



Nehemiah Study and Community Group Notes



Title: The title of Nehemiah derives from the central figure of the narrative.

Author: The author of Ezra probably wrote Nehemiah. The book contains personal records of Nehemiah, but he probably did not author the entire work. Some scholars believe that this same anonymous author also recorded 1-2 Chronicles. Though we do not formally know who authored the work, we can be confident that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Date: The events in this book occur over a period of around 20 years, from 445-423 B.C.

Theme: Nehemiah teaches us how God works in and through his people.

Nehemiah is the story of God *renewing* and *reforming* his people so that they have the courage, conviction and clarity to step forward to both pray and act as the people of God for the glory God.

Background

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1–3).

The LORD calls Abraham to proclaim His name among all nations. As the father of a future nation, a holy assembly dedicated to the LORD, Abraham is blessed with these great promises to be inherited by grace through faith. The promises are to pass from generation to generation for all who truly worship the God of Abraham, eventually to be inherited by His Church today through Jesus.

This family of Abraham grows as the promise passes from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and to his 12 sons. When famine strikes the earth, God protects His people by sheltering them in the land of Egypt. The people of Israel settle in the land and enjoy a period of peace and prosperity, but eventually outgrow their welcome and become enslaved by the Egyptians. But God is faithful.

As the nation cries out for deliverance, the LORD hears their cries. In faithful compassion, He sends Moses. The people are ransomed from slavery and pass over dry land through a parted sea which subsequently swallows their enemies.

The LORD brings Israel to a mountain, on the cusp of the Promised Land, the edge of the inheritance. He tells them of His expectations and makes a covenant. They will be His people; He will be their God.

If His people keep the provisions of the covenant, they will be blessed; if not, curses await. The blessings are plenteous – joy, abundance and God’s presence with the people. The curses are severe – famine, plague and eventual exile. He warns them. Israel is called to put away her idols and turn again to the one true God.

Rather than trust, the people mumble, grumble, groan and moan in the midst of miraculous manna and water-shedding rock. They rebel against the righteous rule of the God of their fathers. They crave what they don’t have, ungrateful for what they do have. They fail to trust, fail to believe, fail to worship. It won’t be the last time. But God is faithful.

After 40 years of wandering, the people enter the land as the LORD drives out their enemies through Joshua and the judges. **God rules in their midst, but the nation called to be distinct from all other nations wants to be like all the others.** They reject the reign of the LORD in favor of a human king. They are given Saul, a man big, strong and beautiful, but lacking the wisdom and grace to lead this nation. He is rejected. But God is faithful.

God gives the people a new king with a poet’s heart and shepherd’s staff, a man after God’s own heart. Under David, the kingdom is united and secured. David proves faithful, but flawed. His son, Solomon, inherits a realm of relative peace and harmony and builds the temple, the place in which God’s presence dwells among His own.

After Solomon’s reign, the people are torn into two nations. The Northern Kingdom, often referred to as Israel, is ruled by wicked king after wicked king, and the people follow their leaders until they are swept away into Assyrian exile around 722 B.C. The Southern Kingdom, often referred to as Judah, fares somewhat better. They alternate between faithful and unfaithful kings and, thus,

linger longer in the land of their fathers. But they too face exile for their disobedience through three periods of deportation. In 586 B.C. Jerusalem is ravaged, the temple destroyed and the nation carried off into this final Babylonian captivity.

The LORD judges the two kingdoms for their unfaithfulness, but He remains faithful and merciful and waits patiently to again pour out His grace upon His people.

The book of 2 Chronicles ends with this bright light of hope:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia,

So that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'" 2 Chronicles 36:22–23

The book of Ezra picks up where Chronicles concludes. Ezra tells of the rebuilding of the temple – the place where God’s presence manifests among His people. The temple, completed in 516 B.C., a significant 70 years after the fall of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:21), will stand until the day a new temple takes its place, a temple made without human hands, a temple that is the body of Christ.

Originally joined as one book in various Hebrew manuscripts, Ezra passes the narrative torch to Nehemiah. Around 445 B.C. Nehemiah, the cupbearer of the king of Babylon, travels over 800 miles (500 as the crow flies) to return to the land of his forefathers and rebuild the wall for the security and peace of Jerusalem, the “city of peace.”

Nehemiah functions as a sequel to the events described in Ezra. The book is an account of God’s faithfulness to His promises and thus foreshadows the gospel reality of a merciful and gracious God who provides for His people even in the midst of their infidelity.

The book opens with a group of exiles from Babylon who return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around the city. Though the people are hard pressed by opposition, the Lord strengthens His people for His work, and they are able to rebuild the wall. From there, the narrative describes the recommitment of the people to the provisions of God's covenant.

There are a variety of complementary ways to read Nehemiah. The title character himself provides helpful snapshots into the affections and integrity of a leader, and the book overviews an important development in the history of God's redemptive plan. These are helpful ways to read the book and provide beneficial insight for our edification, but they are not ultimate.

Nehemiah is ultimately about the rebuilding of God's people through renewal and transformation. As we read the book, we see the faithfulness of our God and His steadfast love toward His own, a love that eventually and fully manifests in the giving of His Son to be the better temple and to establish the better city prepared for those who love Him and joyfully submit to His good rule.

In Summary:

1. Nehemiah was a Jewish man who lived in the Persian city of Susa. He was cupbearer to the king and author of this book of the Bible.

2. In the history of God's people, the events recorded in Nehemiah happened...

- a) 1,000 years after Moses led God's people out of slavery in Egypt (1446 B.C.).
- b) 590 years after David defeated Goliath (1035 B.C.). During this time, Jerusalem became the Holy City. It was the special place God chose to dwell among his people. Later David's son Solomon built the Temple. To rightly worship God, you had to go to Jerusalem and worship at the Temple.
- c) 160 years after Daniel was exiled to Babylon (605 B.C.). After David and Solomon, the people's sin and the wickedness of many of the kings brought God's judgment. The kingdom was divided. The northern 10 tribes of Israel were exiled, and eventually the same happened to the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. In 605 B.C.,

Judah was attacked by the Babylonians, and many were exiled to Babylon. But Jerusalem was not destroyed.

- d) 141 years after Jeremiah prophesied (586 B.C.) the destruction of Jerusalem because God's people would not forsake their wickedness. God used the Babylonians to level the city of Jerusalem, burn and topple the walls and destroy the Temple.
- e) 33 years after Esther was made Queen of Persia (478 B.C.). It is possible that Nehemiah's life was one of those saved because of Queen Esther's courage.
- f) 13 years after Ezra led a second group of exiles (458 B.C.) back to Judah. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah basically function like one book—they're two key parts of the same story. Ezra tells how the temple was rebuilt. Nehemiah shares how the city wall was rebuilt.

Nehemiah teaches us how God works in and through his people.

Nehemiah is the story of God *renewing* and *transforming* of his people so that they have the courage, conviction and clarity to step forward to both pray and act as the people of God for the glory God.

Sermon Outlines

January – April 2016

Part 1: A Passion for a Cause

Nehemiah 1

We live in a world of broken walls. As God revives His people their compassion increases and the cause becomes clear. God's people desire to see change that will glorify Him.

Part 2: Pray and Take Action

Nehemiah 2:1-8

Prayer and action are essential aspects of how God sees His purposes accomplished in our broken walled world.

Part 3: Rising Up to Rebuild

Neh 2:11-3:32

God's reviving work comes as we humbly inspect our own lives, increasingly be open to the inspiration of the Spirit and mobilize as one people.

Part 4: Opposition

Neh 4; Neh 6:1-16

God will build His church but Satan will do everything he can to bring a variety of opposition and hardships to those who are involved in the plan!

Part 5: Generous Unity

Nehemiah 5

Disunity in the church is enough to make any vision stall until it is resolved. Greed, oppression, and indifference needed to be replaced by joyful generosity and unity so the work could continue.

Part 6: By the Book

Nehemiah 8

Revival starts as God's people humbly submit to His word and learn to listen to His voice.

Part 7: Confession

Nehemiah 9

Confession is a natural step as we face the reality of who we are and who God is. As His people seek forgiveness and healing then God moves powerfully.

Part 8: Revival

Nehemiah 9:38-10:39

When God revives His people they commit to change, they focus on being different from the world by showing love, passion and action.

Part 9: Celebrate!

Nehemiah 12:27-47

We celebrate as we remember God's faithfulness and love. For His glory our joy!

Part 10: Constant Change

Nehemiah 13

An experience of revival doesn't mean our work is over. The pull of the world never lets up, and we need to humbly hold each other accountable to God's word.

TALK IT OVER NOTES

******Please note – it's important that you listen to the sermon for these questions to make sense. Please go to willowparkchurch.com to download the latest sermons.**

Part 1: A Passion for a Cause

Nehemiah 1

We live in a world of broken walls. As God revives His people their compassion increases and the cause becomes clear. God's people desire to see change that will glorify Him.

Talk it Over Notes

1. Why was Nehemiah's so broken when he heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down? Have you ever responded similarly to the condition of your own life or an issue that you have heard about?
2. Phil and Glen shared that when God's Spirit begins to move among his people, they see the broken walls of sin and compromise and begin to care. Has your heart ever been broken over the state of today's church? When was the last time you prayed for revival and reformation?
3. Are there areas of your life that you struggle to give over to Jesus, i.e. work, leisure, entertainment, music, the internet, relationships, marriage, etc.? What blessings has God promised when we surrender all to Jesus? Discuss some examples of when this has been evident.
4. Why can we have confidence that if we turn to God and cry out for his help, he will help, revive and reform our lives and his church? What scriptures come to mind when you consider this?
5. Take time, as a community group, to pray. Ask for God's forgiveness

for areas of sin and compromise in our church. Ask the Lord to revive and reform our lives, individually and corporately.

Part 2: Pray and Take Action

Nehemiah 2:1-8

Prayer and action are essential aspects of how God sees His purposes accomplished in our broken walled world.

1. Nehemiah prayed for the impossible. What is on your list of impossible prayer requests?
2. Nehemiah prayed for four or five months before the Lord answered his prayer to present his request to the king. What makes it difficult to persevere in prayer for an extended period of time? How can knowledge of God's character grow your faith to persevere in prayer?
3. How has the Lord used fasting and prayer in your life to advance his kingdom? Is this a discipline you practice regularly or one in which you desire to grow?
4. Faith-filled prayer is not at odds with action. What can you do now to prepare to take action, to speak or to go when the Lord opens a door?
5. Does the welfare of the church and the advance of God's purposes in the church and the world grip your heart like it gripped Nehemiah's? If not, what might be hindering your wholehearted engagement?

Part 3: Rising Up to Rebuild

Neh 2:11-3:32

God's reviving work comes as we humbly inspect our own lives, increasingly be open to the inspiration of the Spirit and mobilize as one people.

Community Group Leaders: Take time to read through the passage, remind folks of the main points, and remind them of Nehemiah's historical setting (see the Nehemiah Part 1 and 2 outlines for historical background).

1. Honestly inspecting the broken walls of our lives and of the church is essential to strengthening the church. Where is God calling you to honestly and humbly inspect the walls of your life (e.g., relationship with the Lord, friends, marriage, parenting, work, etc.)? Where might repentance and growth be needed?
2. What were Nehemiah's motives for inspecting the walls? How should his example guide observations or concerns we bring to fellow believers and to the church?
3. After inspecting the walls, Nehemiah used his experience of God's grace to influence and inspire the people. In what relationship (e.g., home, work, neighborhood, friends, etc.) is God calling you to utilize your influence? How might you draw attention to God's goodness and grace?
4. The diversity of the laborers in rebuilding the wall is a principle for the church: God's church works when *every member* is working. Have you taken your place at the wall of Willow Park Church? Are you laboring to build?

Part 4: Opposition

Neh 4; Neh 6:1-16

God will build His church but Satan will do everything he can to bring a variety of opposition and hardships to those who are involved in the plan!

1. According to chapter 4, why did Nehemiah face opposition? How did he respond? How do you typically respond when you face opposition for your faith?
2. Opposition can come in various forms: personal, cultural, governmental or institutional. In what ways have you faced opposition because you were a Christian?
3. The devil's tactics of opposition are to scorn, threaten, distract, and/or discredit. What has been your experience? How can you turn to God when the enemy of your soul begins to "roar" (1 Peter 5:8)?
4. Nehemiah's response to opposition was to keep his eyes on God and the work the Lord had given him to do. How can Nehemiah's example inform your future responses to opposition?
5. Why is your practice of prayer an important test that you are responding rightly to opposition? How can you grow in making prayer your "default" response?

Part 5: Generous Unity

Nehemiah 5

Disunity in the church is enough to make any vision stall until it is resolved. Greed, oppression, and indifference needed to be replaced by joyful generosity and unity so the work could continue.

1. What kindled Nehemiah's anger in Nehemiah 5:1-10? To what did he call the Jews in response (see Nehemiah 5:11-13)?

2. Who are the spiritually and financially needy in your life? Are there practical ways to invest in their spiritual growth or assist them with their finances?
3. In what ways does the church experience the broken walls of disunity? What are the effects of disunity? How does the gospel enable restoration and maintenance of unity (see Eph. 4:1-3)?
4. How might the Lord be calling you to do your part in building unity in the church through generosity? What might that look like practically?

Part 6: By the Book

Nehemiah 8

Revival starts as God's people humbly submit to His word and learn to listen to His voice.

Take time to read Nehemiah 8 as a Community Group.

1. In Nehemiah 8:1-12, how did God's people receive the reading and instruction of God's Word? Do you receive it similarly when God's Word is read, preached or taught?
2. How would you describe your intake of God's Word (reading, memorizing, meditating, hearing) this past month? Where are you encouraged? Where do you desire to grow?
3. In Nehemiah 8:13-18, how did God's people respond to the commands of God's Word? Is your response similar?
4. In order to be reformed by God's Word means we have to believe and

obey what it teaches. This leads to life change. Where is it easy for you to obey Scripture? Where do you find it difficult to obey?

5. Psalm 119:32 states, "I will run in the way of your commandments for you set my heart free!" In what ways have you experienced the freedom and joy of obeying God's Word?
6. Take time to pray together: that the Lord would give our church a heart to receive his Word with joy and to revive and reform us with his Word.

Part 7: Confession

Nehemiah 9

Confession is a natural step as we face the reality of who we are and who God is. As His people seek forgiveness and healing then God moves powerfully.

1. Take time as a community group to read Nehemiah, Chapter 9.
2. In what practical ways can you grow in your knowledge and experience of God's character?
3. How did the Israelites talk about their sin (see Nehemiah 9:16, 26, 29 and 30)? Do you refer to your sin similarly? In what ways have you justified your sin or taken it lightly?

4. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 7:10 that “godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation...” (NIV). When is the last time you prayed that the Lord would break your heart over your sin?
5. Like the Israelites, our history is a testimony to God’s grace and mercy, despite our rebellion and sin. What is your story of God’s amazing grace and mercy?

Part 8: Revival

Nehemiah 9:38-10:39

When God revives His people they commit to change, they focus on being different from the world by showing love, passion and action.

1. As a community group, read Nehemiah 9:30 – 10:39.
2. In Nehemiah 9:30-31, 33, 36-37, what connection did the people of God make about their predicament and their lack of obedience to God?
3. In Galatians 6:7-8, the Apostle Paul writes, “for whatever one sows, that will he also reap ... the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption ... the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” Is your current predicament largely the result of sinful choices and sowing to the flesh? If so, what specific steps can you take to repent, grow and change?
4. To bear witness to the gospel and glorify God, the church must be distinct from the world around us. In what ways is your life distinct? In what ways are you no different from the world? Where would you desire to grow?

5. In what specific and important way should the church be distinct from the world (see John 13:35)? Where can you grow in demonstrating this important characteristic?

6. God's people obligated their treasures (time, effort, possessions and money) and invested those treasures in the house of God (see Nehemiah 10:32-39). How are you investing your treasures (gifts, time and finances) to care for God's church? Where would you desire to grow?

Part 9: Celebrate!

Nehemiah 12:27-47

We celebrate as we remember God's faithfulness and love. For His glory our joy!

1. Take time as a care group to read Nehemiah 12:27-47.

2. Nehemiah 12 is a passage about corporate celebration. Why is it important for God's people to mark special occasions and important times together with a dedication and/or celebration?

3. As you consider Sundays at Willow Park Church, where do you see the gifts of organization and administration functioning in the Body?

4. The dedication of the walls marked an important moment of God's grace in the life of God's people. What is the important moment we mark and celebrate when we gather each Sunday?

5. In Nehemiah's day, the people gathered to dedicate the walls and to remember the great things God had done for them. How can you make Christ's finished work (His life, death, resurrection and ascension) the focal point of your Sunday celebration?

6. God blesses His people with joy and gladness when they thankfully remember what he's done for them. How can you cultivate a lifestyle of thankfulness for all of God's grace and mercy in your life?

7. Take time as a family, friends or small group to give thanks to God and remember all that he has done for you in Christ Jesus. ¹

Part 10: Constant Change

Nehemiah 13

An experience of revival doesn't mean our work is over. The pull of the world never lets up, and we need to humbly hold each other accountable to God's word.

1. Take time to read Nehemiah 13 as a community group.
 2. In regards to revival, how does Nehemiah's story rightly adjust extremes we can adopt? Why is this a helpful correction?
 3. Where are you tempted to "conform" to the world's ways or values? What steps can you take to renew your mind and heart (see Romans 12:1-2)?
 4. The most loving thing we can do for a fellow believer wandering
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toward or ensnared in sin is to bring loving correction. How is loving correction a means of grace to those who receive it? How well do you give or receive correction? Why is it a lack of love, at times, to ignore sin and compromise?

5. In the face of what seemed like wasted efforts, why was Nehemiah able to persevere and press forward?
6. How can living for others' approval or for success in our efforts tempt us to place our hope and identity in the wrong things? How does remembering our identity in Christ enable us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1)?
7. How does this closing chapter of Nehemiah point us forward to Christ?