



NEHEMIAH

MEMOIRS OF AN ORDINARY MAN

Lansdale
Fall 2024 Study Guide



2 KINGS 24-25



EZRA-NE

BABYLON →



PARALLEL DESIGN



1. PERSIAN KING MOVED BY GOD TO SEND A LEADER TO JERUSALEM



2. LEADER FACES OPPOSITION TO REBUILDING



3. STRANGE ANTI-CLIMAX

EZRA 1-6

ZERUBBABEL THE TEMPLE



ANOTHER 70 YEARS

EZRA 7-10

EZRA TORAH & COMMUNITY



1-2: WHOEVER WANTS TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM, MAY GOD BE WITH YOU! (SEE JEREMIAH 25)

3-6: ZERUBBABEL = PLANTED IN BABYLON

4: YOU HAVE NO PART IN THE TEMPLE! (ISRAELITES WHO NEVER WENT INTO EXILE)

WE JUST WANT TO HELP!

GOD'S PRESENCE?

ELDER'S WHO REMEMBER THE FIRST TEMPLE

THE END.

7-8: GO TEACH THE TORAH AND REBUILD YOUR COMMUNITY!

9-10: THESE PEOPLE ARE AS BAD AS CANAANITES!

GOD NEVER COMMANDS EZRA TO DO THIS (SEE MALACHI 2:13-16)

MIXED RESULTS LEAD TO ANOTHER ANTICLIMAX (DEUTERONOMY 23:1-4)

YOU HAVE NO PART IN ISRAEL!

THE END.

PROPHETIC HOPES AFTER EXILE

- FUTURE MESSIANIC KING (ISAIAH 11, HOSEA 3)
- GOD'S PRESENCE IN A NEW TEMPLE (EZEKIEL 40-48, ZECHARIAH 2)
- GOD'S KINGDOM OVER THE NATIONS (ISAIAH 2, ZECHARIAH 8)
- FULFILL PROMISE TO ABRAHAM (GENESIS 12)



PROPHETS



created by the Bible Project

NEHEMIAH



NEW 1-7 NEHEMIAH CITY WALLS

MAY I GO REPAIR JERUSALEM'S WALLS?
YES! GO IN PEACE.

ARTAXERXES

YOU HAVE NO PART IN JERUSALEM!

THIS AGAIN...

NEW 8-12 SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

7-DAY TORAH MARATHON

CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF BOOTHS

- CONFESSION OF SIN
- COVENANT RENEWAL
- VOW TO FOLLOW THE TORAH
- GREAT CELEBRATION

וְשָׂמְנוּ לָנוּ

NEW 13 ...BUT IT'S NOT

OH GOD... AT LEAST I TRIED!

the end.

TEMPLE NEGLECTED

SABBATH DISHONORED...

...WITHIN SIGHT OF JERUSALEM'S WALLS!

NOT MY WALLS!!!



The Book of Nehemiah

While Nehemiah is found in the middle of the Old Testament, it is the final narrative book before the arrival of Jesus.. It concludes the story beginning with Adam, moving through the covenants of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, setting the stage for Jesus. So, it is normal to be confused when reading Nehemiah for the first time. Nehemiah begins in a Persian palace, but how did we get here and why is Jerusalem destroyed?

After the reigns of David and Solomon, the people of God fell into deep sin and conflict with one another. The nation of Israel fractured into two kingdoms: the southern kingdom of Judah, made of the tribes of Benjamin, Levi, and Judah, and the northern kingdom of Israel, comprised of the remaining nine tribes. The books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles tell the story of these two kingdoms.

The Kingdom of Israel was marked by wickedness and idolatry. Of their nineteen kings, none obeyed the Lord. God repeatedly sent them prophets—Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea—but no one would listen. To judge the people, God allowed Assyria to conquer Israel by 722BC. Read 2 Kings 17:6-17 to learn of the specific sins the people of Israel committed to lead to this judgement.

The southern kingdom of Judah experienced periods of faithfulness under kings like Hezekiah, but soon followed in Israel's footsteps, rejecting God in favor of idols. As a result, God allowed them to be conquered and taken into exile by the armies of Babylon (2 Kings 24-25). But God sent a prophet to Judea, declaring hope in the midst of their judgement. (Jeremiah 29:1-7; 10-14) As Jeremiah wept over the ruin of Jerusalem, he also knew God had prepared a glorious redemption for his people: enter Ezra and Nehemiah!

SESSION 1

Read Nehemiah Chapter 1: 1-11

Opening:

When have you had to ask someone for something you needed—like a ride to the airport, a new job, or wise advice? How did you feel before that conversation, and how did the conversation go?

Asking for something can be a humbling experience. We may fear we are imposing on others or burdening them with our problems. We may feel weak, especially with our Western culture where independence is so highly valued. But often, the help we need comes when we make simple and direct requests. And, when it comes to our relationship with God, He wants us to ask for help in big and bold ways.

The Book of Nehemiah begins with jarring news, prompting Nehemiah to ask for God's help. His bold prayer led to the reconstruction of Jerusalem and God's people. What reconciliation or rebuilding could our prayers bring about?

In this session, we will look at Nehemiah's prayer and consider how to apply his methods in our own prayers.

What does it mean to be God's representative?

How should we approach God in prayer?

What are the elements of an effective prayer?

Discuss:

The Book of Nehemiah was written at the end of an extended period of exile. Seventy years before the time of Nehemiah, Israel was disobedient to God and was removed from the Promised Land and taken into captivity. But despite His people's actions, God remained faithful and began bringing His people back into the broken city of Jerusalem to restore and rebuild.

In what ways has sin left our church and its people broken or in need of restoration? In what ways would you want to see God redeem and rebuild our church?

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4

The Book of Nehemiah starts with a problem: Jerusalem's walls have been broken down, making the already feeble city even more susceptible to attacks from enemies. Upon receiving the news of the city, Nehemiah wept. When the people and places we love are damaged, we, like Nehemiah, should mourn.

Consider how you felt after 911, when our nation was attacked. Do you ever mourn over the condition of Lansdale UMC? What do you think it looks like to faithfully mourn our broken situation?

We are God's representatives and our actions, words, and attitudes should reflect Him. But often, we fall short. When God's people are in disarray, the world will not see a clear picture of God's will, Word, and love.

How well do you think the church is representing God today? In what ways are we in disarray? In what ways are we representing God well?

Nehemiah's initial response to the news of Jerusalem was to pray. When we don't know how to represent, we need to go back to the one we are representing!

Nehemiah's initial response to the news of Jerusalem was to pray. When we don't know how to represent, we need to go back to the one we are representing!

When are you most likely to pray? In what ways are you praying for the church and for God's will to be done in your community?

Read Nehemiah 5-7

The first and most important component of Nehemiah's prayer is acknowledging God. We need to be enthralled with the one we represent.

What attributes of God captivate you the most? What would it look like to appropriately praise God in prayer before anything else?

After Nehemiah acknowledged God and His greatness in verse 5, he humbly confessed sin to God in verses 6-7. When we see God for who He is, we cannot help but see our own sin in comparison. If we are to actively represent our holy God, we need to consistently confess and turn from our sin.

When do you think we need to repent of our sins? What do you think it looks like to repent in front of God and those we have sinned against?

In what ways do honest confession and repentance represent God to those who do not know Him?

There are two aspects of Nehemiah's confession: personal sin ("I and my father's family") and corporate sin ("Israelites"). He owns up to what he and his family had done as well as Israel's guilt. This section of Nehemiah's prayer might feel counter-cultural for us today. We feel the need to shift blame to others rather than owning up to our portion of the problem, and often reject the need to take responsibility for other people's sin.

What difference do you think it would make if we completely owned our personal sin? What difference would it make if we completely confessed and repented of the church's corporate sins and errors?

Since we are God's representatives on earth we should repent of our divisiveness. We've allowed small disagreements in the church to take us off mission.

Do you agree with this assessment? Why, or why not?

In what ways are the divisions in our culture present in the church?

Nehemiah's acknowledgement of God caused him to have a posture of humility, but it also prompted him to pray with boldness.

Read Nehemiah 1:8-11

Nehemiah asked God to remember the promises He made to His people through the Covenant with Moses, which God gave to Israel after He rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Nehemiah could pray boldly to God because he knew God loved His people and desired for them to be restored.

In what ways does understanding God's love for you impact the boldness of your prayers?

Nehemiah prayed using passages from the book of Deuteronomy in verses 8-10. His boldness before God was rooted in his knowledge of God's Word. When we know who God is, we can rightly approach Him and praise Him in truth.

Take a moment to go back to Deuteronomy to read the verses Nehemiah referenced. What verses do you know that describe who God is?

The prayer ends with Nehemiah asking God for success as he prepares to talk to the king about the issue in Jerusalem.

Do you believe it is okay to ask God for success in something you are about to do? Why, or why not?

Nehemiah's prayer is an example of effective prayer.

Why would Nehemiah's prayer be considered effective? What elements of his prayer are commendable?

What are you praying for right now? What can you implement from Nehemiah's example of prayer into your own prayers?

Where do we turn when we face tragedy or when we fall short as God's representatives? God wants us to come to Him—He is all-powerful and loving, eager to hear from His people. Nehemiah gives us a great example of what it looks like to go to God in prayer in the wake of difficult news and impossible situations. We can approach God boldly and humbly, as Nehemiah did, and know God hears us and will respond.

This week, turn to God in prayer. Use Nehemiah's prayer as a template for your conversation with God and take notice of how He answers you.

This week's reading plan:

Day 1: Judah taken into Babylonian Captivity: 2 Kings 25:1-21

Day 2: First return to Jerusalem: Ezra 1:1-11

Day 3: Second return to Jerusalem: Ezra 7:1-10

Day 4: Nehemiah's prayer to God: Nehemiah 1:1-11

Day 5: Nehemiah talks to the king: Nehemiah 2:1-10

SESSION 2

Read Nehemiah Chapter 2: 1-20

Opening:

Have you ever been dared to do something but didn't do it? What was the dare, and why didn't you go through with it?

There are several reasons we wouldn't go through with a dare, but the core reason is that we don't trust something or someone. Life presents us with opportunities to take risks, and if the risks outweigh our trust, we won't go through with them.

In this lesson, we will look at how Nehemiah responded to the risks he faced in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. We will observe how Nehemiah's trust in God's power prompted him to boldly move forward with the assignment God had given him.

How does God's sovereignty play a role in Nehemiah's position?

How does Nehemiah respond to the opportunity given to him by God?

Nehemiah 2 emphasizes God's sovereignty and how Nehemiah took the initiative to bring restoration to Jerusalem. We will walk through the chapter to observe how Nehemiah displayed his trust in God through his bold actions.

God's sovereignty is God's control and rule over all creation. God holds authority over all our circumstances that he either allows or causes to happen.

Is it hard for you to grasp God's sovereignty? Why, or why not?

What are some ways you notice God's sovereignty at work in your life?

Read Nehemiah 2: 1-5

God's sovereignty is on display because God put Nehemiah in a strategic position as cupbearer to the king. Nehemiah was uniquely positioned to help his people. (Similar to Esther).

Has God ever placed you in a strategic position to help others? If so, what were the circumstances?

No matter where God has placed us, we can sometimes fail to acknowledge his power even though we know he is sovereign.

While God is uniquely sovereign over everything, why do we sometimes fail to trust him to lead us?

God is trustworthy, and we can follow him even when we're afraid, in pain, or worried about the future. While Nehemiah trembled at the thought of the king harming him or preventing him from the work he felt convicted to do, he still acted.

Have you ever had a moment when you pushed past your fear and acted? What motivated you to take initiative even though you were afraid?

Nehemiah's trust in God's guidance and sovereign power propelled him to take bold steps to accomplish the mission God gave him. Like Nehemiah, our level of trust in God is often revealed through our obedient words, actions, and attitudes.

In what areas of your life might you need to trust in God's sovereignty?

Read Nehemiah 2:6-10

Even though God was sovereign over Nehemiah's situation, Nehemiah knew he would still face opposition and would need to gather supplies. So, he was proactive. In verses 7-8, he asked the king for letters to provide safe passage and resources to rebuild the wall.

What has it looked like for you to be proactive in your faith? In what ways did God's sovereignty play a role in how and why you acted?

God reigns over our circumstances, but he doesn't make obstacles go away. Instead, he empowers us to face them.

How might your faith in God, who is sovereign, influence your mindset toward obstacles you face? Obstacles our church faces?

Nehemiah not only had a clear direction from God, but he also had confidence that God was with him. Nehemiah says in verses 8 and 18 that “the hand of God was on [him]” to show that God guided him, even in the face of obstacles.

Have you ever felt God’s guidance amid opposition? If so, what was that like?

To summarize Nehemiah’s interaction with the king, Nehemiah’s character, competence, commitment, and courage all helped him leverage his relationship with the king so that he could build the wall. God put Nehemiah in a position to grow in each of those characteristics so that, at the right time, Nehemiah could get everything he needed to rebuild the wall.

Have you noticed God using something you learned—maybe while at a job, during a time of difficulty, or through a relationship—to prepare you for something else later? If so, what did you learn? How did God use what you learned?

Out of the four characteristics of Nehemiah (character, competence, commitment, and courage) which one do you think God is calling you to strengthen? Why?

Read Nehemiah 2:11-15

Nehemiah took responsibility for rebuilding the wall by inspecting the damage, but he also acknowledged that God sovereignly prompted him to do it in verse 12. Nehemiah viewed the mission as a partnership with God.

What is helpful about seeing a God-ordained mission as a partnership with God rather than our singular responsibility? In what areas of your life could you remind yourself that you’re partnered with God and not doing it all on your own?

Read Nehemiah 2:16-19

Nehemiah also took the initiative to restore the wall in verse 17 by gathering people to accomplish the mission. He knew the mission God called him to could not be accomplished by himself. The people responded favorably, and God strengthened their hands for the work.

What are the benefits of a group of people joining each other to work on a common mission together?

How might you be able to contribute to a group of people in a restoration effort in your community, at work, or at your church?

While a group of Israelites came together for the restoration project, it all started with an individual's pain. God sovereignly used Nehemiah's grief over Jerusalem's destruction to propel him to restore it. We will all, like Nehemiah, experience suffering. When we do, we can choose to respond in faith.

When have you experienced suffering? What was your response to those difficult circumstances? How was your faith impacted?

We see in Nehemiah's story that God is sovereign—he's always at work according to his plan. We can trust him, even in difficulty.

What does it look like for you to trust that God is sovereign when you suffer? In what ways might viewing our pain through the lens of God's sovereignty influence our response to suffering?

What sorrow, grief, or trouble are you experiencing now? How could our faith family care for you?

This lesson showed us what a faithful response to God's sovereignty can look like. Nehemiah acted boldly, he trusted God, and he knew God was with him. When we believe God is sovereign, we can respond as Nehemiah did.

What could it look like for you to respond to God's sovereignty this week? In your life? In the life of this church? What bold step could God be calling you to take?

At times it may be difficult to trust that God is sovereign. But God is at work even in the midst of our pain and encourages us to bring restoration where others are experiencing brokenness. He is above all things and will strengthen our hands as we join others in the mission he has given us to work on. He can be trusted. He will never fail us, and his faithfulness enables us to be bold even when we experience fear in the face of challenges.

Weekly Reading Plan:

Day 1: Nehemiah inspects the damage to the wall (Nehemiah 2:11-15)

Day 2: Nehemiah rallies the workers (Nehemiah 2:16-20)

Day 3: The Sheep, Fish, and Jeshanah gates repaired. (Nehemiah 3:1-12)

Day 4: The Valley, Dung, and Fountain gates repaired. (Nehemiah 3:13-21)

Day 5: The priests repair their own houses. (Nehemiah 3:22-32)

SESSION 3

When have you noticed the energy at a large sporting event, concert, or worship service? What was the event, and how did it make you feel?

Large gatherings aren't for everyone, but there is something powerful about a mass of people engaging in the same activity while in close proximity to one another. In this lesson, we will look at how the whole community of Israelites in Jerusalem came together in unity to rebuild the city walls. This monumental task required each person to participate in the construction project. We'll see how Nehemiah 3 displays the power of unity that God wants all his people to experience.

Why is everyone's participation essential to our unity as God's people?

What does Scripture say about unity among God's people?

How does working together impact the sense of community among God's people?

Nehemiah 3 shows us how much God's people can accomplish when they come together and work under a unified purpose. Each person had a valuable role and responsibility to repair the broken wall.

Read Nehemiah 3:1-5

The chapter starts with the repair of the Sheep Gate in verse 1. By verse 32, the Israelites had worked their way counterclockwise around the city walls to end where they started—at the Sheep Gate. The author intentionally references the gate twice to show the extent of the damage. The destruction impacted the entire city.

What difference does it make in your reading of this chapter to know how extensive the rebuilding effort was?

The author repeats the word “repair” or “rebuilt” all throughout the passage to emphasize the unified effort to rebuild the wall. Israel had to work together.

What stands out to you about the unity of the Israelites in this chapter, and why?

When have you seen people work in a unified way like Israel? How did their unity impact what they were working on?

Israel in this chapter gives us an example of what unity as God’s people can look like. Coming together as the church is a daunting task today not only because we represent Christ, who is perfect, but also because people have been drawn away from gathering for various reasons.

In what ways is it difficult for the church to be unified? What do you think could help us come together?

The key element of unity is leadership. When people need to come together, the leaders set the tone. This passage gives us two contrasting examples of leadership: Eliashib in verse 1 and the nobles of Tekoa in verse 5. One promoted unity, the other division.

In what ways have you seen a leader impact the unity of a group or team?

Eliashib was Israel's top leader as the high priest, yet his position did not prevent him from getting his hands dirty. He humbled himself and led by example.

What leadership characteristics do you admire the most from good leaders in your life? How can you implement what you have learned from them in your interactions with others?

Eliashib showed his level of commitment to the people by helping with construction. But, according to verse 5, the nobles of Tekoa refused to help. We are not told why they would not help, but because they were affluent leaders, they might have thought the work was beneath them. Some people think they are too high and mighty for the work. Undoubtedly, a pompous attitude would have threatened unity among God's people.

How have you seen pride cause divisiveness in a group of people?

What are some ways you can prevent pride within yourself from creating division?

With the threat of disunity looming among leaders in the community, the people came together and each played their part in the rebuilding project.

Read Nehemiah 3:7-9, 12, and 21

There were many different types of people represented in the rebuilding of the wall. Here is a breakdown of some of the diversity represented in the project:

- People from different towns (v. 7)
- Various professions (v. 8)
- Government leaders (v. 9)
- Families (v. 12)
- Faith leaders (v. 21)

The workers' different backgrounds show us that everyone how helped had their own unique skills, but they were unified in the same task of restoring the wall.

How would you describe the attitude of the people that helped repair the wall?

This passage points to how some instances require us to step in and help whether or not the task is something we want to do or feel gifted to do.

Why do you think we sometimes avoid stepping in and helping where we see a need? What could it look like to meet needs even if we don't feel like it or don't feel gifted to help?

There are some things we can't do as God's people unless everyone pitches in and helps. We need each other.

What are some areas where we need to lean on one another as God's people? What do we miss out on when we don't work together?

The mission to rebuild the wall provided an opportunity for the unity Israel shared internally as God's people to be experienced externally.

When have you felt most unified with other Christians? Why do you think you felt closer to them?

Read Nehemiah 3:23 and 28-30

The work of restoration was vast and required each person to fully participate, so the Israelites repaired the portions of the wall closest to their own homes. They each jumped in and met a need in close proximity to them. Much like the Israelites in this passage, sometimes achieving unity requires us to meet needs right in front of us.

What needs do you see in your church, community, or neighborhood that you could meet? How might your faith family seek to meet a need in your church or local community?

God calls his people to be unified. As we saw in this session, a great way to pursue unity is through serving alongside one another.

How might serving alongside one another unify your group? In what ways can you help promote unity in your community, church, or home this week?

Nehemiah 3 gives us a hopeful picture of what can happen when we come together. Our unity can sometimes be challenged by our pride, lack of willingness to serve, or by not knowing how we can contribute. But we know God has already unified us through Jesus, and he provides opportunities for us as the church to rally around meeting needs and serving together. We can experience unity as God's people—but we have to be willing to do our part. This week, consider the unity—or lack of unity—in our church. How could you help promote unity? How could you serve? Pray for unity and see what God has in store for you!

Weekly Reading Plan:

Day 1: Sanballat and Tobiah mock the builders (Nehemiah 4:1-3)

Day 2: The builders pray and work. (Nehemiah 4:4-6)

Day 3: Enemies plot to stop the building. (Nehemiah 4:7-10)

Day 4: Nehemiah instructs and encourages the builders. (Nehemiah 4:11-14)

Day 5: A weapon in one hand and a tool in the other. (Nehemiah 4:15-23)

SESSION 4

Nehemiah 4: 1-23

Opening:

What's something you've had to endure (like a complicated project at work, a long line at an amusement park, a family reunion, etc.)? What helped you keep going?

Whether we're at the back of a line or waiting for a promotion, we often aren't where we want to be. In those instances, we need endurance—a characteristic that's hard to come by in our fast-paced world. If we face opposition and resistance, we're encouraged by our culture to take the easier route. But God often calls us to keep going. So what does it look like to push through opposition as we seek to follow God wholeheartedly?

In session 4, we will look at how the Israelites were able to face persistent pressure from their enemies and make progress on restoring the wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah 4 gives us a glimpse into how we can endure the resistance we face as we follow God.

Why do we face opposition?

Where does opposition to God's kingdom come from?

How do we endure the opposition we face?

Nehemiah 4 provides us with raw imagery of the difficulty the Israelites faced in rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. Despite opposition, God's people endured with a shovel in one hand and a sword in the other.

Read Nehemiah 4: 1-3

As the Israelites began to make progress on the wall, Tobiah and Sanballat opposed them by mocking them in verses 1-3 and later plotting to against them in verses 7-8. We might not face the same kinds of adversaries as the Israelites, but we can experience opposition to following God in many ways, including opposition within ourselves or external forces.

In what ways have you faced opposition as you've followed God and his commands?

We should expect opposition to God's kingdom, yet many of us are surprised by opposition.

Why do you think many of us are caught off-guard when we face opposition?

On the surface, Sanballat and Tobiah's antagonism toward Israel seems simply personal. However, much of the resistance God's people face originates from an unseen spiritual enemy, Satan. Even if we're opposed by people, we know there's often a spiritual foundation behind them.

In what ways is it difficult to grasp that surface-level issues often have a spiritual foundation to them? How might viewing your obstacles as spiritual change the way you respond to them?

We need situational awareness to notice spiritual opposition in our lives, especially when we are seeing growth in our faith. We need to observe what's going on in us and around us so we can be in tune with the spiritual reality behind our circumstances.

When have you noticed spiritual opposition in your life? What were the circumstances that helped you realize what was going on?

Being aware of opposition is helpful, but we also need to know how to combat it. Our faith in God gives us hope to move forward in the face of opposition. Notice how Nehemiah expresses his faith in God.

Read Nehemiah 4:4-5

The first thing Nehemiah did in the face of opposition was talk to God. Nehemiah shows us what it can look like to turn to God in difficult circumstances.

How do you typically respond to a difficult situation? What does it look like for you to go to God in prayer in tough circumstances?

Even though they encountered opposition, the Israelites persevered in faith and made progress on the wall.

Read Nehemiah 4:6-9

The essence of the chapter is found in verse 6: Despite opposition, the people persevered to rebuild the wall. Facing opposition is always difficult, but our faith in God propels us forward through it.

How has your faith in God helped you persevere through a tough situation?

Our growing faith helps us face even greater opposition, which is what the Israelites faced in verses 7-8 as their enemies plotted to fight them. The Israelites responded by praying to God and stationing a guard. Their faith and actions went hand-in-hand.

How can our actions reflect our faith in God?

The Israelites could have just prayed and not stationed a guard, which would have risked the progress they made. Instead, they thought practically and strategically and acted.

What does it look like to discern when we need to strategically act on our faith? How might God be prompting you to act strategically in your life?

As the enemies of Israel threatened those rebuilding the wall, the Israelites became disheartened. Nehemiah told the people to not be afraid of their enemies because of the greatness of their God who was with them. Nehemiah called them to place their trust in God.

What makes God trustworthy? What does it look like to trust him, especially in difficult times?

Read Nehemiah 4:15-23

The Israelites worked on the restoration of the wall while arming themselves to defend their people if necessary. Their actions were practical, but they were motivated by their belief in God.

In what ways does your faith in God motivate you throughout each day? What do your actions at work, at home, and in your community reveal about your faith?

Verse 16 tells us that half the people worked on the wall while the other half stood guard with weapons. By working together, they helped each other rebuild the wall and stay safe from their enemies. We can also help each other when we encounter opposition, whether it's spiritual, physical, or emotional.

In what ways do you value others' support when you are facing a challenging season? How might you support a fellow believer who's facing difficulty?

In verses 19-20, Nehemiah shared that God would fight for Israel. The Israelites were reliant on God to defend them against their enemies—they had to trust him. When we face difficult situations, we too can trust that God defends us and fights for us. He's always with us, and he ensures we are spiritually safe with him.

How does knowing that God is with you affect the way you respond to opposition?

This chapter reminds us that when opposition comes our way, we can exercise our faith in God by taking practical steps forward. Faith and action work hand-in-hand to help us endure difficulty.

In what ways are you experiencing opposition or difficulty right now? How might you trust God by taking action this week?

As God's people, we will face opposition. We might experience resistance on a surface level, but we know it originates in the spiritual realm as the enemy seeks to discourage progress of God's kingdom in and through our lives. In order to withstand attacks from the enemy, we must cling to a deeply rooted faith in God and move forward with practical action.

Remember, God actively fights for us. Therefore, we can move forward through opposition with hopefulness because our God is with us.

This next week, consider how you can endure opposition by expressing your faith through prayer and practical action.

Weekly Reading Plan:

Day 1: Outcry against slavery among the Jews. (Nehemiah 5:1-5)

Day 2: Nehemiah calls for justice. (Nehemiah 5:6-11)

Day 3: The people respond. (Nehemiah 5:12-13)

Day 4: Nehemiah's predecessors burdened the people. (Nehemiah 5:14-16)

Day 5: Nehemiah's table. (Nehemiah 5:17-19)

SESSION 5

If you had a superpower that was solely intended to help others, what would it be and who would you help?

In stories, heroes use their superpowers to help others and influence the world around them. In fact, any kind of power can either help or hurt people. Even though we don't have super strength or invisibility, we have all been given power to exercise influence at work, at home, or with our family and friends.

In Nehemiah 5, we encounter a situation in the Israelite community where those in power were hurting their fellow Israelites. Nehemiah responded to the injustice by bravely confronting the leaders and being an example of selfless leadership.

What injustices did Israel face, and how did Nehemiah bring about justice?

What kinds of injustices do we see in our culture today?

How should the church respond to injustice?

Nehemiah 5 shows us how power and influence can either make or break a community of people. On one hand, we see some in power exploiting the weaknesses of the people under them for their own personal gain. Yet, Nehemiah was a leader who set aside his power to bring justice to those around him.

Read Nehemiah 5: 1-5

Many of the Israelites at the time of Nehemiah worked in agriculture. But since their attention was on building the wall, they could not generate income for themselves. Some of their fellow Jews who were more financially stable exploited those with financial weaknesses for personal gain. People in power were utilizing their privilege to oppress people.

Why do you think some people view their power or privilege as an opportunity for personal gain rather than for someone else's gain?

The Jews were being taken advantage of by their own people. God's people are supposed to care for each other, and God hates when anyone is mistreated. Injustice shouldn't characterize the people of God, but, unfortunately, it often does.

In what ways do people take advantage of or behave unjustly towards others today? How has the church been involved in injustice?

There is a connection between justice and God's character and our role as his image bearers. To be God's people is to be those who both desire and bring about justice.

What does it mean to you that God is just? How can we imitate his justice as his people?

In verse 5, the people said they were powerless because what they owned had been taken away from them.

Who do you think may feel powerless in our community? Why do you think they feel powerless?

Read Nehemiah 5: 6-10

Verse 6 tells us that Nehemiah became inflamed with anger because his own people were being oppressed. His righteous anger moved him to provide relief for the people.

Have you ever felt righteous anger over an injustice? If so, what did your anger drive you to do?

Fueled by his righteous anger, Nehemiah boldly confronted the officials and nobles for exploiting the Israelites. Just as Nehemiah was for Israel, the church needs to be a prophetic voice for injustice issues in our world, not a "pathetic" one.

In what ways have you seen the church stand up for those who are oppressed? How can the church continue to speak up against oppression in our culture?

Read Nehemiah 5:11-13

Nehemiah told those in power to give back the land and all the money and resources they took from their fellow Jews. The people in power agreed, swore a public oath, and verse 13 tells us that they did as they promised. While their repentance was costly, they followed through on their word and the oppression was brought to an end. Their response shows us that for justice to be accomplished, words and actions must be in alignment.

Why do you think our actions sometimes don't match our words in seeking out justice? In what ways can we seek out justice with our words and actions?

Read Nehemiah 5:14-19

In verse 14, we see that Nehemiah was given power by the king of Persia to govern the Israelites. Ultimately, we know that God is the one who gives us authority and responsibility, and while we may not be a government official, we all have a sphere of influence we are responsible for. Our sphere of influence may be at home, at work, in a faith community, or with the family and friends God has entrusted to us.

What's your sphere of influence? How might viewing your sphere of influence as entrusted to you by God affect the way you operate in it?

In verse 15, we see Nehemiah's reasoning for not taking what was entitled to him: he feared God. Nehemiah's respect for God led him to honor others.

How might our perception of God affect the way we treat others?

The fundamental reason for the injustices in our world is that we do not view everyone as created in God's image. Each person, no matter their skin color, gender, age, economic background, or any other distinction, is made by God, reflects Him, and is valued by Him. Therefore, every person deserves to be treated with dignity.

In what ways do you treat others differently because you view them as created in God's image?

What might change in our community if everyone treated each other with dignity as God's image-bearers?

Former governors, who had similar motives to the nobles and officials, also oppressed the people. When leaders misuse their power, whether they are aware of it or not, the people they lead suffer.

Have you experienced a heavy burden that a leader has placed on you? If so, what kinds of emotions did you experience?

How does knowing how your actions impact others challenge you to steward the influence God has given you?

Because Nehemiah feared God and saw his fellow Jews as equals, he did not take the resources he had a rightful claim to as the governors did before him. Instead, he brought relief to the people by denying his own rights as governor. In order to gain the trust of people who have been oppressed, we must be willing to make sacrifices for them.

How might making sacrifices for others who have suffered help build their trust? What kinds of sacrifices might need to be made to help those who are oppressed in our world?

Each culture has an underlying system of values that are expressed in rights for people. Sometimes the rights our culture prizes are in line with God's Word, but sometimes they are not.

What are some rights your culture holds tightly to? In what ways might an overemphasis on your rights prevent us from acting justly toward others?

Nehemiah's actions encourage us to lay down our rights and make sacrifices so we can help bring justice to others. We can make sacrifices like using our free time to serve the underprivileged, giving financially to a cause fighting injustice, or getting out of our comfort zone to get to know someone different than ourselves. When we put ourselves in a

Posture of learning and giving, we can help others thrive.

What sacrifice can you make that could help someone around you thrive?

As God's people, we are to represent him by being a beacon of light to the world. We can show God's heart for people by caring for those who are hopeless and advocating for justice.

What could it look like for you to be a light to those around you this week?

Every person has been created in the image of God, and we honor him when we treat others with dignity, especially when they are oppressed. Regardless of the culture we live in, there will always be oppressed people around us—perhaps we have experienced oppression ourselves.

God has equipped us to be a blessing to others and boldly address the injustices around us by exchanging entitlement for service. Our sacrifices will help bring freedom to those under oppression. As we seek justice inside and outside the body of Christ, we bring light to darkness and reveal God's heart to the world.

Weekly Reading Plan:

Day 1: Enemies plot to harm Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:1-4)

Day 2: Sanballat spreads dangerous rumors about Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:5-9)

Day 3: Shemaiah prophesies to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:10)

Day 4: Tobiah and Sanballat's scheme is uncovered. (Nehemiah 6:11-14)

Day 5: The wall is completed and intimidation continues. (Nehemiah 6:15-19)

SESSION 6

What's one thing you can always be distracted by? Why do you think it distracts you?

Whether we like to admit it or not, we all can be distracted at times. Distractions can be self-imposed, or they can come from something as simple as a text, a viral video, or a chatty friend. Though often harmless, serious distractions can prevent us from doing what we are called to do.

In chapter 6 of Nehemiah's story, Nehemiah's enemies try to distract him from his God-given task to rebuild the wall. We will see how Nehemiah was able to push past opposition to restore the wall for God's people.

How does the enemy use emotions to distract us?

What role does truth play in navigating our emotions?

How should we approach the enemy's distractions in our lives?

By this point in the story, the wall has nearly been completed. Israel's enemies have grown increasingly concerned that the Israelites will establish a stronghold in the area, so they've hatched a plan to distract them.

Read Nehemiah 6:1-4

Sanballat and Geshem saw that the wall was nearly finished and tried to distract Nehemiah from his work by calling for a meeting with him outside the city.

How did Nehemiah respond to them in verses 3-4? What do these verses reveal about Nehemiah's focus?

In verse 2, Nehemiah recognized that his enemies were trying to harm him to take him away from his God-given work. We must identify and remove the distractions that can take us away from the work God wants to do in and through us.

What distractions in your life pull you away from God? What do you think would happen if those distractions were removed?

Nehemiah recognized what his enemies were trying to do and, as we see in verse 3, chose to prioritize the work on the wall instead of letting his enemies distract him. While we aren't rebuilding a wall like Nehemiah was, we all have God-given work—to become like him in our attitudes and actions, to obey him in every area of our lives, and to glorify him in our vocations.

How would you describe the work God has given you to do, both spiritually and vocationally?

Why do you think we sometimes don't prioritize God's work in our lives? What does it look like for you to prioritize God's work in and through your life above any distractions?

What do you believe is the work God has for our church? What distractions might be keeping us from completing this work?

Read Nehemiah 6:5-9

Sanballat spread false rumors about Nehemiah, saying Nehemiah wanted to establish himself as the king in Israel. This rumor could have been detrimental to making progress on the wall. Nehemiah gave his response to the rumors in verses 8-9.

How did Nehemiah respond to the rumors? What did he ask God to do? What stands out to you about Nehemiah's response, and why?

Rumors and lies can damage us emotionally and distract us from what God wants to accomplish in us. We need to speak truth to our emotions because while they may be real, they don't always point to the truth.

What makes emotions sometimes an unreliable source of truth?

When have you noticed your emotions directing you away from the truth? How did you respond?

In verse 8, Nehemiah said the rumor was false. Though the rumor could have threatened his life, he focused on the truth instead of allowing his emotions to inform his response.

How might you allow truth to dictate your response in highly emotional situations?

In verse 9, Nehemiah recognized that the enemy's ploys were meant to intimidate him. The Hebrew word for "intimidate" is littered throughout the passage in verses 9, 13, 14, and 19 and reveals that intimidation was the enemy's strategy to stop work on the wall.

In what ways can intimidation be an effective distraction from God's work?

Instead of giving in to the enemy's intimidation, Nehemiah prayed and asked God to strengthen him. Nehemiah consistently went before the Lord when he faced opposition to his work. God wants us to go to him, especially when we experience strong emotions.

When have you turned to God in prayer in a difficult situation? What did you pray? How did praying about your problem affect you?

In verse 9 and later in 14, Nehemiah prayed when he was threatened by his enemies. Prayer is not the dictation of our will to God, but our alignment with his will. Prayer helps us align ourselves with God instead of focusing on our emotions.

In what ways has prayer helped you shift your focus from your emotions to what God desires for you?

Read Nehemiah 6:10-14

As a prophet, Shemaiah should have been a good source of truth, but Tobiah and Sanballat paid him to deceive Nehemiah. Shemaiah's deception can remind us that we need to filter what we hear from people, media outlets, or the internet—even those we trust—through the truth of God's Word.

In what ways can you use Scripture to help you discern the truth?

According to God's Law, only priests were allowed to enter the innermost parts of the temple where God's holy presence dwelled. If Nehemiah went in, he could have sinned by desecrating the temple or even died from being in God's holy presence. Since Nehemiah knew the Law, he was not deceived by Shemaiah's deceptive warning. When we know the truth in God's Word, as Nehemiah did, we won't be easily deceived.

How well would you say you know the Bible? What could it look like to grow in your understanding of God's Word?

Read Nehemiah 6:15-19

Despite the extent of the damage and opposition, the work on the wall was completed in fifty-two days, showing God's sovereign and capable hand over the reconstruction. Nehemiah's enemies were trying to intimidate him, but in the end the miraculous completion of the wall intimidated *them*. The completion of the wall shows us what God can do through people who refuse to allow distractions and opposition to get in the way of his work.

What do you think God wants to accomplish through our church? What distractions or opposition do you face? What would it take for you to persevere?

No matter where we are on our journey with God, we will encounter opposition to God's work in and through us. To persevere through distractions as his followers, we can choose to focus on truth through prayer and engaging God's Word.

What could it look like to persevere this week by utilizing prayer and God's Word to focus on God?

As we pursue the Lord's work in and through our lives, we will undoubtedly encounter opposition. We may not face the same distractions Nehemiah had in rebuilding the wall, but we will face them in various forms. The enemy may try to discourage us through fear, lead us astray with ill-advised guidance, or distract us with our own ambitions. However, we can remain faithful to God by following Nehemiah's example of focusing on truth through prayer and engaging God's Word. As we follow the Lord, he will be faithful to carry out his work that will amaze us and the world around us.

When distractions come your way, stay focused on God's truth, and God will fulfill his work in and through you.

Weekly Reading Plan:

Day 1: Nehemiah delegates and finds the genealogical record. (Nehemiah 7:1-5)

Day 2: Record of the number of Israelite men who returned from exile. (Nehemiah 7:6-38)

Day 3: Record of the priests and temple servants who returned. (Nehemiah 7:39-56)

Day 4: Record of Solomon's servants who returned and genealogical disqualifications. (Nehemiah 7:57-65)

Day 5: Summary of the assembly and their contributions. (Nehemiah 7:66-73)

SESSION 7

Describe a time you experienced joy when you were surrounded by other people (maybe at a family gathering, a church service, or an event). What made it joyful?

We can experience joy alone but being with others causes our happiness to multiply. Parties become more vibrant, mutual experiences more memorable, and worship more powerful. God has called us unto community so that, as we gather, we can experience the joy of knowing him.

In Nehemiah 7-8, we will see God's people gather to hear from God through Scripture. After they hear the Scriptures read aloud—some of them for the first time—they collectively celebrate, rejoicing in learning more about God and his ways. We can experience that same joy today when we give our attention to God's Word.

What is one essential tool we need in our churches?

How should we respond to the reading of God's Word?

What can we learn about reverence for the Bible from the people in Nehemiah 8?

By the end of Nehemiah 7, the wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and the people were settling in their homes. For the first time in a long time, there was peace in God's city. But, the wall was just a tool—the people needed something more, something greater, to establish their relationship with God.

Read Nehemiah 7:73-8:3

The completed wall provided God's people an opportunity to live in peace and be a light to surrounding nations. But the wall was not their source of peace and light—only God could truly protect and provide for them.

What tools or blessings are we tempted to trust for peace and provision instead of God?

When our lives are going well, we may not feel like we need God—at least not as strongly as we do in times of suffering. But despite how we feel, we always need God.

What could we do to remind ourselves of our constant need for God's guidance, provision, and protection?

In verse 1, the people ask Ezra to bring the Word of God to them. The crowd desired to hear the Torah spoken over them.

In what ways do you think our churches would be different today if the people longed to hear God's Word? In what ways is your life different when you desire to hear God's Word?

Ezra spend the entire morning, from sunrise to noon, reading the books of the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy) out loud. As he read, the people attentively listened so that they could learn about God and his requirements for them.

Read Nehemiah 8:2-8

The crowd stood, attentively listening to Ezra for hours. It can be incredible to imagine with our shortened attention spans and busy lives. For some of us, it can be difficult to listen to a full sermon without feeling a desire to look at our phones. Even so, it is worthwhile to discipline ourselves to pay attention to the public reading and teach of the Bible.

What could you do to minimize distractions so that you might be more attentive to what God wants to teach you in his Word?

It is not enough to just read God's Word, we must respond to it.

Read Nehemiah 8:9-12

Worship isn't just when you lift your hands in worship. It's also your disposition. We are called to honor God through our attitudes and actions while participating in worship services. It is possible to sing worship songs or even feel encouraged by a Sunday service without a posture of reverence toward God.

What do you hope to get out of worship services? What attitude, engagement, and posture do you try to give to God during worship?

When people heard the Law, they were overwhelmed with sorrow. The Law describes sin in detail and God's requirements for his people. Those who were listening to Ezra, who understood all that was being read to them, clearly saw their sin and failure to live up to God's standard. Like the Israelites, we grieve when we recognize our sin.

In what ways was the sorrow of the Israelites the correct response to their sin? What should our response be toward our sin when we recognize it?

Ezra and the Levites instructed the people to not grieve because "the joy of the Lord is your strength." Their conviction under the Law was meant to drive them to God. As with Israel, we also do not have the strength to save ourselves—our sin is proof of that. But we do know the one who can and has saved us. Conviction should always push us toward our loving God.

How do you typically respond to conviction? Why?

The joy of God welcoming his people despite their sinfulness led the people of Jerusalem to break out in celebration. God has also made a way for us to be his people. Because of what Jesus has done, we can be forgiven and welcomed into a relationship with God. That is good news worth celebrating.

Is celebration a part of your regular worship? What would it look like for you and your community to celebrate the salvation we have in Jesus together?

After the public reading of the Word, the people committed themselves to understanding and obeying the Law.

Read Nehemiah 8:13-18

When the family leaders investigated the Law, they discovered a festival the Law commanded them to celebrate called Succoth or the Festival of Booths. When we think of God's Law, we tend to think of a list of boring rules to follow. But God's Law leads us into full, abundant life, which includes feasts and celebrations.

When you think of God's Laws and commands, what do you think of? In what ways does the Law's inclusion of festivals change the way you think about obedience to God?

What would it look like for you to commit to knowing the fullness of God's Word so you might obey it?

In verse 17, we see that obedience brought Israel tremendous joy. We don't always connect obedience with joy, but God will give us joy when we follow him. He is our good Father.

When has obedience given you joy?

The joy Israel experienced began when they gathered to hear the Scriptures. Like Israel, the joy of our relationship with God starts with our desire to hear from him. His Word teaches us who he is and the right way to live, and it leads us into joy.

When do you read the Bible? When do you read it with others?

What would it look like for you and your community to give more attention to reading, understanding, and obeying the Bible together?

Following God is not about living a boring, sad life. When we investigate God's Word, we find the path to tremendous joy. And when we obey God's Word, we find a life of communal celebration and peace. It will take focus and discipline for us to commit ourselves to the Scriptures. But every ounce of effort we give to knowing and obeying God will be worth the joy of knowing him.

Weekly Reading Plan:

Day 1: The people gather. (Nehemiah 8:1-6)

Day 2: The Levites explain the Law. (Nehemiah 8:7-9)

Day 3: The people celebrate God's Word. (Nehemiah 8:10-12)

Day 4: The people celebrate the festival. (Nehemiah 8:13-16)

Day 5: Celebration and a solemn assembly. (Nehemiah 8:17-18)

SESSION 8

Share about a time when you fixed something that was broken. What effort or resources did you have to spend to fix the damage?

When something is broken, we often think of replacing it. Rolling up our sleeves to repair something takes time, energy, and often money. But the effort of repairing our belongings or something in our community can be deeply satisfying.

Before Jesus, our lives were broken, but God did not discard us. He is in the process of refining us by calling us to habits of confession and repentance. But repairing the damage of our sin is not an easy task. In this lesson, we will learn about the practices of confession and repentance. Repairing the damage of sin is not easy, but it is eternally significant.

What does repentance look like?

How does redemptive history inform our relationship with God and others?

Why do we need to communally repent?

When the Israelites heard the Word of God in Nehemiah 8, they responded with remorse because they realized they were not following God's commands. But the Levites told them not to mourn when they celebrated the Feast of Booths. Now that the festival has ended, the Israelites had to confront their sin, which caused them both sorrow and repentance.

Read Nehemiah 9:1-3

For Israel to move forward in their relationship with God, they had to deal with their past. To mourn their sin, the Israelites covered their heads in dust, wore sackcloth, and fasted. Even though we have full forgiveness in Christ, like Israel, we should mourn our sin and the effect it has had on our lives and the lives of those around us.

What makes grief the correct response to sin? What do you think it looks like to mourn sin today?

Lament is acknowledging what has happened to and through you. But lament is not a simple task to be checked off our to-do list. It takes time to grieve the effects of sin.

Why do you think we tend to rush past mourning our sin?

Consider your life and, if you want to, share your answer to this question:

What sin in your life do you need to mourn?

In verse 2, the Israelites confessed both their sin and the sins of their ancestors. The idea of communal repentance is often foreign to us—we would rather point to specific people who have sinned rather than accepting that we, as a community, have been in error.

Why do you think we would rather take individual responsibility for sin than accept communal responsibility? When do you think it is appropriate to communally mourn and repent sin?

The Israelites stood to confess and repent of their sin. But their confession began in an unusual way.

Read Nehemiah 9:4-6

Israel began to mourn by praising God. He is the subject of every sentence in verses 6-15. We may not think of praise as a proper confession, but to truly confess, we must know who God is and approach him rightly.

In what ways could praising God affect the way we confess our sin?

Repentance is not just an agreement with God about our sin but an act of turning away from sin and embracing the life God calls us into. Think about when someone has apologized to you. It is one thing for them to say they are sorry, but something altogether different for them to change their behavior.

What are some ways we can help one another turn from our sin toward God's ways?

Israel's confession continued by retelling their redemptive history. Their prayer walks through the repeated faithlessness of their ancestors and the ongoing faithfulness of God.

Read Nehemiah 9:7-31

Reflecting on God's track record gave Israel a foundation for the future. When they recognized God's consistent faithfulness, they could be confident in their future with him. Verse 28 says, talking about God, "When they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven and rescued them many times in your compassion." God cared for Israel, despite their rebellion—and he does the same for us.

In what ways has God been faithful to you when you have gone astray?

Israel was not just mourning the effect their sin had on others, but the effect their sin had on their relationship with God.

In what ways can the sins we've not repented of affect our relationship with God?

It can be easy to look down our noses at Israel—they failed God so often! But, when we consider our own track record, our lives are not so different from theirs. We fail God every day. But we also see God's love through his faithfulness to us. Even when his people acted like his enemies, he loved them as his children.

How could we remind ourselves of God's unending faithfulness when we think about our past sin?

The confession concludes with the Israelites reflecting on their current situation.

Read Nehemiah 9:32-37

Israel knew they needed God's help to fix their current situation. Sin damages our relationships and ruins families, neighborhoods, and cities. Only God can fix our personal and communal problems.

What personal problems do you need God's help with? What communal problems do we need God's help with?

Though Israel was already in a covenant relationship with God, they needed to rededicate themselves to their covenant. We, as the church, also need to rededicate ourselves to God, reminding ourselves of our covenant with him and our purpose in him.

Is God leading you or our church to repent of anything in particular? If so, what is the next step of rededication (mourning, confession, and repentance) you need to take?

Despite our consistent failures, God is faithful to his people. We, individually and corporately, are prone to wander from him. We need his conviction and to be struck by the sorrow of our sin. But we do not need to stay in sorrow. When we come together and rededicate ourselves to Jesus, we can begin to heal and repair the damage sin has done.

Our sin will cloud the world's image of God. If we want to redeem our communities, live as witnesses to God's goodness, and fulfill his purposes for our lives, we will need to start with repentance.

Weekly Reading Plan:

Day 1: The Levites lead the people to praise God. (Nehemiah 9:1-8)

Day 2: God saves Israel and gives them the Law. (Nehemiah 9:9-15)

Day 3: God provides for Israel despite their rebellion. (Nehemiah 9:16-25)

Day 4: The continuous cycle of sin, discipline, appeal, and rescue. (Nehemiah 9:26-31)

Day 5: The people appeal to be rescued again and renew the covenant. (Nehemiah 9:32-38)

SESSION 9

What are some of your bucket-list dreams or goals?

What are you currently doing to reach those goals?

Many of us have big aspirations for our lives, but to reach those goals we must change our behavior today. We can only get to our desired future by working toward it. God also has a purpose for our lives. But if we are not wholly committed to him and his ways, we will be unable to go where he wants to take us.

In this lesson, we will look at the importance of communal dedication to God and the goodness our commitment to God can bring into the world.

Why do we, as a community, need to dedicate ourselves to God?

What does it mean to have a biblical worldview?

What should our relationship to the world be like?

In Nehemiah 10-12, we will continue to see Israel's spiritual renewal. God has been faithful to Israel through their sin and exile. Now God asks Israel to commit to being faithful to him. In chapter 10, the leaders of Israel gather to make a formal commitment to God.

Read Nehemiah 10:28-39

We often think of formal agreements as something for individuals—contracts are only binding for those who sign them marriage vows for those who agree to them, and promises for the individuals who make them. But here, the enter people enter into a formal agreement with God.

Do you feel like your commitment to God is more individual or communal? How so?

What could be the benefit of committing to God as a community?

The church is more effective as a community than it is as a disconnected group of individuals. We need one another for support, encouragement, correction, and wisdom. We need all of us, with our gifts, to work together to be effective in our community.

In what ways can the work of the church be damaged if we think of our commitment to God as only individual?

Verse 28 says the Israelites separated themselves from the surrounding cultures that did not commit to obeying God. While we should not let our culture dictate our pursuit of God, in many instances we have allowed our culture to shape the way we practice our faith.

In what ways do you see the church being swayed by cultural influences?

How might outside influences that do not honor God be impacting your faith?

We must have a biblical worldview—to see and think about our world the way God does.

When you have a decision to make or a circumstance that you do not know how to navigate, where do you go for answers?

What would it take for us to go to God for answers before anywhere else?

In Nehemiah 10, the people spend a lot of time recommitting to temple worship. Today, we do not have to travel to Jerusalem to worship in God's temple because God is with us through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, everything we do should be done as an act of worship. Every area of our lives should be committed to God.

What does it look like to worship God with your relationships? While running errands? At work?

There is a common misunderstanding within the church. While we are called to be different from our culture, we were never meant to be separated from it. God's people are to be insulated from culture, but not isolated from the world.

In your mind, what does it mean to be insulated from the world?

How can we balance the tension of being uninfluenced by the world while being involved with those who do not know Jesus?

We are all influenced by the media we consume and the people around us. Part of being insulated from the culture is knowing how and by what we're being influenced.

What media or people have the most influence in your life and the way you see the world? What could you do to evaluate what you watch and hear using a biblical worldview?

In verses 32-39, the Israelites commit their resources to worship in the house of God. The Mosaic Law mandated setting aside a certain amount of money or goods to contribute to the temple for the proper animal sacrifices to be made and to help support the priests who led the people in worship. Our worship looks different today, but we are still called to commit to holiness by sacrificing our time and material items to contribute to the worship of our God.

What does it look like for you to honor God by setting aside resources to help contribute to worship and ministry?

Do you find giving easy or difficult? How so?

How does generosity enable you to worship God more fully?

Tithing is not only an opportunity to contribute to ministry, but an opportunity to worship God. We can cheerfully give because we know that everything we have is a gift from God.

Weekly Reading Plan:

Day 1: Those who signed the covenant renewal. (Nehemiah 10:1-29)

Day 2: The vow of purity in marriage and sabbath. (Nehemiah 10:30-31)

Day 3: The vow of upholding the temple tax. (Nehemiah 10:32-39)

Day 4: Resettling Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 11:1-21)

Day 5: The Levites who settled in Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 11:22-36)

SESSION 10

What specific work might God be calling you to do today? What opportunities has he given you to serve him?

The principle that leaders should take the first step may seem a bit redundant. After all, a leader should actually lead. Some leaders, however, send their people first to try something when it is risky or likely to fail.

We see a different story unfold in Nehemiah. The walls have been built and the city was being restored. Unfortunately, the population of the city was too sparse. There weren't enough people to protect the city or create thriving businesses.

Read Nehemiah 11: 1-2

There are two quick things I want you to notice about these verses. First, the leaders led the charge in moving into the city. Second, the people didn't really want to live in the city. In fact, they had to cast lots to determine who go the short straw and had to move.

Isn't it strange that people would be hesitant to move into Jerusalem? This was their capital, their center of pride and accomplishment before exile. Wouldn't they want to joyously return? Scripture doesn't explicitly give a reason for their hesitancy to move, but when we've witnessed natural disasters in our own country, we begin to see a similar pattern.

As broken buildings are cleared and infrastructure is repaired, there often isn't an immediate flood of business back into the business district. People are often timid to return.

After we get on the same page with God, now we scatter into the world, throughout culture. Ninety percent of Israel did not live within the walls of Jerusalem. God providentially placed his people throughout Israel, among those who did not know him. We may not think of our placement as part of God's greater mission, but your neighborhood and workplace are providential placements.

Where has God placed you? Who in your neighborhood and workplace could you influence to know God?

Your sphere of influence is where God wants you to shine for him. He is strategically using you to build his kingdom. Whether it is a barista at your favorite coffee shop, your mail carrier, or your CEO, God loves the people he has put you around.

What would it look like for you to reflect God's goodness to those around you? How might you be intentional about sharing God's love with them?

Since Tobias and Sanballat kept threatening to send their armies and destroy the city, most preferred to keep a low profile in their local village. Others knew the city was nearly empty, how could they build a successful business there?

What steps of faith might God be calling you individually to take to increase his kingdom?

What steps of faith might God be calling our church to take to increase his kingdom?

But the leaders of Jerusalem knew that in order for Jerusalem to have an identity and fulfill its calling from God, someone needed to live inside the walls. Despite the risks to their safety and livelihood, they took the first steps and moved into the city before anyone else. Once there, they called people to follow. Some came willingly, others came when commanded, but the city filled again with life.

How is this similar to the current condition of our church? What might your first step as a leader in this church look like?

When you boldly make the first move, it inspires others. You will face risks and you might even lose, but great leaders take risks so their followers don't have to. Once you've blazed the trail and taken the first steps, invite others to follow. It's what leaders do.

Is God calling you to lead your family or a group at church into a new territory of ministry? If so, what might that be?

Are you waiting for someone to show leadership in a particular area of life? What do you want to see happen? What stops you from showing leadership in that area?

How does knowing Christ give you the confidence to take the first steps?

It is important to know that when we seek to try something new, there is a chance for failure. We must allow for failure as we try new ministries, new ventures, new evangelism. We need to recognize them as opportunities to learn, grow, and try something even better the next time.

What would it look like if you knew failure was ok? Would you be more willing to take a step of faith into what God is calling you to?

How can we develop an environment at church where we are willing to try, possibly fail, and then keep trying?

Read Nehemiah 11: 3-36

As we continue to discern the purpose and plans God has for our church, it is important to remember that **YOU ARE NOT A NUMBER!** Why do you suppose Nehemiah records so many names in his account of those returning to settle in Jerusalem? The names serve to focus our attention on the promises God made to His people. They remind the workers they are part of one special family of purpose. Perhaps most importantly, the names remind us that these were real people with real stories who made a real difference.

If we were to list all the difference makers who helped build Lansdale UMC, the list would be long. Hundreds and thousands of people have served and sacrificed in order to reach people far from God.

Where would your name be on the list of those who have faithfully served at and through Lansdale?

What are you most proud of when you think about how you have served God?

Every member at Lansdale has a name, every name has a story, and every story matters to God. God really does care about the people we are trying to reach. But, God also cares about the people already here.

God hasn't forgotten you. God is with us in the late nights and the early mornings, the long phone calls, and the prayers spoken through tears.

The mission to reach the world with the Gospel is a huge undertaking. We can never forget that the church's mission is fulfilled by individuals. Individuals who matter to God come together to fight and build and make a difference. God hasn't forgotten you. He knows the cares about our personal circumstances. Jesus knows us by name.

How does it impact you to know how intimately God knows and loves you?

Who in your life needs to hear about Jesus? Make a list and begin praying for them. Begin praying for God to give you opportunities to share your faith with them.

SESSION 11

Despite having scattered throughout the land, the people gathered back in Jerusalem to celebrate the work God had done.

Read Nehemiah 12:27-43

The Israelites gathered to worship and celebrate what God had done among them. In the same way, we regularly gather as the church to remind ourselves of God's Word, worship, and celebrate what God has done among us. However, many of us see Sunday worship as a to-do list item rather than a celebration.

How might seeing worship as a celebration of God's communal work change the way you view Sunday services? How might it change the way you worship during Sunday services?

God calls all of us to be a light for him in our culture. But that work begins with us dedicating ourselves to God's Word and ways.

What is one thing our church could do today to be more committed to God?

God has called his people to be a light to the world through a lifestyle of holiness, service, and celebration. Imagine what our world would look like if our lifestyles of celebrating what God has done for us would be evident to those who are "far off."

No matter where you are in your relationship with God, dedicate yourself to him today. Allow his Word to set you apart so that you can be his ambassador wherever he has placed you. Go be a light to the world by walking in holiness, intentionally serving where God has placed you, and celebrating what he has done.

Jerusalem's wall was finished in 52 days. Amazing! Nehemiah made plans to celebrate. Nehemiah passed out assignments, organized the people, and oversaw every aspect of the celebration. Nehemiah took the celebration as seriously as he took the building of the wall because he knew celebration was the final step of the project.

Romans 11:36: "For from him and through him and for him are all things." Nehemiah realized the building project started with God, was sustained by God, and was for God. Celebration reminds us that every success happens by the grace of God.

What do we need to be celebrating at Lansdale? Do we recognize and celebrate what God has and is doing here?

No matter what we are doing, thankfulness is not an add-on activity. Gratitude to God for all that He has done removes pride and opens the door to future blessings. Without thanksgiving, we would forget what is truly important. When we stop remembering God, we allow the unhealthy and false independence to grow. We begin to think we did it. And before we know it, we have removed God from our decision-making process.

What would it look like to truly give God all the glory for the accomplishments in our lives?

How does forgetting to have thanksgiving remove God from our decision-making process?

Our ability to make a difference is a direct result of Jesus' work in us. All our success is from Him, through Him, and for Him. So, why wouldn't we approach our victories with celebration and thanksgiving?

How can you do this better in your life? How can we do it better in the life of the church?

Read Nehemiah 12:27-29

They sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem. The Levites had many responsibilities in the life and worship of Israel, but one of the most important jobs that they had was to lead the people in songs of worship and praise to God.

What role or responsibility has God given you in the life of our church?

Those who were leading others in worship needed to be good singers, but most importantly, they had to be people of worship. There is a huge difference between being a great singer and being a great leader of songs of worship to God. Worship should be excellent, but it isn't entertainment. The goal isn't to give people a good feeling (though that may happen), but to give glory and honor to God. You cannot lead others well in an area that you are not strong in.

Do you feel as though you worship to give glory to God?

In verse 30, the priests and Levites purified themselves first. They could not lead the people in worship of God unless they walked in purity before the Lord. Then they purified the people. They brought cleansing to the people the way the Bible said to, knowing that only a purified people could really worship and praise God. Without purity, we can't worship God in spirit and in truth.

We can be made pure and clean before God today, right now, by doing what the Bible says to do—not in following the Old Testament ceremony, but by receiving the word of the New Testament: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9)

Are you able to truly worship God in spirit and in truth because you have been made pure and clean before God today?

Read Nehemiah 12: 31-43

The two large choirs were called thanksgiving choirs for a good reason. All praise and worship must have a strong element of thanksgiving to God for it to be genuine. Notice, the singers sang loudly. They were full of thanksgiving and great joy. All the people were overwhelmed with joy and thanksgiving, considering all God had done. And everyone was included, even the women and children.

Have you ever worshipped God while overflowing with joy and thanksgiving?

Do we worship God in a way that invites others into our worship so that no one is excluded?

The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off. Their worship was a testimony to others, and what others heard was not so much the singing itself as the JOY. We often worry about others hearing us sing but what God wants to hear, and what others should hear, is not so much your singing but your joy!

Would those listening hear our joy when we are worshipping?

Read Nehemiah 12: 44-47

This was a day of giving. People brought their offerings, the firstfruits and the tithes to the storehouse of the Levites, and they did it with joy because they enjoyed supporting the priests and Levites ministering on their behalf.

Do you give out of joy? How could your giving become more of an act of joyful worship?

This was a day of giving, a day of purity, a day of consecration. Giving in joy and as an act of worship. A day of purity, not just for this day, but as an ongoing desire and promise. A day of consecration, when holy things were set apart for the Levites, for the use in worship and ministry.

They devoted the city to God and to His honor. They took possession of Jerusalem for Him and in His name. We ought to do the same for our homes, our schools, our places of work, and our church. We need to dedicate our spaces to God, asking for His possession and presence to be there, asking for His protection. Dedicating our spaces to honor Him and bring Him glory.

What would it look like to dedicate your home to God's presence and glory?

When we dedicate ourselves and our spaces to God, we become more careful in our work and actions. There is an increase in diligence and watchfulness (v. 45).

What is the biggest mess you have ever had to clean up?

Messes are a part of life. When something small is wrong—a loose cap on a gallon of milk, a frozen pipe, or a slick spot on the floor—it can lead to serious problems. The same is true for our spiritual lives. Small compromises or cracks in our faithfulness can lead to big problems in our relationship with God.

In this last lesson from Nehemiah, we will look at how small decisions damaged the witness, worship, and work of God. Ultimately, sin is not a problem we can clean up on our own. We all need a savior.

After all the vows and redemptive work that has taken place in the book of Nehemiah, we might expect this book to end on a happy note. Instead, we see God's people make a series of small compromises that lead to disastrous problems. Nehemiah had left Jerusalem to return to his role in the Persian court, but in his absence Israel strayed from God's commands.

Read Nehemiah 13:1-10

Micro-compromises in our faith lead to massive diversions from God's purpose and mission. We are all tempted to make small compromises in our individual pursuits of holiness. We may not even notice our little compromises until they have led us far from God.

When, if ever, has a compromise led you to unexpected or unwanted places in your faith?

At some point, the people began to value an outside voice over God's, inviting Tobiah, who opposed the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, to live in God's temple. Letting outside voices guide God's people can be cancerous to our ability to serve God.

What voices or ideas have we allowed into our church? In what ways might their influence be diverting us from God's mission?

When Nehemiah learned about the desecration of the temple, he removed Tobiah and all his belongings. The first step of recommitting to God is getting rid of outside influences that damage the witness and work of the church.

Is there anything in your life God may be calling you to remove that doesn't honor him? What podcasts, media personalities, or influences might you need to remove from or diminish in your life?

Removing the bad influence from the temple was not enough for Nehemiah. In verse 9, we see him purifying the storehouse. Purification is restoring it to be viewed in the proper way. After we remove the outside influences or habits from our lives, we must reorient our minds to see ourselves the way God sees us.

Think about the habits that need to be removed from your life—what better purpose does God have for that area of your life? If you are unsure, what could you do to seek answers in God's Word or from God in prayer?

After Nehemiah removed Tobiah from the temple and purified the storeroom, he started using the storehouse for its intended purpose. He also reinstated the Levites and put them back to work in the temple.

Read Nehemiah 13:11-14

After removing the desecration and refocusing our vision to match God's, we have to recommit to God's mission. Like the Israelites, it is not enough to have a verbal commitment to God—we need to actively obey him.

**What areas of your life do you feel are not committed to God?
What could it look like to recommit those areas of your life to God?**

Nehemiah turned to God in verse 14, asking to be remembered for his faithfulness. Despite all his work rebuilding the wall and the rededication of the people, Jerusalem had still fallen into sin and apathy. There are times when standing for God can feel exhausting or even fruitless. But God does not forget the good work we have done in his name, even when we cannot see tangible results from our work.

How do you react when your faithfulness feels unrewarded, unnoticed, or unimpactful?

What could you do to remind yourself that God sees and remembers you?

The remainder of Nehemiah 13 addresses more compromises Israel made in Nehemiah's absence. It may be easy to think of their compromises as simple changes in behavior, but their actions revealed their hearts. Instead of honoring God, they ignored God and his commands.

Read Nehemiah 13:15-31

The Israelites broke their vow to keep the Sabbath by opening their gates to outside merchants. What God ordained as a holy day had become just another day of business. Our circumstances today may be different from the Israelites', but like them, we can easily be distracted from worshipping God.

What commitments, activities, or interests absorb most of your time? What compromises can these priorities ask us to make in our faith?

In verses 20 and 22, Nehemiah set up guards at the gates of Jerusalem to prevent the bustle of commerce from interrupting the Sabbath. There is wisdom in setting up safeguards to help us keep our priorities on Jesus.

What preventive measures could help keep you focused on worshipping God rather than the things of this world?

The final compromise Nehemiah found was intermarriage between God's people and those who worshipped other gods. When the Israelites married people from different cultures, their families wandered from the faith. In verse 24, we see that many of the families in Jerusalem did not even speak Hebrew. The children had no way to understand God's Word, much less obey it.

In what ways can families be tempted to wander from the faith today?

How can we, as a community, share the responsibility to raise children according to God's Word?

The book abruptly ends with the ongoing work in Jerusalem. It seems like Nehemiah's work will never be done. It may feel like an unsatisfying ending, but the unresolved nature of sin is the point of the book. We cannot fix our true problem. Nehemiah ultimately shows us our need for a savior, who we know is Christ.

What habits or sins point to our need for Jesus?

To sum up the Book of Nehemiah, Jesus is using it to call the church back to him and charging us to rededicate ourselves to him so that we can represent him in the world.

As you think back on this series, in what specific ways is God calling us to represent him in our community?

Do we, as a church, need to come together for a time of confession, rededication, and renewed focus on our mission to Praise God, Make Disciples, and Serve All?