they had ignored the cry of the distressed poor. What Sodom suffered would be Jerusalem's fate if they persisted in such unloving conduct to their destitute neighbors. God did not have rules for one people which he overlooked in the case of others.

Nehemiah's life was totally devoted to such a God. He found 'delight' (1:11) in seeking God's face (1:4), revering God's name (1:11), pursuing God's will (1:11; 2:4–5), acknowledging God's goodness (2:8, 18), serving God's people (2:12, 17), trusting God's power (2:20), confessing God's holiness (4:14; 5:9, 15), sharing God's Word (8:9), showing God's love (8:10), remembering God's generosity (8:13–18), recalling God's faithfulness (9:5–37), obeying God's commands (10:29) and encouraging God's servants (10:37–39; 13:10–13).⁴

⁴ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 17–20). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Map of Restored Jerusalem

Jerusalem Restored by Nehemiah



What is a Community Group?

As a family of missionary servants, we are called and sent by Jesus to give witness to His gracious reign. Jesus intends to shape and nourish His followers by His Word and Spirit in the soil of community so that disciples grow and multiply. This is why C3 is deeply committed to God's **Word**, God's **Community**, and God's **Mission**. For our church to mature in these commitments, community groups become indispensable and are one of the key organizing principles of our church. This is why a community group is **NOT** primarily:

- A bible study where only one person speaks. Community groups are where the 'people of the book' open, consult, submit to, and share from the word of God thoughtfully and regularly.
- A therapy group where we spend the majority of our time discussing our problems and seeking solutions.
- A small group where we isolate and insulate ourselves from non-Christians.
- A social activist group where we gather in order to accomplish a service goal.
- A weekly meeting where we attempt to cram bible study, confession, prayer, and fellowship into once-a-week, two-hour block. Authentic discipleship is best experienced when we develop ongoing relationships where ordinary Christians live ordinary lives with Christ-centered, gospel-sharing intentionality.

Each of these may, at times, be experienced, but the predominant culture of a thriving community group is a loving, caring, committed, and generous family that gathers around Christ to share His gospel and life with each other. As we do so, we seek to invite and connect neighbors, family, co-workers and friends, to those in our community group that they might experience His presence and healing power through word and deed.

Suggested Reading: Total Church (Timmis, Chester), Everyday Church (Timmis, Chester), Gospel Fluency (Vanderstelt), The Art of Neighboring (Pathak, Runyon, Frazee), Gospel-Driven Church (Wilson), Life Together (Bonhoeffer), The Church as Movement (Woodward, White Jr.).

Why should I join a Community Group?

Trying to live this kind of discipling life independently of a discipling community is both difficult and dangerous. We are intended for one another, belong to one another, and we are His *people*. The Spirit graciously gives a variety of gifts to the church in order to share Jesus' calling to 'make disciples' together. No one person is able to bear the full weight of disciple-making on their own. We need each other to faithfully keep Jesus' great command to love God and others, and obey Jesus' great commission to make disciples. This is what a community group is all about.

How do I join a Community Group?

If you are not currently in a community group, please let someone from the connections desk know. If you do not have a community group in your neighborhood, consider hosting or leading a group by speaking to one of the elders of our church. Either way, we want to see our entire church experience the life-transforming grace of God found in the family He creates by His Word and Spirit, for His glory, our joy, and the good of our neighbors and friends!

SERMON SCHEDULE

SERMON TITLE	SERMON TEXT
Broken Walls, Broken Hearts	1:1-11
The Courage to Care	2:1-8
Mission & Opposition	2:9-20
Service & Solidarity	3:1-32
Problems & Progress	4:1-14
Fear & Fighting	4:15-23
Confronting Corruption	5:1-13
The Witness of our Wallet	5:14-19
Traps & Truth	6:1-14
Calling>Criticism	6:15-7:4
Progress & Participation	7:5-73
Receiving & Rejoicing	8:1-12
Purposeful Partying	8:13-18
Rehearsing Redemption	9:1-37
Covenant & Commitment	9:38-10:39
Inside-Out Mission	11:1-36
Priestly Service	12:1-26
Preparation & Dedication	12:27-43
Money & Mission	12:44-47
Redemptive Anger	13:1-14
Folly & Forgiveness	13:15-22
Fathers & Faithfulness	13:23-31

Sermon Themes and Questions

Broken Walls, Broken Hearts

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Weekly Verse: Matthew 5:14

Observations: When we are first introduced to Nehemiah as cupbearer to Artaxerxes, there is no indication he had ever previously thought of relinquishing his comparatively exalted status in order to throw in his lot with his fellow Jews in the remote and insignificant Jerusalem.

The effect of this news on Nehemiah is so overwhelming that it can only be described as a sudden realization that God was calling him to a radically new sphere of service... Only thus can we explain the determined purpose which now overtakes him, the strong sense of identity with his people, evident in his prayer, and the durability which he will later show in the face of stiff opposition...Nehemiah first answers his vocation not with action, but, as is right, with prayer—and prayer lasting some four months at that! This period of waiting upon God is not to be regarded as a sign of weakness on his part. From the later narrative we know that he was a dynamic man of action.⁵

Discussion Questions:

1. How did Nehemiah respond to the terrible news of verses 1-3?
2. How should we respond when we hear something/someone is broken in our church? What motivated Nehemiah?
3. How eager are you to pray and fast when you see something is disrepair? Why? When was the last time your heart broke over something?
4. Why do you think it's important to take ownership, even when you didn't create the problem?
5. What does Nehemiah's repentance look like? How can you learn from his example?

⁵ Williamson, H. G. M. (1998). *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Vol. 16, p. 175). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

The Courage to Care

Nehemiah 2:1-8

Weekly Verse: Nehemiah 2:8

Observations: Those months of private intercession must have been a peculiarly testing time for so active a man as Nehemiah, but for him to have forced the issue with the king could have proved disastrous to his whole enterprise. Instead, he shows that his confidence is supremely in God. Thus, although there is the suggestion in the opening verses of the chapter that Nehemiah gave the king a “lever” to open his inquiry, he nevertheless is diffident and ambiguous in his initial response, presumably to ensure that this was indeed the right time to act. Second, as soon as he realizes that it is, Nehemiah is confident enough to ask in a forthright manner for exactly what he wants and needs. Finally, because his confidence is in God, he has no hesitation in accepting all that the king offers both materially and by way of protection for the journey. The whole paragraph is thus a model of the balance that needs to be maintained between the total sovereignty of God, with prayer as its proper response, and human responsibility with its counterpart in wise and thoughtful activity. In the practicalities of the situation, Nehemiah appears unaware of any clash between these two, for he needed to know the truth of both if he was to make any substantial progress.⁶

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you care most about? How is that visible in your life?
2. When are you prone to live out of fear, instead of God’s love for you? What does that look like?
3. How would the life of our Community Group be shaped if we collectively lived in light of God’s love for us?
4. In what areas is God leading us as a Community Group to repentance?
5. What risks is God encouraging us to take as a Community Group?

⁶ Williamson, H. G. M. (1998). *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Vol. 16, p. 184). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Mission & Opposition

Nehemiah 2:9-20

Weekly Verse: Nehemiah 2:20

Observations: There is something affecting about this man of action, so assured of his vocation, nevertheless refraining from speaking of his proposals until he has engaged physically with the enormity of the task and no doubt prayerfully counted the cost of proceeding; cf. Luke 9:57–62; 14:28–32. He does not simply announce what he intends doing, nor force his own will on his audience. Rather...he invites the people's participation in the fulfillment of God's call. The remarkable unanimity of the people's response will have served as confirmation that he was on the right path. Similarly in the Church, it is to be expected as a general rule that an individual vocation to whatever task will be acknowledged by the community of faith at large; cf. Acts 13:1–2.

Finally, even in his dealings with his opponents, Nehemiah responds to their jibes not with rash retaliation but with a firm expression of God's ability to prosper his cause. Rather than being deflected from his primary task, he asserts positively that "We, his servants, will start to rebuild" (v 20). At this early stage, he is content to leave God with responsibility for the negative handling of opposition. This, too, is one of the hardest lessons for any church or individual to learn; cf. Rom 12:19; 1 Pet 2:21–23; 4:19.⁷

Discussion Questions:

1. What excites or scares you about C3Houston's mission for the 'Whole Church to take the Whole Gospel to All of Houston?'
2. Have you experienced resistance or mockery for your faith?
3. With the mockery of Nehemiah, he could have thrown in the towel. What would make you consider giving up Jesus' church?
4. How are you helping to build the walls of C3Houston?
5. What might God be calling you or your Community Group to do in order to serve Jesus' mission at C3Houston?

⁷ Williamson, H. G. M. (1998). *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Vol. 16, p. 193). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Service & Solidarity

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Weekly Verse: 1 Corinthians 12:12

Observations: The very length and detail of the list demonstrates the evident willingness unselfishly to cooperate which each individual and group displayed. Without a determination to submit personal pride and ambition to the larger task, the work could never have been accomplished so swiftly and successfully.

We may have the faith to believe that God has made us as we are because, as we are controlled by his Spirit, he has a use for our individual gifts and abilities. Finally, we should briefly note the *variety of involvement* displayed. There were some, we observed, who because of pride and proprietary interest refused to take part at all. Most, we know, labored effectively at the task allotted to them, while a few even managed “a second section.” By this testimony, the chapter stands as a permanent challenge to all readers in their own spheres of service.⁸

Discussion Questions:

1. If the church is a body, where every member plays a significant part, what part do you play at C3Houston?
2. What do others in your community group think about your gifts? How can they be used to bless the community group
3. What are the most common excuses you make that keep you from helping to build our church?
4. What do these excuses reflect you view of God?
5. What are the needs of your neighbors and how can the gifts of your community group serve them?

⁸ Williamson, H. G. M. (1998). *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Vol. 16, pp. 211–212). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Problems & Progress

Nehemiah 4:1-14

Weekly Verse: Nehemiah 4:14

Observations: For all its apparent triumph, the opening verse of the section sounds an ominous note: the halfway stage has been reached. In all major undertakings this is often a point for critical reflection. Initial enthusiasm has worn thin and the end is not yet sufficiently within sight to encourage a final effort. Nehemiah's leadership thus faced a crisis as sentiments of despair rapidly passed from mouth to mouth, aided by an expressive ditty that did nothing to relieve the gloom (v 4).

To make matters worse, the tactics of the enemy were having an increasingly unsettling effect. The unholy alliance of v 1 meant that Judah was effectively surrounded by hostile powers whose threats, whatever their legality in fact, will have seemed far from empty to those most closely involved. Had Nehemiah allowed these twin dangers to go unchecked, there was a serious likelihood of mass desertions, resulting in the probable abandonment of the whole project.⁹

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the root of Sanballats anger? Why do you think that is?
2. How do Nehemiah's opponents attempt to undermine him?
3. Have you ever encountered mocking for living faithfully for Jesus?
4. How did Nehemiah respond to mockery? Are you surprised?
5. In what ways do your actions resemble Nehemiah when mocked for following Jesus?
6. How can your community group better foster an encouraging culture as we risk mockery for Jesus?

⁹ Williamson, H. G. M. (1998). *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Vol. 16, p. 229). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Fear & Fighting

Nehemiah 4:15-23

Weekly Verse: Nehemiah 4:20

Observations: Although by nature a sturdy extrovert, Nehemiah endeavored to balance strength with love. If his narrative appears to portray a man more powerful than loving, it is largely because the story is set in the arena of sustained hostility. He is fighting for Israel's continuing spiritual existence, but he is not without compassion. He honestly recalls his own experience of intense fear in the palace at Susa (2:2) and can sympathize with the terrified. This leader knows how to come alongside discouraged (10), fearful (11), vulnerable (12) and deprived (5:1–6) people with emotional tenderness as well as moral strength.

Before a few days have gone by, Nehemiah and his colleagues realize that they are in serious trouble. There is opposition outside the ranks (1–9) and depression within (10–23). Yet, however intense, adversity is never a solitary visitor to the soul. Paul believed that trouble enables discerning Christians to unearth hidden treasure. Blessings emerge in affliction which are rarely found in periods of ease. Sorrow is not purposeless if it drives us to God, increases our dependence on him, enhances our sensitivity to the needs of others and makes us more like Jesus. Christ told his followers that they were unlikely to escape trouble and mature believers prefer rather to learn from adversity than bemoan it.¹⁰

Discussion Questions:

1. Can you think of a time when faithfulness to Jesus might cost you a job, promotion, relationship, loss of reputation?
2. How did you respond? What would you do differently today?
3. How did Nehemiah respond to the danger around him?
4. What do you think kept Nehemiah from retreating in fear?
5. What is God asking your community group to risk in order to build for His glory and the good of others? Will you do it?

¹⁰ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 71–72). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Confronting Corruption

Nehemiah 5:1-13

Memory Verse: 1 John 3:17-18

Observations: When Nehemiah left the palace at Susa it was not merely as an influential Israelite with permission to rebuild Jerusalem's walls but as the king's appointed 'governor' of Judah (14). His imperial authority accounts for the apparent ease with which he convened special meetings to discuss major aspects of the work (2:16–18; 4:14; 5:7–13) and helps to explain the hostility of his enemies, people who had doubtless benefited from the community's earlier lack of decisive local leadership. Responsibility for Judean affairs had probably been in the hands of Sanballat as the nearest official governor, and he would hardly have welcomed (2:10) the intrusion into his domain of a new, well-organized and altruistic leader like Nehemiah.

The scene changes dramatically from Jerusalem's wall to Judah's urgent economic needs. To his work as building-site manager Nehemiah adds new skills as an imaginative and effective social worker. The story describes Nehemiah facing a new problem, finding a solution and behaving in an exemplary fashion.¹¹

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways do we experience injustice and exploitation?
2. How does it feel to be exploited when you're most vulnerable?
3. Why do you think Nehemiah became so angry?
4. Does it concern you that he acted the way he did? Why or why not?
5. What is the difference between godly, righteous anger, and ungodly, unrighteous anger?
6. How can your community group help each other discern if your anger is godly and righteous and what to do with it?

¹¹ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 86–87). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

The Witness of our Wallet

Nehemiah 5:14-19

Memory Verse: Nehemiah 5:19

Observations: The early Christian churches were left in no doubt about their responsibilities to the poor. In the subsistence economy of first-century society, the vast majority of people were living on the breadline. It was an economy in which equilibrium, not growth, was the normal expectation. It is reliably estimated that for ninety-eight per cent of the population basic necessities were in short supply. The apostle Paul (who hardly belonged to the affluent two per cent) did not exaggerate when he said he had ‘often gone without food’ and made several references to his experience of extreme hunger. Yet in such a deprived economic context, Christian believers were reminded of their responsibility to people worse off than themselves. It demonstrated their love for God as well as for the people he created and treasured. Nehemiah is an excellent example of a believer who put his money to good use. He tried to help others in need by *lending the people money and grain* (10). He knew of officials who were guilty of alarming exploitation and spent their lives eagerly grasping every coin which might come their way but, *out of reverence for God, Nehemiah did not act like that* (15).¹²

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Nehemiah is so generous?
2. What must he believe about His God? Do you believe the same about God?
3. How does God’s character, nature, attributes and actions towards you shape how you treat others?
4. Where do you find your greatest security? Is it money, health, the approval of others, family, work, looks or intelligence?
5. Do those things last? Why do you seek them for security?
6. How can your community group foster greater generosity at C3Houston? How can you tangibly display God’s character and generosity towards your church? What would need to change?

¹² Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God’s Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 97–98). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Traps & Truth

Nehemiah 6:1-14

Memory Verse: Nehemiah 6:9

Observations: As the work on the walls nears its completion, so the enemy abandons all former tactics and concentrates instead on attempting to eliminate Nehemiah from the scene. Not only is this a personal attack in its intention, but in vv 5–9 it similarly becomes a personalization of the more general charges leveled against the community as a whole in 2:19. Because God’s work in the world is, generally speaking, entrusted to his people, the dangers to which Nehemiah was thus exposed are ones which, in varying degrees, any disciple has to be prepared to face. As so often, the example of Jesus himself stands out as supreme: while no two witnesses could be found to agree touching any specific charge brought against him, he was immediately condemned once his true identity became the subject of examination (Mark 14:53–64).

It is instructive to observe, however, that the narrative does not pause for self-congratulation. Bricks and mortar, or any other aspect of institution, can never provide more than a framework; the substance depends on the attitudes and activities of the people concerned. In this case, the walls alone would not be sufficient to offer protection against the dangers threatened by those in personal alliance with one who had set himself to oppose all the values for which Nehemiah stood (vv 16–19).¹³

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the traps and tactics are used by Nehemiah’s enemies?
2. How does Nehemiah discover the trap? How does he know he’s been set up? How did Nehemiah’s understanding of his purpose protect him from deception?
3. What deceptions or distortions are keeping you from Jesus’ calling to follow him and make disciples together?
4. What ways can your community group help to point out distortions and deceptions in order to obey Jesus’ calling?

¹³ Williamson, H. G. M. (1998). *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Vol. 16, p. 262). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Fear & Faithfulness

Nehemiah 6:15-7:4

Memory Verse: Nehemiah 7:2

Observations: The enemy is subtle. Behind these various attacks on God's servant there stands a far more sinister enemy than Sanballat and Tobiah. These men are merely pawns in the devil's manipulative campaign to frustrate God's work. Nobody can escape his sinister advances. Even the perfect ministry of the Lord Jesus was initiated by a period of severe testing in which the devil did his utmost to deflect Christ from his unique mission. The devil met Jesus in the wilderness with temptations similar to those encountered by Nehemiah and his contemporaries. They were temptations to please himself (bread from those stones which lay in the sand), parade himself (ruling over the nations in return for allegiance to the enemy), and prove himself (leaping from the temple pinnacle) rather than accepting that what God had said ('You are my Son, whom I love') is true. They are temptations markedly similar to those which lurked at every street corner in fifth-century Jerusalem, and they are just as powerful and persuasive in the contemporary world: temptations to materialism (get bread), hedonism (please yourself) and secularism (ignore God). The lust for money by hired prophets and avaricious nobles, the lust for pleasure (even at the cost of disobedience) by those who ignored God's will about marriage, and the lust for power by the governor's enemies, are sick evidence of the devil's work, and he is active still.¹⁴

Discussion Questions:

1. What caused Nehemiah's enemies to be afraid?
2. What is your greatest fear? How does this fear manifest itself in your life?
3. In what ways does the enemy use fear to keep you from faithfulness?
4. How does Nehemiah's confidence in God's purposes keep him from succumbing to the fear he felt?
5. How can your community group help you do the same?

¹⁴ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 110). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Progress & Participation

Nehemiah 7:5-73

Memory Verse: Luke 10:20

Observations: Nehemiah's list does not only provide us with the names and locations of the returning exiles. It describes the various forms of service in which many of these devout people were engaged throughout the decades as priests (39–42), Levites (43), singers (44), gatekeepers (45), temple servants (46–56), initially designated by King David 'to assist the Levites', and the descendants of Solomon's servants (57–60), originally appointed by David's son to supplement the work of the temple servants by performing menial tasks around the spacious building and its precincts. This wide variety of people represented different gifts which across the centuries had been brought to the service of God. It reached back to the time of Moses and the institution of the priesthood, and on to the establishment of the kingdom under David and Solomon and the later story of God's people, through good and ill, prosperity and adversity, both in their homeland and away from it, right down to their resettlement in sixth-century Judah.

God's servants in the developing life of this new community. The multicolored grace of God has equipped his people with a variety of choice gifts, and all believers are personally equipped in one way or another. Our responsibility before God is to discern, develop and use our gifts for the enrichment of others and for his glory alone¹⁵

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does Nehemiah gather people by their genealogies?
2. Why is being named in this register so important? What is the consequence of not being found on it?
3. In what ways are you creating a heritage of serving the Lord?
4. What part do you play in helping the building up of C3Houston?
5. If you're not actively involved, what's keeping you from joining in the work of Christ in our church and city?

¹⁵ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 123–124). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Receiving & Rejoicing

Nehemiah 8:1-12

Memory Verse: Nehemiah 8:9

Observations: We have already seen that Nehemiah's ambition was not simply to reconstruct the city's defenses but to revitalize a spiritual community. Writing in the same century as Nehemiah, the Greek historian Thucydides made the point that it is the people not the walls that make a city. The spiritual, moral and social contribution of committed men and women is of greater importance than strong bulwarks, but Jerusalem's governor soon discovered that reforming a community is a more exacting task than restoring its walls. He believed that the people living within the newly fortified city and their neighbors in the surrounding towns and villages had a right to spiritual prosperity as well as physical security.

As soon as the building work came to an end, an unusual event took place which was to prove dramatically influential in the spiritual life of God's people. The work was finished during the late summer month of Elul (6:15), and the next month, Tishri, marked the beginning of the year. The first day of this *seventh month* was a public holiday known as the Feast of Trumpets. So, only a few days after the completion of the rebuilding project, hundreds of men, women and children gathered in Jerusalem for a new year celebration in which God's written Word played a central part. An outdoor public meeting was devoted entirely to hearing the reading and interpretation of Scripture.¹⁶

Discussion Questions:

1. How important is God's word to your life?
2. If someone asked you to explain the bible, what would you say?
3. What is the difference between wanting to know about God and wanting to know God?
4. How committed is your community group in sharing God's word?
5. What is their response to hearing God's word?
6. Why is their joy when we confess sin and repent?

¹⁶ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 127). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Purposeful Partying

Nehemiah 8:13-18

Memory Verse: Hebrews 10:19

Observations: The day following this huge meeting, the heads of families gathered with Jerusalem's spiritual leaders for further study of God's Word. Their reading on the second day reminded them that halfway through this seventh month they were to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Scriptural teaching concerning this week of celebration was to be communicated by the heads of families to everybody else in the country. They were to *proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem* (15). During the forthcoming festival, God's Word was not only to be declared orally but enacted visually so that, by hearing and seeing, people would recall what he had done for them.¹⁷

Discussion Questions:

1. What significance does this festival have for God's people?
2. What was God calling them to remember through observing this festival?
3. What is God calling you to remember about Him and His redemption and restoration in your life?
4. How should God's people respond to the grace given to us in the past, present, and what is promised in our future?
5. Does your community group know how to celebrate God's grace through parties, encouragement, and joyful friendship?
6. What can your community group change in order to welcome strangers and invite others to enjoy God's grace through meals and celebrations?

¹⁷ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 137). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Rehearsing Redemption

Nehemiah 9:1-37

Memory Verse: 1 John 1:9

Observations: We have been looking at the means by which Nehemiah's contemporaries had their vision of God enlarged in chapter 9. Still in the same chapter, we turn now to trace the specific features of their portraiture of God in order to see what these attributes meant in their everyday experience. Ten aspects of God's nature and character emerge in this prayer, and they are as important for us today as they were for these Judean believers in the fifth century BC. As they responded to the Levites' call to prayer (4) they were led into the presence of an active and responsive God.¹⁸

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is the confession of sin so important to the people of Israel?
2. How important is it to confess the sins of their fathers? Why do you think they did so?
3. How natural is it to confess your sins to God? How often do you take time to confess those sins before your community group? Why is this so difficult? What fears keep you from being vulnerable in this way?
4. Why do you think remembering the mighty acts of God is so important after they confessed their sins?
5. What do they rehearse about God's acts of redemption?
6. What ways can your community group more openly share their struggles, sin, and ways in which they've been 'stiff necked' against God?

¹⁸ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 153). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Covenant & Commitment

Nehemiah 9:38-10:39

Memory Verse: Nehemiah 9:38 & 10:29

Observations: The extensive prayer in chapter 9 eloquently describes the relationship between the Lord and his people and appropriately emphasizes the generosity of God. The basic stipulation of this Nehemiah covenant is that his people promise to obey God's Word. They publicly agree to *follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord* (10:29). This general statement is followed by a series of specific ways in which this commitment to God's law is to be applied in various aspects of their lives: domestic (mixed marriages), commercial (Sabbath trading), agricultural (seventh-year laws), social (cancellation of debts), religious (support of God's house) and economic (regular contributions). Finally, Nehemiah's covenant concluded with an appropriate recapitulation: *We will not neglect the house of our God* (10:39).¹⁹

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think they decided to covenant and commit to God after their confession of sin earlier in this chapter?
2. If you were to write a covenant to God, what issues would you first confess and what things would you want to commit to changing or obeying?
3. Why do you think the covenant speaks so much about tithing and giving? How is this significant in the story of Nehemiah?
4. Where does your heart go when tithing and giving is discussed? Is it a worshipful joy or a frustrating topic?
5. Are there ways you have 'neglected the house of God?' How important is it for you to confess this and change?

¹⁹ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 171). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Inside-Out Mission

Nehemiah 11:1-36

Memory Verse: Nehemiah 11:2

Observations: History was immensely important to God's people, but they were not fusty antiquarians, eager to collect information about their forebears simply for the sake of compiling family trees. These are reliable records and they certainly trace roots but they are something more. From these lists it is possible to discern some important spiritual principles in the mind of Nehemiah, his devout predecessors and contemporaries who collected, treasured and edited this material. We are not reading a dusty and irrelevant catalogue of names and families; these archives convey a series of far-reaching biblical truths.²⁰

Discussion Questions:

1. How are they now to live in Jerusalem in light of the covenant they made earlier?
2. What significance is there to living in neighboring towns to Jerusalem?
3. How would you describe your neighborhood? What are its hopes, hurts and opportunities for God's redeeming work?
4. What can you learn from the way this list describes each family?
5. How important is your family history and legacy? What ways can your community group foster a longer view of history by retelling your past and praying for your future together?

²⁰ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 194–195). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Priestly Service

Nehemiah 12:1-26

Memory Verse: Psalm 39:4-5

Observations: It is not enough to tell people what they must do; the leader must become a visible model of obedience, holiness and love. For that reason, leaders need to cultivate their own spiritual lives so that they do not contradict their message. Both Paul and Peter urged their first-century colleagues in ministry to take care of themselves so that they did not become a bad advertisement for the gospel. Richard Baxter emphasized the importance of example: 'He that means as he speaks will surely do as he speaks.' Preachers are especially vulnerable; congregations have every right to an embodied sermon and not merely an eloquent one. Baxter warns his colleagues that their mission can easily be ruined. 'One proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action may cut the throat of many a sermon and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing.'²¹

Discussion Questions:

1. How important are the priests to the service of God's people?
2. As you read the names of generations of faithful priestly service, does it encourage you or cause you disappointment?
3. Do you feel you are part of a legacy? If so, what is it?
4. If your funeral were today, what would people say about the way you loved, served, and commended Christ to them in word and deed?
5. What obstacles are keeping you from building a legacy of faithful servants of Christ?
6. How can your community group display priestly service to others and help develop priestly service in you? What ways can you help others walk in their God-given gifts?

²¹ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 200). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Preparation & Dedication

Nehemiah 12:27-43

Memory Verse: Romans 12:1-2

Observations: There is no need for the commentator to apologize for this display of joy at a task well done. Biblical faith invites us unashamedly to look to future consummation as a tangible reality to work towards and as a motivation to endure hardships in the present. We are reminded in this of the example of Jesus himself, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2).

If the spiritual be not expressed through the physical, he seems to say, then it is not spiritual at all but mere hypocrisy. But equally, if the physical is not imbued with commitment to and dependence upon God, then it is, quite simply, an arrogant materialism. As if, therefore, to impress this lesson upon his readers, he does not stop, as a mere novelist might have done, with this triumphant and climactic account. Rather, he deliberately presses forward to speak of at first sight comparatively trivial daily arrangements and then of subsequent setbacks, for by these tokens too is true progress to be measured.²²

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the people celebrating?
2. Why do you think celebration and dedication are so important to form the life of the church?
3. How can you contribute and dedicate yourself to the Lord’s work at C3Houston?
4. What prevents you from enjoying God when you gather with God’s people to worship Him?
5. How significant is thankfulness in how you worship? What are you thankful to the Lord for? How often do you tell Him how grateful you are?
6. How regularly does your community group share the evidences of God’s grace in your lives? What can you do to help?

²² Williamson, H. G. M. (1998). *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Vol. 16, p. 377). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Money & Mission

Nehemiah 12:44-47

Memory Verse: Matthew 6:21

Observations: In recording this narrative, our author is at pains to mention six characteristics of the people's giving to the Lord's work. It was organized (*men were appointed*, 44), specific (*contributions, firstfruits and tithes*, 44), grateful (because the ministry of God's servants had brought them such delight: *for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites*, 44), obligatory (*all Israel contributed*, 47), regular (*daily portions*, 47) and universal (everyone, including *the Levites* who were also to set aside the portion for the priests' support, *the descendants of Aaron*, 47). The apostle Paul rightly insisted that God's servants and needy people must be lovingly and regularly supported, and early Christian worship provided an opportunity for the offering of money for the Lord's work. No worship can be honoring to God if those who serve the Lord are deprived of life's basic necessities.

Sadly, in the light of Israel's later experience, this vivid description of Israel's generosity following the dedication service reads like a forgotten dream. When Nehemiah left Jerusalem and returned to his work at the Persian palace, things gradually began to deteriorate. One of the first things to suffer was the generous support of the Levites. That widespread and sustained neglect is one theme in the book's closing chapter.²³

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is the commitment and contribution of God's people so significant in accomplishing God's plans?
2. How do you think Jesus' mission is accomplished at C3Houston?
3. In what ways do you struggle to give to our church's mission?
4. How can this passage shape your view of giving & generosity?
5. What changes might you make to walk in step with this teaching?
6. How might your community group help to encourage generosity?

²³ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 217). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Redemptive Anger

Nehemiah 13:1-14

Memory Verse: Ephesians 6:12

Observations: There is an absorbing realism about Scripture. It refuses to present us with a romantic portrait of life; things do not always develop as we hope. ‘Good beginnings are no guarantee of happy endings’. People with immense gifts do not always achieve their potential. The biblical narratives often present us with frustrated ambitions, disappointing failure, neglected opportunities and broken vows. Sin often spoils the story. Abraham attempts to deceive, Jacob cheats, Moses loses his temper, David commits adultery and Peter lies. The stark honesty of the Bible makes it such compelling and relevant reading.²⁴

This final chapter of Nehemiah demonstrates the disastrous consequences of poor leadership (4, 28), the damage caused by disobedience to God’s Word (4–9), the insidious temptations of a materialistic society (15–18), and the danger of ignoring family values (23–27). Nehemiah may have been tempted to bring his book to a more cheering and inspiring conclusion with his account of vibrant worship (12:27–43), diligent service (44–46), generous giving (47) and obedient listening (13:1–3) but, although true, it would have given a misleading impression of Judah’s spiritual life in the mid-fifth century BC.²⁵

Discussion Questions:

1. Why was God so animated that any Ammonite or Moabite enter the assembly of God (see Numbers 22-25)?
2. Does this mean there is no redemption possible for them?
3. How do you think Nehemiah felt when he saw Tobiah living in the temple of God?
4. Is Nehemiah’s response righteous or unrighteous? Why?
5. Does Nehemiah’s response make you feel uncomfortable? Why?

²⁴ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God’s Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 218). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

²⁵ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God’s Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (pp. 218–219). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Folly & Forgiveness

Nehemiah 13:15-22

Memory Verse: Matthew 11:28-29

Observations: When God entered a covenant with his people, he gave visible signs to demonstrate his love for them and commitment to them. Supremely, he gave them a book (law), a place (tabernacle, then temple), a ministry (priests and Levites), and a day (Sabbath) at the end of each week which they were to devote exclusively to him. So far in chapter 13 of Nehemiah, we have seen how the first three of these outward signs had become seriously defiled: God's Word had been disobeyed (1–3), his temple desecrated (4–9) and his ministers neglected (10–11). Now we see how his day had been disregarded.

On his return, Nehemiah found that, not only in the 'holy city' but also in Judah's surrounding communities, there was no appreciable attempt to keep the Sabbath special. The seventh day was much like any other day. This weekly outward sign of their commitment to God was no longer evident to an unbelieving neighbor. By their disobedience to God's Word, they had come to worship the unseen idols of contemporary culture.²⁶

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think is the importance of a Sabbath rest?
2. In what ways is breaking the Sabbath a condition of the heart?
3. How damaging to our witness of Christ is our inability to rest?
4. What does this tell others about what we think of Jesus and His gospel?
5. How can you create a rhythm of Sabbath in your life?
6. In what ways does the ability to rest display Jesus' superiority to idols?
7. How can your community group encourage rest and worship?

²⁶ Brown, R. (1998). *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 235). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Fathers & Faithfulness

Nehemiah 13:23-31

Memory Verse: Ephesians 5:22-24

Observations: With all the enormous accomplishments of Nehemiah's ministry, God's people continued to pursue sin instead of righteousness. Men married godless women, their children were not taught their language in order to read the Scriptures, and the fathers were giving away their daughters to godless men. It seems their commitment and covenant, their life and legacy, was all but forgotten. Nehemiah confronts their sin and fights for their purity. He cleanses the church of unfit leaders and holds the men accountable as covenant heads of their families.

So it is with our current day, men who choose passivity over passionate pursuit of God, reap the destruction their apathy causes. We are given this last word as a warning to all who claim allegiances to a holy God. Will we choose the tide of culture or the timeless treasure of God's glory and purposes?

Discussion Questions:

1. How were the Israelites rebelling against God
2. How did they break their oath in chapter 10?
3. How important is it for fathers to lead their family in loving, serving, and obeying the Lord?
4. Why does Nehemiah ask God to "Remember me..."?
5. In what areas might you need to repent and ask God to remember His grace and favor towards you?
6. How has this book impacted your view of God, the church, and your place in the church?
7. What did this story teach you about God's attributes?
8. Are you ready to participate in building Jesus' church as a member of C3Houston? Why or why not?