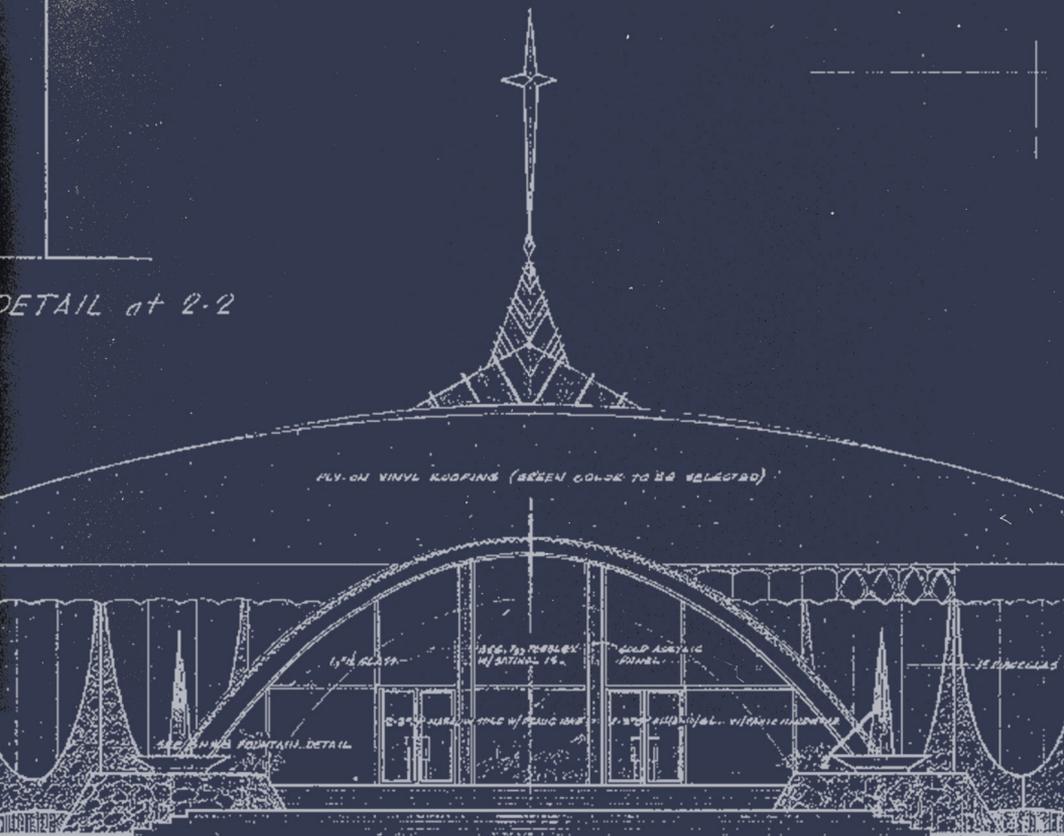


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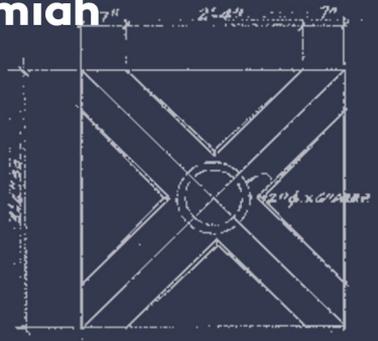


REBUILDING HOME

A Study in Nehemiah

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MARK DRISCOLL

REBUILDING HOME

A Study in Nehemiah

REALFAITH.COM

By Mark Driscoll

Rebuilding Home: A Study in Nehemiah
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REAL GROUPS WITH REALFAITH

Faith that does not result in good deeds is not real faith.

James 2:20, TLB

At RealFaith, we believe that the Word of God isn't just for us to read, it's to be obeyed. And living in community with fellow believers is one of the ways God the Father allows us to learn and grow to become more like His Son Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. We do this through something called Real Groups. Here are a few tips to start your own.

1. Invite

Invite your friends, neighbors, family, coworkers, and enemies, because they all need Jesus whether they know Him or not! Whether it's a group of men, women, families, students, or singles, explain that you'd like to start a weekly sermon-based small group based on Pastor Mark Driscoll's sermons.

2. Listen to the sermon on realfaith.com or on the RealFaith app

You can host a viewing party to watch RealFaith Live and discuss it all at once, or you can watch it separately and gather to discuss it at another time that works for the group.

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3. Get into God's Word

In addition to watching the sermon, make sure you and all group members have a study guide from realfaith.com for the current sermon series. There are questions for personal reflection as well as for groups that can guide your devotional times throughout the week. You can also sign up for Daily Devos at realfaith.com.

4. Gather together

Whether at someone's house, a public place, or through something like Zoom, meet weekly to discuss the sermon and what God has taught you through it. The great thing about Real Groups is that you don't all have to be in the same location. You can talk about sermon takeaways, what stood out to you in the study guide, or what God taught you in His Word that week. Focus on personal application as much as possible.

5. Pray

When you gather, feel free to share prayer requests, pray for each other on the spot, and continue praying throughout the week. Prayer is a great unifying force that God gives us to strengthen His family.

6. Share

Send us photos, videos, testimonies, and updates of how your group is doing to hello@realfaith.com. You might even be featured on our RealFaith Live show!

There are plenty more resources to discover at realfaith.com/real-groups, as well. We will be praying for you and your group and look forward to hearing what God does through it.

PREFACE

Christ and Culture: When God and Government Collide

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." – Jesus in Matthew 5:14

The Bible opens in Genesis with a beautiful garden paradise. The Bible closes in Revelation with the vision of Heaven as a paradise urban city called the New Jerusalem. Throughout the Bible, the city of Jerusalem (also called Zion) is set forth as the prototypical city that is supposed to belong to God and shine forth as a holy city in example to the other cities of the earth. Jerusalem is so important that it is mentioned around 1000 times in Scripture. A city has both greater density and diversity than suburban and rural areas. For the first time in the world's history, today roughly half of the world's population is urban.

Despite beloved images of biblical characters tending to sheep in remote hills, Christianity is historically an urban religion. The history book of early Christianity, Acts, reveals that Christianity began as an urban movement led by Paul, whose itinerant church planting ministry was almost exclusively urban as he moved from city to city and bypassed the rural areas. Historians like Rodney Stark and Wayne Meeks say that by 300 AD, upwards of half of the people living in major Roman cities were Christian, while more than ninety percent of those living

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in the countryside were still pagan. Curiously, our word “pagan” likely came from the Greek word *paganus* which meant “someone who lives on the farm” as most of the Christians lived in cities and most pagans lives on farms. God’s people should bring the gospel to any place that there are people as God loves all people. However, since there are more people in the city it also makes sense that bringing the gospel to cities would be a priority.

A city is the most strategic place for Christians and the gospel. Culture is like a river. Cities are upstream, creating culture that then flows downstream to the masses. Because government, law, education, healthcare, information, media, arts, sports, entertainment, trade, travel, population and industry are concentrated most in a city, cities are the fountains from which culture flows. To transform culture, God calls some Christians to live as missionaries in cities, and bring the culture of God’s Kingdom to the city.

Susa (the city of man) vs Jerusalem (the city of God)

In *The City of God*, the early church father Augustine provided a uniquely Christian perspective on history, politics, and culture contrasting the city of God with the city of man. His basic thesis is that people either live culture up, building their own nations and cultures without reference to God as typified in the Bible by the city and Tower of Babel, or kingdom down, seeking to follow the pattern of the Kingdom of God in answer to Jesus' prayer that His Kingdom would come and will would be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

The backdrop of Nehemiah is a division between two cities. Division literally means two visions, and the cities of Susa and Jerusalem were intended to have different visions as one represents the culture up city of man, and

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the other was supposed to represent the Kingdom down city of God.

Susa was the winter capital of the godless Persian Empire. Its name means “lily”, as lilies grew in the area. Nehemiah served Susa’s royal palace. As a Jew, Nehemiah was far away from home working for the enemy kingdom that had crushed and closed the city of Jerusalem, cancelling the worship of God. Nehemiah 2:9-19 is the report of his trip to quietly investigate the destroyed and desolate city of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was supposed to be the earthly capital of God’s Kingdom. Its name means “city of peace” and it was meant to be ruled by King Jesus, the Prince of Peace. King David established it as the capital city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah opens with him in Susa, heartbroken for Jerusalem, and working to rebuild the walls and city as a home for God’s people to worship Him in chapters 3-13.

Nehemiah's rebuilding of Jerusalem literally preserved our faith. Jerusalem is the place from which Christians trace their inception as the fulfilment of Judaism. The city was great because it was the place from which God’s name went out to the world^a, was a throne of God on the earth^b, and was home of the Temple where sin was atoned for and God was worshipped. Much of Jesus' ministry occurred in Jerusalem, including His weeping over the city, much like Nehemiah.^c After His resurrection from death, Jesus walked back toward Jerusalem.^d Before ascending back into Heaven, Jesus commanded His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit.^e One day, Jesus will also return to Jerusalem^f and establish the New Jerusalem.^g Until then, the battle between God and government

^a 1 Kings 11:36, 14:21; 2 Kings 21:4; Deuteronomy 12:5, 12:11

^b Psalm 48 ^c Luke 19:28, 41-44 ^d Luke 24 ^e Acts 1-2 ^f Zechariah 14:1-5

^g Revelation 3:12, 21:2

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continues on the earth.

When God and Government Collide

The motivation of Susa to leave Jerusalem in ruins and uninhabited was both political and spiritual. One Bible dictionary explains, “During Nehemiah’s governorship, the Judean province was less than 900 square miles, an area easily controlled by a formidable central city. For this reason, the foreigners living in the trans-Euphrates satrapy strongly opposed the rebuilding of the walls of the city: If the Jews were able to secure this central fortress by raising its walls, they would once again dominate the land of Israel; if the Jews were unable to restore the walls, they would be relatively powerless to resist an enemy’s attack. These foreigners were led by Sanballat the Samaritan, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab—each the governor of his respective region. Together, these three governors represent the nations surrounding Jerusalem and the territory of Judaea on all three sides—Samaria to the north, Ammon to the east, and Arabia to the south (the Mediterranean Sea borders Judaea to the west).”¹¹

For God’s people to live freely and worship biblically meant a loss of power to the godless government. For this reason, God’s people had to be politically engaged to secure religious freedom. To be sure, some believers can go too far and care more about converting people to be voters of their party instead of worshippers of their God. However, if God’s people are not involved in all spheres of society – politics, entertainment, education, etc. – then their freedom to worship God will be eventually forbidden, as we see in Nehemiah. In a world where there is political pressure pulling God’s people to the left and right, Nehemiah is a brilliant case study in going up to God

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for vision, and going down to the culture to wisely and courageously find a way to set up the city of God. There, God's people can live Kingdom down, worshipping God and serving as a countercultural witness to others that the best way of life is the life governed and guided by our God. This understanding of the city of God vs the city of man sets the stage for the man and mission of Nehemiah, which we study next.

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CHAPTER 1

Nehemiah: The Man and His Mission

There was never a revival of religion without a revival of his opposition. As soon as Ezra and Nehemiah begin to labor, Sanballat and Tobiah are stirred up to hinder them. What then? We are not alarmed because Satan hindereth us, for it is a proof that we are on the Lord's side, and are doing the Lord's work, and in his strength we shall win the victory, and triumph over our adversary. — Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The book of Nehemiah reports one of the finest leadership initiatives in all of history, with the restoration of the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah is a vital case study for leaders seeking to build churches as a countercultural city within cities. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:14, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” The calling of God’s people throughout history has not been to conform to the surrounding culture or expect unbelievers in the world to obey God. Instead, God’s people are called to live as a countercultural subculture, bringing the values of the Kingdom of God down to the people of God living as a witness to the world of a better way of life under King Jesus. This is the driving purpose behind the massive building project and spiritual revival in Nehemiah.

Nehemiah’s name means, “Yahweh is my comfort”. He is constantly hated, opposed, slandered, sued, lied about,

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and plotted against. Most people would break under such unrelenting and unfair pressure. Nehemiah, however, remained resolute because he continually met with God in prayer, worship, and journaling to receive the comfort and confidence he needed from God.

Nehemiah's father was named Hacaliah, although we know virtually nothing about him or his brothers, including Hanani who is named (1:2). Nehemiah's family was likely prominent and prosperous since the family burial tomb was in Jerusalem (2:5). In this family, we see that God not only uses the poor and unknown, but also the rich and known, if their hearts are devoted to Him.

Nehemiah loved God and was a seemingly average believing man working a government job and was not a religious professional. Much of the book are his journal entries (chapters 1-7, 13). Although he is recognized by many as one of the greatest leaders in all of Scripture for rebuilding a city (in a short 52 days after 141 years of prior failed efforts), he is never mentioned in the New Testament.

In the winter season (November-December) of 445 BC, nearing the end of the writing of the Old Testament, news was brought to Nehemiah by either his actual brother or a close male relative regarding how God's people were faring far away in Judah, in the city of Jerusalem. Under King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians attacked the city 141 years prior, destroying it and carrying many of God's people into exile, as reported in Daniel.

God's people had so dishonored, disregarded, and defied Him that He sent a succession of prophets to rebuke them of sin and invite them to return to God or face divine judgment before the fall of Jerusalem occurred:

- Isaiah 13:1, 17-19 – The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw...Behold, I am

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stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. Their bows will slaughter the young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb; their eyes will not pity children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.

- Isaiah 39:6–7 – “Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”
- Jeremiah 27:4-7 – Give them this charge for their masters: “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: This is what you shall say to your masters: ‘It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me. Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes. Then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave.’”

Despite the pleading of the prophets, people did not turn from their sin and trust in their Lord. So, the city was destroyed and largely abandoned because it was defenseless. God’s people were discouraged, unable to live or worship freely and biblically for 141 years, despite multiple failed rebuilding attempts. The wall was necessary if God was to have a people and a place for

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the coming of Jesus Christ.

Nehemiah Is About What Always Happens

Sometimes, people wrongly dismiss the Bible because they think it is an old book about what used to happen. The truth is, the Bible is a timeless book that is always timely because it teaches us about what always happens. This is the case with Nehemiah.

There was a once great city in a once great nation that had been mightily blessed by God until it chose evil and folly. Over time, God removed His hands of provision and protection so that the culture spun out of control, bringing misery and mayhem along with poverty and pain to once flourishing people. Most everyone had an excuse and found someone or something to blame for the problem so that nothing changed, and everything only got worse. This went on for a very long time, until one day a leader rose up with a fresh vision of the problem, plan for the solution, anointing from God, and courage to risk his own life by working for the well-being of the people and their culture.

Does this sound like the need of our present day?

Nehemiah is one of the greatest Spirit-filled political and business leaders in world history. He stands with Moses, Joseph, David, and Joshua as giant leaders in the Old Testament. For all leaders in government, business, church, or the community, Nehemiah is an incredible mentor and coach for how to lead boldly and humbly in the will of God.

One Bible dictionary says, "Nehemiah is often regarded as a consummate servant-leader...Nehemiah was a man of:

- service—demonstrated by his exalted position as the king's cupbearer;

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- responsibility—demonstrated by his appointment to the position of governor of Judah;
- faith—demonstrated by his wholehearted devotion to and utter trust in his God;
- preparation—demonstrated by his practice of planning before acting;
- prayer—demonstrated by his consistent prayer life;
- action—demonstrated by his realization of what needed to be done and his willingness to do whatever it takes to see the mission accomplished;
- cooperation—demonstrated by his willingness to work with others;
- discretion—demonstrated by his inspection of the walls of the city at night;
- delegation—demonstrated by his willingness to delegate authority to those under him;
- determination—demonstrated by his unwillingness to let opposition deter him from fulfilling his objectives;
- confidence—demonstrated by his conviction that he was doing God’s will;
- compassion—demonstrated by his heart for his people;
- unselfishness—demonstrated by his refusal to accept the governor’s portion;
- triumph—demonstrated by his success over both physical adversaries (the opposition group) and material adversaries (walls of Jerusalem);
- confrontation—demonstrated by his earnestness in confronting sin and wrongdoing;
- motivation—demonstrated by his desire to serve God;
- convictions—demonstrated by his unwillingness to tolerate evil around him;
- inspiration—demonstrated by his ability to motivate others to serve God;
- vision—demonstrated by his focus on God’s

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- expectations rather than on people's limitations;
- perseverance—demonstrated by his ability to finish the task at hand.”²

Our day is suffering from a massive lack of leadership at most every level of society. Like the days of Nehemiah, there is no shortage of excuses, but what we really need is a godly leader with a plan to fix the mess we've made.

Leadership is Practical and Spiritual

The Christian and Jewish versions of the Old Testament are the same, with one curious exception. In the Jewish Bible, the books of Esther and Nehemiah are one book, and in the Christian Bible they are two books.

Ezra and Nehemiah report the same events happening at the same time with the emphasis on two different men's involvement. Ezra is a religious professional, trained and approved as a teacher of the Bible and leader of people. Nehemiah is a leader in the godless government with business skills.

Nehemiah functions like an Executive Pastor skilled at strategic planning, fundraising, budgeting, legal issues, permits, human resources, public relations, and security, along with organizational management with such things as job descriptions, delegation of duties, and chain of command. Ezra functions like a Senior Pastor skilled at training people to do pastoral ministry, preaching God's Word, and leading people to repent of their sin, trust in God, and make life changes to obey the will of God. Nehemiah rebuilds the city along with a platform that Ezra then stands on to lead and feed God's people.

Some people wrongly consider what Ezra does as ministry work and what Nehemiah does as secular work. Both men are called by God, gifted by God, filled with the

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Spirit of God, and obey God. Both men pray a lot, worship God, and regularly spend time in the Scriptures. They work together in ministry, although their ministries complement but do not compete with one another. Nehemiah deals with the practical – lumber, building permits, and construction crews. Ezra deals a lot more with the spiritual – sermons, small groups, and worship bands.

Anything commanded by the Lord and done for the Lord is ministry, fully spiritual, and not secular. God often has ordinary practical ministry done (building) to pave the way for more overt spiritual ministry (filling). For example, God made the world, then put people in it. God also made our bodies, then put our souls in them. God later had the Temple built, and then the Holy Spirit filled it. God also has people gather together throughout Acts before falling on them so that they are organized into a body before being filled with the Spirit.

Healthy ministry requires Spirit-filled leaders who are called and gifted in both the practical and spiritual working together. When there is practical ministry without spiritual ministry, you have beautiful and well-kept church buildings that are void of life in the Spirit, evangelistic fervor, and passionate worship of God. When spiritual ministry is done without practical ministry, people are saved, songs are sung, and prayers are uttered but a lot of resources are wasted rather than stewarded.

Think of practical ministry as a rudder and spiritual ministry as the sail. Together, they bring tremendous power that presses forward toward a destination. If either the rudder or the sail is missing, not much progress or power will be happening.

What God Seeks to Build, Satan Seeks to Break

Throughout Nehemiah, God keeps revealing what is

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to be built, and who and how it is to be built. The word “build” in various forms shows up roughly two dozen times throughout the book. God clearly wants a wall built so that within those walls, God’s people can be built up.

The crisis is that there is no safe place for God’s people to gather for Bible teaching, worship, prayer, and relationship. God’s people were scattered, and like a fire where the logs are scattered rather than stacked, what once had heat and passion now had embers and smoke.

The same thing happened to the Church across the world not long ago during what was presented as a global pandemic. Churches were closed en masse for the first time, across the world. While people isolated physically, they suffered spiritually, emotionally, and mentally because God made us to be together and told us that it’s not good to be alone. The most common Greek word used for the Church in the New Testament is *ekklesia* which means “assembly” or “gathering”. The Bible is clear that, just like the parts on our body need one another to function in a healthy way, so do the various people in the local church need one another to function in a healthy way. Sadly, many pastors overreacted to the closing of the Church and scattering of the Christians, wrongly saying that we don’t need a place to gather as God’s people. Nothing could be further from the truth. God does not need a home, but His people do. Just like any family, God’s family, the Church, needs to meet somewhere together.

Anytime there is a concerted effort of politicians, lawyers, and the media to shut down places of worship, you know that Satan is behind it all. When God seeks to build a house to gather His family, Satan seeks to break it to scatter that family. This is on full display throughout Nehemiah. From beginning to end, he is harassed and

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threatened in every way. The old preacher Dwight L. Moody said, "Every true work of God has had its bitter enemies - not only outside, but also inside - just as in the days of Nehemiah."

There are two basic theories that guide both practical life and academic study. One, traditional theory is how to build things like a marriage, family, church, nation, business, or civilized culture. As Creator, this is what God does. Two, critical theory is how to break things that have already been built. As Destroyer, this is what Satan does.

As God works through Nehemiah to build (or construct) a place for God's people to gather in worship, Satan also works through three named opponents to break (or deconstruct) all that is being built. Sanballat is the godless governor of nearby Samaria, Geshem is a public leader whose name was found on silver bowls found by archaeologists, and Tobiah is part of a ruling family mentioned outside of the Bible in places like 2 Maccabees 3:11. All three men are likely political leaders surrounding God's people who hate and oppose the worship of God for financial, political, and spiritual reason. They work together to form an unholy alliance against a common enemy - God and his leader, Nehemiah.

Satan uses this same tactic in our day. Technology allows the wicked to connect digitally, form an unholy alliance, and combine forces to dissuade or even destroy the work of a leader. One of the pastors I personally learn from and listen to once asked me if I knew why total strangers who had never met suddenly align like two barrels on a gun to start shooting a leader. When I said "no", he explained that even though people do not know one another, the demons working through them do and so the demons make the introductions. I have seen this pernicious pattern more times than I can count, and we see it again in Nehemiah as these three godless leaders

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unite to break what the godly leaders are seeking to build.

Leadership Lessons from Nehemiah

As a leader, Nehemiah fulfills Jesus' exhortation to devote the service of our lives to loving God and our neighbor. The risks and sacrifices Nehemiah continually makes are not for his benefit, but rather for the glory of God and good of people. He uses his political/business skills to be a missionary, building a better future for God's people to worship freely and grow in grace and godliness. As we study Nehemiah, there are three major themes that emerge about his leadership style.

1. He has a confident humility. His confidence is not arrogance in his ability, but rather an unwavering connection to and faith in God's calling on his life.
2. His confident humility comes from frequent prayer.^a
3. His confident humility enables him to give all credit to others and ultimately God for his success so that he is worshipping God rather than boasting in himself.^b

In reading Nehemiah, I've comprised a list of questions that have greatly helped me as a leader. I share them in hopes that the Holy Spirit might also use them to help you as you seek His calling for your life and where He would have you serve the building of His Kingdom:

1. What has God revealed to you and burdened you for? (1:1-11a)
2. What must you walk away from to pursue God's calling? (1:11b)
3. How will you communicate your God-given vision to others? (2:1-3)
4. Who must you ask for what resources? (2:4-10)

^a 1:4-11a, 2:4, 4:4-5, 5:19, 6:9, 6:14, 13:22b, 13:29, 13:31b

^b 2:8, 2:11-12, 2:20, 4:14-15, 4:20, 6:15-16, 7:5, 8:1

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5. What research must you do to realistically assess the total cost (e.g. time, money, energy, emotion, etc.) of the mission? (2:11-16)
6. What leaders must be strategically recruited to start the mission? (2:17-20)
7. Where is the best place to begin the work? (3:1-32)
8. Where are your gates, or strategic places, you need to protect from enemies attacking? (3:1-32)
9. How will you deal with your most public and painful critics? (4:1-23)
10. How can you show the gospel with courage and mercy to those who are watching? (5:1-19)
11. How will you handle escalating opposition and threats meant to cause fear? (6:1-14)
12. What is the generational legacy you are laboring to leave for others? (7:4-73)
13. How will you connect what you are doing publicly with people privately? (8:1-18)
14. Will you courageously and continuously call your people to repentance of sin? (9:1-37)
15. What will you ask of the leaders who are considering joining your mission? (10:38-11:39)
16. How will you track who God is bringing and assimilate them into your organization? (11:1-36)
17. Who are your trustworthy people who can work in the organization caring for people while you work on the organization to grow it? (12:1-26)
18. How much will you ask of the regular people who are needed for the mission? (13:1-22)
19. What closed-handed practical life issues will you go to war for and not compromise on? (13:23-30)

Having now met the man Nehemiah, and his mission, we will begin learning from the book he wrote one chapter at a time.

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CHAPTER 2

How are political and social wars really worship wars?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 1

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 1:11*
– “O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy...”

Commentary: As a pastor, as I travel the nation and world, I am constantly heartbroken whenever I see a once beautiful church building that has been neglected for years and no longer houses a vibrant church family. It boggles my mind that, for so long, so many of God’s people living in a community can ignore the need, or that the people who oversee the property have no vision to rebuild the property and relaunch the ministry.

We see something similar in the opening chapter of Nehemiah. Although the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed and its walls broken for 141 years, he has a sudden, deep, emotional breaking at hearing the news causing weeping, mourning, fasting, and praying for 3-4 months (2:1 is in March-April). Some have speculated that Nehemiah was responding to some new devastating news, but it’s more likely he was simply seeing and feeling old news in a new way.

Because we live in cultures no less spiritually broken

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than Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day, we should feel as he felt and pray as he prayed. Before devising a plan or beginning a project, Nehemiah spent months praying and fasting for God to go before him and prepare him for the task of rebuilding a home for God's people to gather and worship freely. Throughout Nehemiah, he prays repeatedly to get both God's vision, and his God-given role in serving that vision.²

Without making Nehemiah's prayer a rigid prototype, it is helpful to learn from his example which includes:

- P-praise God (1:5)
- R-repent of sin (1:6-7)
- A-agree with God's promises (1:8-9 echoes Deuteronomy 12:5, 9:29, 28:64, and 30:1-4)
- Y-yearn for God's blessing (1:10-11)

Nehemiah occupied a strategic position in the foreign court of the Persian King Artaxerxes, who was the third son of Ahasueras and Vashti, who are mentioned in the book of Esther. A brutal man, "Artaxerxes killed Artabanus and murdered his older brother Darius, the rightful heir to the throne. He then defeated his other brother Hystaspes in battle...Artaxerxes suppressed two major rebellions in the early years of his reign."³

In Nehemiah's example, we learn the two ways God's people can occupy strategic positions in business and government. One, they can rise as leaders. Two, they can attach themselves to rising leaders as faithful and trustworthy assistants who humbly come alongside a leader. Nehemiah, much like Joseph in Egypt or Daniel in Babylon, is an illustration of the latter. Although Nehemiah is essentially a slave, his proven character and loyalty elevated him to the inner circle of the king's most trusted

² 1:4-11, 2:4, 4:4-5, 4:9, 5:19, 6:9, 6:14, 13:14, 13:22, 13:29-3

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assistants.

Assassination attempts against a king were common and so a cupbearer ensured the safety of the king. Overseeing the purchase and storage of a king's wine collection, they also sample the wine to ensure its safety. This dangerous job required a most trustworthy person as the life of the king was literally in Nehemiah's hands. One Bible dictionary adds, "Cupbearers could also have other duties, as indicated by Tobit 1:22: 'Ahikar was cupbearer, keeper of the signet ring, administrator, and accountant.'"⁴

Nehemiah's role may have required that he be castrated, as was often the case (e.g. Daniel according to Isaiah 39:6-7 and Daniel 1), and would explain why he was allowed frequent access to the queen (2:6). Not knowing that one day God would use his government position, Nehemiah humbly and faithfully served a godless man for years with character and integrity which allowed him to later be released to rebuild Jerusalem: "The Persian king likely appointed Nehemiah as governor of Judaea because he wanted a loyal subject to govern this powerful area located directly between Babylon and unstable Egypt."⁵

The point of the first chapter is that the character tests we face today are preparing our character for our testimony tomorrow.

Dig Deeper.

1. Look up Luke 19:28, 41-44 and Nehemiah 1. How does Nehemiah's heart for Jerusalem look a lot like Jesus'? What breaks your heart about your city?
2. Nehemiah 1 opens with Nehemiah praying. Look up the frequent prayers of Nehemiah to see how vital prayer was to his entire life (1:4-11, 2:4, 4:4-5, 4:9, 5:19, 6:9, 6:14, 13:14, 13:22, 13:29-31).

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Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. What need/ministry opportunity has God burdened you for? How can a season of fasting, praying, and journaling like Nehemiah help you discern God's will and what, if anything, you should do to meet that ministry need?
2. How have you seen a character test in a difficult season of your life be used as part of your Christian testimony later in life?
3. Nehemiah spends a lot of time praying and journaling. What does prayer and journaling look like in your own life?
4. Nehemiah 1 reports Nehemiah's prayer needs. How can the group be praying for you?

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How can you find God's will with prayer and planning?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 2

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 2:8*
– ...*the good hand of my God was upon me.*

Commentary: When my wife Grace and I first got married, we quickly realized that we approached problem solving very differently. She would spend a lot of time praying so that she was unburdened, filled with faith, and trusting God to take care of us. I would spend my time planning, doing research, looking at calendars and budgets, and seeking to strategize a way to overcome our frustrations to get on to a better future. Early in our marriage, her praying and my planning became a point of disagreement. She felt I was not spiritual enough. I felt she was not practical enough. Having now been married for over three decades, we've learned from each other. I pray a lot more before and during our planning. Grace still prays but has learned to also join me in making plans.

How about you? Are you better at praying or planning?

Like a left foot and a right foot, Nehemiah's walk with God involves both prayer and planning. In Nehemiah 1, God gave him the heart of Jesus for a devastated city, and a devastated church within that city. Tragically, that sad state had been unchanged for 141 years despite many failed efforts to revive both the city and the church. Then, God called Nehemiah to lead the rebuilding and revival. Nehemiah starts by praying for God's wisdom and favor with the king, and finances from the king, while developing a comprehensive strategic plan.

Standing before the king, Nehemiah could not hide his burden. It was expected that anyone present before

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the king, especially if the queen was also present, would have a joyful spirit and not bring a burden. Nehemiah's request to leave his job to rebuild a city and church is bold because it would leave the king's life at risk. So, he briefly stops to pray yet again. What makes this request even more audacious is that some 13 years prior, the same request was made to rebuild the same city and church and that effort was opposed by the very king who Nehemiah was asking to reverse his own policy!^a The king wanted to know Nehemiah's plan and how long it would take – an incredible 12 years of time away (5:14, 13:6).

Nehemiah sketched out his plan, requesting letters from the king as military protection for the journey. He also asked the king to personally fund the project with timber from his private forest, along with a personal residence as a secure base of operations. Amazingly, Nehemiah's huge prayer (1:11) was answered. God alone is given credit for every success.^b

When God acts, Satan reacts. For the first time in the story, a unified opposition rises up against Nehemiah as his critics are the first to "greet" him in Jerusalem. Political leaders from surrounding areas joined together to attack Nehemiah and his mission to rebuild the city and church. Even humble leaders who are acting in obedience to God will always face critics and opponents, as was also the case with Jesus.

The 100-mile journey to Jerusalem would have taken a few months.^c Upon arriving, Nehemiah curiously does not immediately launch into his work, but rather takes three days to presumably pray and Sabbath. He was wisely gathering up his energy for a long and exhausting season of work and opposition.

^a Ezra 4:7-23 ^b 2:8, 2:11-12, 2:20, 4:14-15, 4:20, 6:15-16, 7:5, 8:1 ^c e.g. Ezra 7:8-9

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Nehemiah began his work under the cover of darkness to discreetly investigate firsthand the condition of the walls. Leaders make decisions based upon information, and without accurate information, a leader makes a poor decision. So, Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem and inspects the entire wall himself. The various broken gates were essentially the doorways to the city, and without a rebuilt wall and gates, God's people could not return to the city and worship as the church.

In this section of Nehemiah's journal, we learn two important leadership lessons. One, a leader must accept reality. Nehemiah used the words "broken" and "destroyed" to describe how dire things had become. Two, a leader will only be able to inspire others to follow if they are convinced that they are following God's calling. Despite 141 years of failed attempts, no experience for the job, an overwhelming task with only a handful of discouraged people, facing powerful critics, Nehemiah proceeds because it was "what my God had put into my heart to do" (2:12). God's calling meant he would not be retreating.

Finally ready to cast God's vision to the people, Nehemiah spoke to them directly and from his heart. First, he identifies with the people, repeatedly saying "us" and "we". Second, his motive is humility and not pride, as his goal is to spare God's people further derision. Third, he assures them that God has already answered his prayers and His hand was upon them. Fourth, he recounted the victory God had already given them with the support of the king proving God was with them. Fifth, he looked people in the eye, spoke to them directly, and answered their questions so that they could trust him.

Courageously, the people who had been without success or hope for many years believed in Nehemiah's God given vision, trusted his integrity, and agreed to work together. The task was monumental. Estimates are that

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the wall was anywhere from 1-2.5 miles in circumference, 3-4 feet thick, and 15-20 feet high, broken for many years with the large stones scattered and gates burned.

Rather than allowing the critics to get the final word, Nehemiah wisely spoke to reassure the people that God would make them succeed, thereby making His name great and mocking His critics. The people follow their leader, focusing on their God and mission instead of their critics and enemies.

Dig Deeper.

1. How is Nehemiah's life (he prays no less than 9 times in 13 chapters) an illustration for the principle in 1 Thessalonians 5:17?
2. How do Nehemiah's bold prayers to King Jesus and bold requests to King Artaxerxes remind you of Jesus' teaching in Luke 11:9-10 and John 14:14?
3. How is Nehemiah 2 an illustration of the principle in Proverbs 21:1?

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. What leadership lessons from Nehemiah stand out to you? Why?
2. Nehemiah is a case study in godly leadership. What leader(s) have most positively impacted your own life? What made them different?
3. Nehemiah immediately faced opposition. Why are critics and enemies today weaponizing technology to cause more fear and failure than ever before?
4. Nehemiah is constantly praying for the ministry God has called him to. How can you be praying for the ministry God has called you to?

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How can we make the boring parts of life meaningful?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 3

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 2:20 – “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build...”*

Commentary: In life, there are few extraordinary days. Most days are ordinary – we brush our teeth, eat our meals, finish our tasks, wash our dishes, take out our trash, and get some sleep. Every once in a while, something extraordinary happens – a miracle, revelation, or angel makes an unexpected appearance. The Bible reports a lot of extraordinary days. The Bible also reports a lot of ordinary days. In reading the Bible, many if not most people skip the ordinary days and stop to focus on the extraordinary days.

The first two chapters of Nehemiah were extraordinary days – Nehemiah was deeply burdened by God, given fresh vision to rebuild Jerusalem so that God’s people could live safely and worship freely, along with a detailed plan that was miraculously granted by the king after months of fasting and praying. Chapter three reports the normal days – regular people doing regular tasks like most people on most days. Nehemiah has moved from Susa to Jerusalem and, with the plan completed, the long days of hard work commence.

After the ordinary days of hard work – digging holes, shoveling dirt, hauling, and stacking stones – there will be more extraordinary days that include a revival among God’s people in response to Spirit-filled Bible teaching and worship leading. In the middle of the extraordinary days are the ordinary days. This is the cycle of ministry – someone has to vacuum the church, change the air

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filters, take out the trash, restock the toilet paper, pay the electric bill, replace the dead light bulbs, and unlock the front door – so that people can come in to meet with God and have an extraordinary day. Most of what is celebrated in ministry are the extraordinary days, and what makes those days possible are the ordinary days where humble, faithful, hardworking servants of God get practical things done. This is the heart of Nehemiah 3, and God’s way of honoring faithful servants by naming the leaders and their teams in His Word to commemorate their ordinary ministry forever.

As we examine what is considered by many to be the most boring and irrelevant chapter in the entire book, it’s curious to note that some Bible commentaries skip it altogether. For those who are willing to read chapter 3 carefully and prayerfully, there is much that God will impart to them because if something is in the Bible, it must be significant. Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Sometimes, our “good work” involves a hard day’s labor, just like our Lord who spent 90% of his life swinging a hammer.

As you read Nehemiah 3, stop for a moment and imagine that your name was in that chapter, along with your family and friends who served with you in some tedious ministry task. This chapter would likely become your favorite in the entire Bible, if not among your favorite chapters in the entire Bible. The lengthy list of names and projects includes 38 people along with numerous others whose names are not listed, 42 separate teams laboring to complete various assigned aspects of the work, spread across seven neighborhoods in the city marked by their corresponding gates. In this enormous city and ministry

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project, we learn the following principles regarding people and their leaders.

Insights for Leaders

- Have a clear plan before you start assigning duties to people
- Make sure your team knows their mission and is unified
- Smaller projects require generalists who can do many things; larger projects require specialists who are experts at one thing
- Deputize trustworthy people and trust them to be dependable
- Create layers and levels of leadership and communication so that the leader is not the bottleneck of the mission
- The senior leader(s) must work on the organization so that everyone else can work in the organization
- Look for old stones/resources that have proven valuable and helpful in the past and can be repurposed for the present and future

Insights for People

- God works through people and so you are important for God's mission
- All work is holy and can be considered ministry if done unto the Lord
- Leaders must lead (3:1)
- Some people refuse to work (3:5)
- Some people do more than others (3:11, 3:19, 3:21, 3:24, 3:27, 3:30)
- Some people work from home (3:10, 3:23, 3:28-30)
- Some people work harder than others (3:20)
- Families often work together in areas of ministry
- Some work is less desirable than others (e.g. Dung

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Gate)

- Recruiting people from the outside to round out a great team is necessary (e.g. men of Jericho, people from the outlying cities of Tekoa, Gibeon, Mizpah, Zanoah, Beth Hukkerem)
- A diverse team is the most desirable (e.g. priests; skilled craftsmen in 3:8, 3:31-32; city officials; women in 3:12; bachelors in 3:12; temple servants/deacons in 3:26, 3:31; security guards in 3:29; and business leaders in 3:32).

In reading the long list of names, we see how God acknowledges and even honors the hard work of those who love Him and labor to make His name great. In the spirit of Nehemiah 3, it is encouraging to make a habit of acknowledging and thanking people who are humbly serving in your ministry, doing the hard work that no one sees but that everyone benefits from.

Dig Deeper.

1. According to Genesis 2:5, what is one of the reasons God made human beings? How is work part of what it means to live a godly life?
2. How is the work in Nehemiah an illustration of the principle in Colossians 3:23?
3. Look up Ephesians 2:8-10 and see how Nehemiah 3 is an example of not being saved by your works but being saved by Jesus to your works.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. When reading Nehemiah 3, who comes to mind as an example of a faithful, humble person who serves without prestige or praise?
2. What importance do you see placed on healthy, unified, hard-working teams in Nehemiah 3?
3. What are some of the ordinary days in your life that

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set up and allowed the extraordinary days that followed (e.g. working hard to save money so that you could give generously or have a child)?

4. What strikes you as most intriguing about the leaders and the workers in Genesis 3?

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How can you build your life and protect it from your enemies?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 4

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 4:14 – “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”*

Commentary: Some years ago, I was driving with a well-known Christian pastor whose life has been one of incredible highs and lows. He has seen God show up and do the most supernatural and incredible things, as well as seen Satan show up and do the most demonic and despicable things. Having endured far more public attack and critique than I ever will, he piqued my curiosity by asking me if I would like to know the secret to never being publicly maligned again. He then told me that the key to never being attacked, critiqued, or opposed was to 1. say nothing, 2. do nothing, and 3. have nothing.

His words were both sobering and clarifying. If you want to stand for something, own something, or do something, you have to pay something. The more you hope to have, the more you have to give.

Nehemiah has a God-given vision, military covering, and financial backing from the king, moved from the city of Susa to Jerusalem, and has the support of a small but growing group of people who are trusting him to lead them. Like every spiritual war, enemies show up seeking to break everything Nehemiah and the people are trying to build. From the first day Nehemiah arrived in town, some hated the man, his message, and his mission (2:10). What began as the equivalent of critics on blogs and social media escalates into a dangerous mob that never goes

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away so long as Nehemiah obeys the Lord instead of the mob.

Whenever God is for you, it is certain that Satan and others will be against you. When God places His hand upon you, it is certain that Satan and others will raise their fist against you. When God provides for you, it is certain that Satan and others will try and steal it from you. When you share your vision, it is certain that Satan and others will mock you with derision.

Regarding the motives for undermining a work of God, people become opponents for a variety of reasons.

1. Insecure people are threatened by the success of a leader/organization.
2. Jealous people covet the success of a leader/organization.
3. Enemies have an agenda that conflicts with the mission of a leader/organization.
4. Entitled people demand control over a leader/organization.
5. Inflexible people oppose change and attack any leader/organization promoting change.
6. Demonic people attack anything and anyone that is doing good for God.
7. Unrepentant people attack a leader/organization that has told them truth that they despise.

Nehemiah 4 is a case study in leading people through slander, attack, and lies to stay on message and mission. At some point, every church, ministry, business, or other organization seeking to do good will have to endure a beating to continue in their blessing.

Opposition begins on the psychological level with mockery and ridicule before the work even begins and gets very personal to discourage the people (4:1-3). Today, the internet only multiplies this misery. The anti-

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movement had two visible leaders, not unlike two barrels on a gun (2:10). Sanballat was a powerful governor from a nearby town who cared only about his power, pleasure, and profit. Tobiah likely married into a Jewish family to deceive God's people, just like Judas. People like Tobiah are confusing because they say they are believers, and then oppose God's vision and attack God's leaders.

Nehemiah wisely chooses not to engage the critics because if you engage, you will enrage (4:4-5). Nehemiah would not stoke a fire of conflict and enemies to distract him from his God-given mission. Rather than bottling up his frustration, or lashing out in anger at his critics, Nehemiah runs to God in prayer continually. First, he prays for the blessing of God's people. Second, he prays for the judgment of their enemies who are ultimately fighting against God Himself.

God heard and answered Nehemiah's prayer very quickly, and the people overcame their fear to push forward together with unified resolve (4:6). Rather than wasting energy on critics and lies, the people invested their energy in their mission.

Seeing the resolve and success of God's people, the opponents (led by Sanballat and Tobiah) recruited more enemies to the fight, assembling a coalition of troublemakers and agitators (4:7-8). Sadly, unholy alliances often form around the sole purpose of opposing a leader and their mission. They surrounded the entire city with Sanballat and the Samaritans to the north, Tobiah and the Ammonites to the East, Geshem (2:19) and the Arabs to the south, and the men of Ashdod from the Philistine city to the west. This was a threat of simultaneous war from every side.

Rather than responding to critics or wasting time in pointless negotiations, Nehemiah called the people to prayer. He also appointed security detail to remain on

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constant lookout for attacks. This would have comforted God's people and warned their enemies. Because we fight on both the spiritual and physical levels, they both prayed and posted a guard (4:9).

Despite the rather benign response of prayer and defensive security, the enemies began making death threats against believers as things were quickly escalating and threatening to end in a bloody conflict. Nehemiah had to be stressed. Even believers who were for the project became gripped with the fear that they too would be attacked simply for being associated with Nehemiah. To make matters worse, people were weary from the work and possibly needing to defend themselves and their families (4:10-12).

In response to escalating threats and danger, Nehemiah posted entire families at various points of vulnerability along the wall. Nehemiah was placing a heavy burden upon the fathers and their sons to protect their families as what was really at stake was more than just a city or a church, but the legacy of men and their families to have a future as worshippers of God (4:13-14).

A hero outside of Scripture is the great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-92). His magazine *The Sword and Trowel* started in 1865, taking its name from Nehemiah 4. Anything we build with God (e.g. spiritual life, marriage, children, business, ministry) requires work, as typified in the bricklayers' trowel. Since enemies love to break what we build, we must also have a sword in our other hand to defend it. In light of these powerful images, two important questions are worthy of our consideration:

1. Trowel: What has God burdened you to build? (A spiritual life? Marriage? Children? Business? Ministry?)
2. Sword: How can you best defend what you are building?

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Dig Deeper.

1. How is Nehemiah 4 really an illustration of the principle from Jesus in John 15:18-25?
2. Look up Revelation 6:10 and 19:1-3 to learn more about not just praying for God's blessing on His people but also God's cursing on their enemies.
3. Based upon Ephesians 6:10-12, how is this very real physical battle also spiritual in Nehemiah 4? How do they respond in the physical world and the spiritual world to protect and defend themselves?

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. What has God burdened you to build? How can you best defend what you are building?
2. How does Nehemiah 4 help you to not jump into the latest Christian gossip or speak ill of other Christians?
3. Do you think it is harder to deal with enemies and critics of your faith today than it was in Nehemiah 4? Why, or why not?
4. Why was it important for the people in Nehemiah 4 to remain unified and supportive of one another? How can you pursue this with your family and/or Christian friends?

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How do you manage wealth whether you are rich or poor?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 5

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 5:19 – Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.*

Commentary: There were constantly people around Jesus who lied about, attacked, and threatened Him. In a shocking plot twist, they were unable to murder Jesus until someone in His inner circle aligned with critics and betrayed Christ. Judas opened himself to Satan, and because he was very close to Jesus, he was very deadly to Jesus.

Strangers online, politicians we have never met, and critics of Christianity are real and potentially a real problem. Our greatest threat, however, is usually the people who say they are believers that we allow to be close with us. Paul said to the church at Ephesus during his farewell meeting before sailing away in Acts 20:29-30 (NLT), “I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following.” We tend to trust the people we know more than the people we do not know, especially if they profess to believe in our God and are part of our believing community.

The crisis in Nehemiah 5 is internal and financial. God’s people were starving, selling their children into slavery during a massive economic crisis caused by a famine, high taxation from the godless government, combined with extortion and fellow “believers” taking advantage of impoverished people by robbing them of their land and possessions with the heart of Judas.

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Since we either worship our wealth as our God, or worship God with our wealth, the Bible has a lot to say about finances and stewardship in over 800 Scriptures. Roughly 25% of Jesus' teaching was regarding money, including that money is a revelation of our heart's priorities, and that someone cannot worship both God and money.^o

Greed is not only a grievous sin against God, but also a painful sin against Christian unity and love. God's people do not just have spiritually connected lives but also financially connected lives as they transact business and exchange goods and services. Those with wealth and power must be careful to not take advantage of fellow believers because it hurts God's people and is a terrible witness to unbelievers. Christians are to love people and use money, rather than loving money and using people.

The problem in western culture is that our thinking about wealth is driven more by atheistic Marxism than the Bible. We are wrongly told there are two kinds of people – rich and poor – and that rich people are bad because they take advantage of poor people who are good. The Bible, however, gives us four kinds of people, not two, as we see in Nehemiah 5.

<p><u>Category #1</u> Godly Rich God blesses, they worked hard, tithe to God, invest smart, and are generous to others. (e.g. Abraham, Joseph of Arimathea, Nehemiah)</p>	<p><u>Category #2</u> Godly Poor Hard-working integrous people who are good stewards (e.g. Jesus, the widow who gave her mite, orphaned children, and the poor in Nehemiah 5)</p>
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^o Matthew 6:19-24

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<u>Category #3</u> Ungodly Rich Gain and spend wealth sinfully (e.g. Pharaoh, Judas, rich young ruler, overtaxing government and people charging excessive interest in Nehemiah 5)	<u>Category #4</u> Ungodly Poor Do not work, spend wisely, tithe generously, or invest smartly (e.g. the sluggards and poor in Proverbs)
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Sadly, our culture has tended to look only at issues of poverty and wealth rather than godliness and ungodliness as Scripture does. In Nehemiah 5, the crisis is between the ungodly rich and the godly poor, with Nehemiah who was godly and rich leading the resolution.

In Nehemiah's day, it was not unlawful for Jews to loan money to one another, but they were not to act like money lenders and charge interest.^a They were to treat one another with love even in the matter of taking security^b or making a brother a servant.^c Both the people and the land belonged to the Lord, and He would not have anybody using either one for personal gain in a sinful manner. Furthermore, the "Year of Jubilee"^d required that all debts were forgiven every 50th year, all land restored to its original owners, and all servants set free as God's way of caring for the poor.

The unrighteous rich in Nehemiah's day did not share God's heart for their poor brothers and sisters. Dire economic hardship compelled normally silent wives to speak out in protest on four accounts. First, believers were facing starvation. Second, desperate believers had leveraged all of their possessions (fields, vineyards, houses) and risked literally losing everything. Third, unable to pay their taxes, some were in great legal peril. Fourth,

^a Deut. 23:19-20 ^b Deut. 24:10-13; Ex. 22:25-27 ^c Lev. 25:35-46 ^d Lev. 25

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in an effort to stave off financial ruin, some families sold their own children into slavery. Some of God's people were bankrupting and enslaving fellow church members while they were all working together to rebuild the city and their church as a witness of God's love!

Upon hearing of the great injustice, Nehemiah was angry. Some commentators have wrongly criticized Nehemiah for his anger. God has a righteous anger^a, as did Jesus during His earthly life.^b Indeed, much anger is not righteous, but a righteous anger compels us to action, which is precisely what happened with Nehemiah. Rather than lashing out in anger, Nehemiah prayerfully prepared his response. Boldly, Nehemiah confronted the most rich and powerful. While they were not technically breaking the laws of their nation, they were acting sinfully according to God's laws.

Nehemiah also demanded restitution. Had those who had taken advantage of their brothers and sisters merely repented, the practice would have stopped, but apart from restitution, they would have still remained in dire poverty with devastated lives.

Nehemiah led through his own example. It was customary for political leaders, like Nehemiah, to collect additional taxes for themselves for justifiable things like a salary, living expenses, personal staff, and operational budget. It was also customary for a man in Nehemiah's position to purchase land knowing it would increase in value. Nonetheless, he did not raise any taxes for himself or purchase any land. Nehemiah willingly denied many of his own personal interests for the sake of the mission to build the city and build the church as a city within that city. Nehemiah paid for all of his personal, political, and ministry expenses out of his own pocket. He hosted lavish

^a Deut. 13:17 ^b John 2:14-22

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dinner for 150 people and ministered to the richest and poorest members of his city. Nehemiah proved to be a godly and rich man. Lastly, Nehemiah fully devoted 12 years of his life to this project because real change takes time as there are no shortcuts to success.

Dig Deeper.

1. Look up the following Scriptures to learn what Jesus says about our treasure: Matt. 6:19-24; Luke 18:22.
2. Look up the following Scriptures about our eternal rewards for good stewardship in this life: Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 19:17-19; Rom. 2:6-11, 8:1, 12:13, 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; Col. 3:25; Rev. 11:18.
3. Look up the following Scriptures about believers practicing hospitality starting with the example of church leaders (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8), to be followed by all Christians (1 Peter 4:9). Furthermore, hospitality is meant to be extended to family (1 Tim. 5:8), friends (Prov. 27:10), Christians (Gal. 6:10), and non-Christians (Lev. 19:34).

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. Of the four categories, which kind of family did you grow up in?
2. If you are honest, which of the four categories most accurately describes your stewardship?
3. What does generosity look like for you?
4. What does hospitality look like for you?

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What is the best way to deal with cruel enemies?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 6

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 6:9*
– “O God, strengthen my hands.”

Commentary: In any competitive sporting event, the last few minutes are the most intense and exciting. As one team is pressing toward their victory, their opponent summons up all the courage they can to stop them. What is true in sports is also true in business, politics, and ministry – there is always a fight near the finish.

In Nehemiah, as God’s people were successfully rebuilding their city and their church as the city within that city, opposition to their efforts escalated. With the security walls nearly rebuilt, and only the doors remaining to be hung, their enemies surged to stop them. Nehemiah was singled out for attack because he was the leader. Jesus quoted the Old Testament principle that the best way to get the sheep to scatter is to strike the shepherd, and Satan also knows this verse, which is why the person calling the shots ends up taking the shots. God not only appoints leaders, but Satan and his servants also attack them. To be a godly leader requires a willingness and ability to endure personal attacks and hardship without giving up, getting bitter, or being diverted from your mission. Nehemiah 6 is a case study in leadership as well as common tactics the Enemy and enemies use against God’s leaders. Nehemiah will have to increase his pain tolerance to finish the work.

Critics opposed to Nehemiah’s ministry since he first arrived at the city are again united to divert from the mission.^o At first glance, what appears to be a change of

^o Nehemiah 6:1-4

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heart, wanting to meet with Nehemiah for a discussion in a town between the two warring sides, is nothing more than a deceptive murder plot. Nehemiah responded with discernment, knowing they were not seeking his friendship but rather his failure. Wasting a few days on a meeting would come at the cost of finishing his work. So, he repeatedly declined their offer. Saying no to pushy, covert, lying and controlling enemies who exert public pressure is a vital leadership lesson.

Unsuccessful at diversion, his enemies move to disgrace by attacking Nehemiah personally.^o A leader takes the hardest and most frequent public beating because, just as in battle, the shortest route to winning a war is to shoot the highest-ranking officer. Nehemiah's enemies were wealthy and powerful political leaders, so their personal attacks were very serious. Because Nehemiah's character was impeccable, his enemies resorted to the demonic tactic of fabricating lies – that he was going to set himself up as king (the same lie later told about Jesus in Luke 23:1-5). Sedition could have resulted in Nehemiah's arrest, imprisonment in Susa, and possibly the death penalty. Nehemiah faced the lose-lose scenario of finishing his mission or saving his life.

Even worse, the lies were communicated in an open legal letter which gave it credibility. Ancient legal documents were sealed to only be read by the intended recipient. In sending an open letter, Nehemiah's enemies were publicly circulating the lie in a way that would be akin to a detailed modern day smear campaign spread through emails, texts, blogs, press releases, and baseless hit piece articles with salacious click-bait headlines and a shady attorney filling out legal paperwork. Nehemiah ignores most lies, refutes the worst lies, and attacks his

^o Nehemiah 6:5-9

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enemies' motives as politically motivated fear tactics. He did not meet with his enemies, but he did meet with his God in prayer for wisdom and courage.

Despite the failed efforts to divert and disgrace Nehemiah, his enemies persisted in attacking, trying to deceive the people supporting him.^a They weaponized his faith in God against him. A “prophet” who claimed to speak for God called Nehemiah to a meeting in his home to deliver a “prophecy”. The false prophet’s false prophecy was that Nehemiah would be killed at night, and God wanted him to flee to the temple to hide in seclusion for safety. This ever-popular tactic is to pay off a religious leader to speak lies and oppose the godly leader who actually speaks the truth. Nehemiah was not conned by this charlatan. Just because someone is spiritual, or has even been greatly used of God in the past, what they say must not be immediately accepted but rather confirmed as truthful.^b Jesus^c, Paul^d and John^e all promised false prophets would come in our day, just as they did in the days of Nehemiah.

Entering the Temple as the false prophet had commanded was suicide. The penalty was death^f, and even King Uzziah was given only leprosy in God’s mercy for doing this very thing.^g

Nehemiah’s final response to the attempts to divert, disgrace, and deceive are exemplary. First, he did not lose courage or stop pressing forward. Second, he was discerning and not dissuaded by threats, lies, or manipulation. Third, he continually prayed for wisdom and power for himself and for God’s vengeance upon his enemies.

Nehemiah persevered without a wife, friend, comforter,

^a Nehemiah 6:10-14 ^b e.g. Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:20-22; Isaiah 8:20;

Romans 4:3 ^c Matthew 7:15, 24:11,24 ^d Acts 20:29-31 ^e 1 John 4:1

^f Numbers 18:7 ^g 2 Chronicles 26:16-21

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encourager, or relief from the constant attacks. Leadership is lonely, and Nehemiah prayed a lot because God was all he had. While many joys and pleasures are taken from a leader (e.g. sleep, a quiet life, rest, safety, security, privacy, encouragement, friendship), God kindly gives Himself to them in a deeper relationship than the average believer in return.

This scene is an important transition as the wall is completed. In less than a year from God's calling, Nehemiah completed the first and arguably most difficult task, rebuilding of the city wall for fortification. Nehemiah labored in prayer and planning, gained legal permission from the king, raised capital, moved from Susa to Jerusalem, endured external critics, along with death threats internally and externally. Nehemiah's reputation was shot, along with his wealth, as he collected no salary and paid for much of the work. However, after roughly 141 years of failed attempts, the wall was completed, God's people were welcomed, and God could be worshipped.

Curiously, the completion of the wall is mentioned in passing with little reflection on Nehemiah's emotional feelings. Perhaps he remained focused on the task ahead, transitioning from things (stones, walls, gates) to people (new residents and converts). Leaders tend to quickly move from a success to the new opportunities and obstacles that come next.

Some of Nehemiah's critics lost their courage once the wall was completed. The success of a leader is perhaps their best defense against character attacks and criticisms. By finishing his God-given mission, Nehemiah proved that God was with him. Successful, Nehemiah remained humble - giving God all credit. Not all of Nehemiah's critics, however, lost heart and moved on with their lives. Tobiah, who was probably Jewish, established himself as Nehemiah's foremost enemy, at war through

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the rest of the book. A powerful public business leader, he even married the daughter of Meshullam, who had helped rebuild the wall, to gain favor with God's people (3:4, 30). Making matters worse, Tobiah also apparently hired a PR firm to improve his public image.

The leadership principle in this chapter is that sometimes the people who should be the most *for* you are the most *against* you. If there's nothing you can do to work with them, you have to ignore them and continue your mission, which is precisely what Nehemiah does.

Dig Deeper.

1. Nehemiah faced a false prophet motivated by false profit. Look up the following Scriptures to learn more about false prophets: Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:20-22; Isaiah 8:20; Romans 4:3.
2. To learn more about false prophets, look up what Jesus (Matthew 7:15, 24:11,24), Paul (Acts 20:29-31) and John (1 John 4:1) promised about false prophets in our day.
3. How is the example of Acts 17:11 a helpful principle for being a discerning believer?

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. Have you ever had a false prophet deliver a false prophecy in your life – saying something untrue that did not come to pass but caused you anxiety wondering if it was from God?
2. What lessons do you personally learn from how Nehemiah dealt with his enemies and critics?
3. This is the hardest season of Nehemiah's life. What is the hardest season God has called you to endure?
4. Nehemiah was alone a lot and prayed a lot. How can the group members be praying for one another, so they are not so alone?

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NOTES

Are you better at dealing with people or things?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 7

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 6:16 – And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.*

Commentary: A family is comprised of things and people. For example, a family has to live in some kind of physical home. In that home, the family members have relationships. One without the other is not a healthy or safe family. What is true of a family is true of God's church family.

A good leader knows how to steward both things (e.g. finances, real estate, technology, equipment), and people (e.g. relationships, leadership culture, team dynamics, organizational health). In family systems, this would be the difference between the home, calendar, and budget that the family lives within, and the interpersonal communication and relationships between family members. Both matter greatly.

Thus far in Nehemiah, we have seen him working mainly on things (fundraising, legal documents, stone stacking, wall building, gate hanging, security, and public relations). With much of that work now complete, his focus shifts to people and how to welcome them to the city and church, care for them, teach them about God, and help them build healthy families and interpersonal relationships along with Ezra (to learn more, read the book of the Bible bearing his name). Simply stated, Nehemiah goes from working *on* the organization he leads to working *in* the organization.

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As a leadership lesson, Nehemiah starts with leaders who will then build teams to pursue their part of the mission. These leaders and working teams include:

- Gatekeepers – overseeing parts of the city as geographical leaders to care for the people in the church when they scatter throughout the week
- Singers – leading God’s people in corporate worship when they gather together
- Levites – essentially pastors and ministry leaders with trustworthy assistants who care for people, helping them mature in relationship with God and others

Overseeing these teams were two primary leaders who reported directly to Nehemiah – Hanani and Hananiah. Hananiah oversaw the security of the city and church. In a church, Hanani would be like an executive or campus pastor, and in the business world, he would be like the chief financial officer or vice president. This man was Nehemiah’s brother who had been with him from the beginning of the project (1:1-2). He was chosen because he was a godly man who had proven himself through the entire project and could be trusted to not undermine Nehemiah or be turned negative by enemies. The leadership principle here is that the most empowered leaders must have lengthy seasons of testing before they are given the authority to lead other leaders and teams, or in the words of the New Testament be “tested and approved”.

In addition to leaders, Nehemiah also began leading through policies to govern the people and ensure their well-being. These policies included setting the times which the doors to the city could be open, setting security guards on duty, and preparing the people for growth of the city and church. As an organization grows, the leader begins to lead less through personal contact and more

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through appointed assistant leaders, and policies, so that things do not bottleneck relationally at the senior leader. For some people, these changes can be difficult because they feel displaced, no longer having direct access to the senior leader, but it's the only way to lead a growing organization.

Having completed the wall and establishing leadership to care for people in the city and church, the stage was now set for an influx of people and their conversion to the God of the Bible. The leadership principle here is that a leader labors to establish a world of facilities, leaders, care, and systems that can then welcome, evangelize, and disciple people. The people who God brought into the city and church are listed in this chapter of Nehemiah because everyone is known by and cared for by God.

After finishing the wall surrounding the city of Jerusalem in just 52 days, people are finally allowed to inhabit the city, which had previously lay in ruins for 141 years. Most of Nehemiah 7 is a repetition of the same list of people mentioned in Ezra 2:1–64. While many commentators skip this section of inspired Scripture, it shows to us how much of ministry revolves around caring for multitudes of people and stewarding money and other assets.

While we are not well-informed of each of these leaders, Scripture does tell us that Zerubbabel was a prominent civil leader and that Jeshua (or Joshua) was a noted religious leader from whom descended 14 successive generations of high priests. Both men figure prominently in the minor prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

This lengthy list is of regular people who returned to the city to worship God. The equivalent of this list today is simply those who are Christians and living their faith at your church and the churches around you.

Nehemiah lists just over 4,000 priests who were

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descendants of Moses' brother Aaron. Listed with them are the Levites who descended from one of the 12 patriarchs in Genesis and assisted the priests in doing the pastoral work of caring for people.

The singers who lead worship in the city are referenced at least 18 times in Nehemiah. In this, we see the importance of musical worship and production that includes singing among God's people.

The gatekeepers were leaders chosen to oversee the various neighborhoods in the city where the gates were located. Through these gates people would pass in and out of the city as these gates served in a very real way as a door into the Old Testament church where God could be met and worshipped.

While the priests ministered like pastors thanks to the help of the Levites, who were in some ways like supportive ministry leaders, the Levites were also assisted by the temple servants and sons of Solomon's servants. These servants worked faithfully much like the most fruitful members of a church.

There was also a list of people who arrived in Jerusalem claiming to be religious leaders and members of prominent families. However, their claims could not be proven, so they were not put into leadership without God's confirmation. There are always going to be people who position themselves as spiritual leaders, but unless their claims can be verified, they should not be empowered to lead. Just because someone led in another place does not mean they are ready to lead somewhere new until they are known, proven, and invited.

The city and church quickly grew very large. To fund all of the ministry, a great deal of money was generously given by God's people. Thankfully, the people not only gave generously but so did the wealthiest people who were able to underwrite a great deal of the urban ministry

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expenses with gifts as large as what would be millions of dollars in today's terms. Everyone gave, and those who made more gave more.

Lastly, in this chapter we learn many principles about God and people including the following:

1. God made people and saves people because, in His mercy, He cares for us.
2. God knows us by name and keeps record of His people (see also Jesus' words in Luke 10:20).
3. God cares for His people through leaders and systems.
4. God appoints all of His people to serve the well-being of their church and city in some way.
5. It is good for a church/ministry to seek to grow by welcoming and serving more people.
6. A growing organization must mature and change to remain healthy and effective.
7. God being worshipped by His people in all things is the reason we were created and source of our joy.
8. God being worshipped includes our generously contributing to the funding of ministry.

Dig Deeper.

1. Worship leaders and musicians are featured in this chapter. Look up the following Scriptures to learn more about worshipping God together in song (Psalm 95:1-22; John 4:21-24; Romans 12:1; Revelation 5:8-14).
2. How is Nehemiah 7 an illustration of the principle in Philippians 2:1-8?
3. Who are your favorite person names in this chapter, or what is your favorite ministry role in this chapter? Why?

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. Are you better at stewarding things or people?

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2. Why do some churches/ministries struggle to make changes, get organized, deploy leaders, and invite new people so they can grow?
3. Nehemiah 7 honors a lot of ministry staff and volunteers by naming them with gratitude. Take some time thinking of who you can be praying for and encouraging in their ministry.
4. Take time encouraging one another in the group, naming their unique abilities and why you appreciate them.

NOTES

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What is the air and the ground war in spiritual warfare?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 8

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 8:6 – Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.*

Commentary: Jesus said that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church. As we have learned in Nehemiah, gates are defensive protections. Satan has captured people in sin and darkness, locking them behind gates like deception and addiction, so that they are not free. Jesus came to set captives free and has commissioned the church to tear down gates that are strongholds so that people can be free to new life in Christ. All of this is spiritual warfare.

In a military war, there is both an air war and a ground war. Planes, drones, and helicopters fly over the battle to demolish strongholds, and also to distribute supplies to needy soldiers and civilians. Soldiers with boots on the ground do the hard work of fighting off the bad guys so that people who are oppressed can be set free. What is true of military war is also true of spiritual warfare. Large events where the Bible is preached and God is worshipped, along with things like publishing, social media, and Internet platforms get ministry out to the world broadly like an air war of truth. Local churches and ministries, people meeting together in homes to pray for and support one another, sharing the gospel with family and friends, and doing good by meeting the physical needs of the poor and suffering is the ground war of love. In Nehemiah 8, we see both of these ministries at work. In

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the New Testament, this same pattern occurs when there is the public preaching of the gospel to large groups, followed by small groups meeting in homes to build relationships and spur one another on to love and good deeds.

Air War

Deals with the masses

Is event centered

Draws people to the church

Proclaims with authority

Provides general principles

Ground War

Deals with individuals & small groups

Is relationship centered

Connects people in the church

Explains with accountability

Provides personal applications

Shortly following completion of the rebuilding of the wall, roughly 50,000 people moved back into the city and had practical needs for everything from housing to food. The first church service occurred only one week after the wall was completed because the worship of God was the high priority. This time of year was their equivalent of New Year's Day and was the perfect time to get right with the Lord. Ezra, the spiritual leader, was the counterpart to Nehemiah, who was the administrative leader. We see the two men working out of their gifting, with Nehemiah focused on stewarding things, and Ezra focused on stewarding people. The men were very humble as they willingly shared power and worked together with tremendous success.

Ezra's lengthy sermon summarized the Pentateuch (meaning book in five parts), the first five books of the Bible written by Moses. Listening to the sermon were every man and woman who was old enough to understand what was being taught, cheering like a rock concert for Ezra to open the Bible.

Despite Ezra's sermon lasting upwards of six hours,

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people remained attentive. A high pulpit was built for Ezra so that the people could see him, and hear him, with God's Word literally and figuratively raised in authority. Joining Ezra on the platform were other godly leaders like an old school Billy Graham Crusade. In reverent respect, the people stood when the Scriptures were open, honoring and receiving God's Word humbly.

Ezra's sermon exalted God. The people are passionate in their worship, evident in their words and visible in their actions, as they whole person responded to God's Word, including getting face down on the ground. This powerful move of God the Holy Spirit was a revival.

In addition to the air war of preaching, there was also the ground war of explaining the sermon and praying for people. Group leaders were family heads and ministry leaders who met with individuals and groups to answer questions, clear up confusion, and help apply Scripture to their lives. In that day, very few people had copies of the Scriptures as the printing press was not invented for nearly 2,000 years, so hearing God's Word was a tremendous blessing. The Old Testament they read from was originally written in Hebrew but most of the people spoke Aramaic. Their Scriptures were translated, preached by Ezra, and then applied to individuals in the same way that we learn from and apply the Bible translated into English.

Hearing God's Word, people were convicted by the Holy Spirit with deep remorse for the sin in their lives.⁹ Ezra brought the men who were the heads of their homes together to instruct them on lovingly caring for their wives, children, and grandchildren. This is exactly what the closing lines of the Old Testament promised would occur when the good news of Jesus was understood – fathers' hearts would be inclined toward their children.

⁹ Romans 3:20

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Ezra's sermons covered, in part, the Feast of Booths (also called the Feast of Tabernacles), which is like the U.S. celebration of Thanksgiving.^o The spiritual leaders discovered instruction about the feast in Leviticus 23:37–43. This was celebrated from the 15th to the 22nd of the seventh month. Since they discovered these instructions on the second day of the seventh month (8:2, 13), the timing was perfect. They had exactly two weeks to prepare for it.

In previous years, not all Jews had made booths (not unlike camping) and lived in them for the week of the feast. They had given only “token” acknowledgment of the feast. This revival was a pivotal week of joyful celebration that brought glory to the Lord.

This time was to look back on their exiles for disobedience and 40 years of wilderness wandering^b, look around at God's gracious blessing in their lives and ways to help others in need, and look forward to their future and eventual entrance into God's eternal Kingdom ruled by King Jesus! Many years later, Jesus Himself also celebrated this feast in John 7:10–26.

Ezra continued the “Bible conference” during the entire week of the feast, reading and explaining the Word of God day-by-day. The combination of joyful fellowship, feasting, and hearing the Word strengthened the people. Nehemiah 8 stresses the celebration of the Feast of Booths was to include solemn repentance of sin and corresponding joy in the grace of God.^c This good news of Jesus Christ was foreshadowed just days prior to the celebration of the Feast of Booths on the annual Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, which was the holiest day of the year.^d In God's providence, Jerusalem was open, and the revival meeting occurred just in time for the

^o Nehemiah 8:1-2 ^b Leviticus 23:43 ^c Num. 29:35 ^d Lev. 16

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celebration of the Day of Atonement. This was the most important day of the year, and sacrifice was made for sinners to prepare them for the coming of Jesus Christ who shed His blood for the sins of the world.

Dig Deeper.

1. Read Leviticus 23:39–43 to learn more about the Feast of Booths.
2. Read John 7:10–26 to see Jesus celebrating the Feast of Booths described in Nehemiah 8.
3. Read Ezra 7:10 to understand the life and ministry model of Ezra who preaches God's Word in Nehemiah 8.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. If you were on a ministry team in the days of Nehemiah, would you have been under Nehemiah stewarding things (e.g. finances, real estate, policies), or under Ezra stewarding people (e.g. leading worship, explaining the Bible in conversations with people, on the prayer team)?
2. Why is it important that different leaders like Nehemiah and Ezra, along with the people who serve under their leadership, love, respect, and appreciate one another's differences?
3. Nehemiah 8 reports a profound moment when God the Holy Spirit really moved in the lives of people as they gathered for Bible teaching and worshipful singing. Can you think of a time in your life where you experienced something similar?
4. Of everything God did for, in, and through His people in Nehemiah 8, which is your favorite? Why?

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NOTES

What happens when religion turns into revival?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 9

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 9:3 – ...they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God.*

Commentary: Dead religion happens when people do spiritual things without the life of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said this is what happens when people say and sing things with their lips that they don't truly believe in their heart. Jesus also routinely rebuked religious leaders for worrying about how they looked on the outside as they religiously performed for the approval of people but did not deal with their inward sinful heart that hated Him and plotted His murder.

Dynamic revival happens when God the Holy Spirit does a powerful work for, in, and through people. In a season of revival, there is a genuine hunger for God's Word, fresh love for God and hatred of personal sin, and life in the Spirit poured out. Generally, an unusually high number of people become new Christians, and old Christians become awakened to new life in the Spirit.

Thus far in Nehemiah, we have seen a tremendous struggle between two sides of a battle. On one side, Nehemiah's prayer and planning culminated in the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, repopulating of the city, and regathering of God's people for revival worship. Opposing Nehemiah were a well-organized group of enemies and critics who did not want God's people to freely gather to worship God. Ultimately, this was spiritual warfare and the reason the fight was so intense was because God's plan for revival was so immense.

In Nehemiah 9, there is a tremendous outpouring of

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the Holy Spirit in response to the preaching of the Word of God and devoted prayer of godly leaders. Convicted of their sin against a good God, the people repent of their sin, turn from their dead religion, and experience a dynamic revival. Curiously, repentance includes both turning from their own sins as well as the sins of previous generations of their families. In this, God's people teach us twin truths neglected in our current culture. First, we are not merely individuals but also members of families which have shaped us for better and worse. Second, rather than denying the sin in our families, or using that sin as an excuse for our own sin, God in His kindness welcomes us to repent of personal and family sin. In reading this repentant prayer, the words "you" in reference to God, and "they" in reference to sinful people, highlight the goodness of God and wickedness of people.

This prayer was preceded by a sermon that lasted upwards of six hours from Ezra, followed up by Bible training for men, and concluded with Bible studies that lasted upwards of three hours. As a result of reading Scripture, God's people are compelled to pray. These twin disciplines of Scripture and prayer are how God speaks to us and how we speak to God. The prayer, which many consider to be the longest in the Old Testament, is a summary events from creation to Abraham and Moses in the first five books of the Old Testament (Pentateuch) that they had been studying for many days.

Throughout this prayer, God's character remains in constant sharp focus, quoting God's self-explanation in Exodus 34:5-7. These verses are referenced more than any other section of Scripture throughout Scripture and were likely stated from memory, which is a good idea for us as well.

In this prayer, we learn that there is only one God, He alone is our creator, sustainer, savior, covenant maker,

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faithful, righteous, miraculous, glorious, powerful, judge, provider, leader, law giver, provider, gracious, forgiving, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, enduring, teacher, conqueror, child giver, enemy crusher, home maker, business blessing, food giver, chastiser, prayer hearer, savior sender, prayer answerer, sin forgiver, prophet sender, great, mighty, awesome, righteous, and altogether perfect in all He does.

In this prayer, the people and their forefathers are declared presumptuous, stiff necked, forgetful, ungrateful, idolatrous, blasphemous, needy, incapable, fat, lazy, disobedient, rebellious, law breaking, prophet murdering, evil, disobedient, stubborn, wicked, sinful, and distressed in various English translations.

In religion, people judge one another. In revival, people judge themselves. True repentance in our life is different from four kinds of counterfeit repentance:

1. Mere Confession – had God’s people only confessed their sins without truly repenting, they would have agreed that they were guilty of sin but not changed their behavior.
2. Worldly Sorrow – 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that “worldly grief produces death”. Worldly sorrow feels bad for sin but does not embrace Jesus’ death as our “man of sorrows”^a who, “carried our sorrows”^b so that we can move from sorrow to salvation, forgiveness, new life, and joy.
3. Self-Righteous – proudly self-righteous repentance confesses the sins of other people, while neglecting our own. Jesus’ story of the self-righteous versus the unrighteous man in Luke 18:9-14 is the perfect example.
4. Religious Repentance – is motivated by an attempt to manipulate God for a blessing, and feeling sorry

^a Isaiah 53:3 ^b Isaiah 53:4

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for getting caught in sin, or sorry for the consequences of sin, but not the sin itself. It seeks in some way to pay God back by feeling bad, wallowing in shame, guilt, and condemnation while the gospel is about Jesus having taken our shame, guilt, and condemnation so that we are no longer under such things.⁹ Religious repentance falsely believes that if we do not punish ourselves for our sin, then God will be angry and punish us. Jesus was punished to forgive our sin and rose to give us new life and so the biggest problem with religious repentance is that it focuses too much on the sinner and too little on the Savior.

There can be no progress in the Christian life without ongoing real repentance. Luther launched the revival known as the Protestant Reformation by nailing “The Ninety-Five Theses” to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral in Germany. The first sentence said, “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ...willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Before the Church can revive the world, God needs to revive the Church. We cannot invite people to repent of their old life in the flesh and live a new life in the Spirit if we are not experiencing it for ourselves. Perhaps the greatest revival preacher in American history, George Whitefield, modeled this very truth by spending time each evening repenting of his sin before God, then getting up the next day to preach repentance to fellow sinners.

Dig Deeper.

1. Nehemiah 9 quotes Exodus 34:5-7, which is the verse quoted more often than any other verse in the Bible. Look it up to hear how God explains Himself to His people.

⁹ Hebrews 12:1-2; Romans 8:1

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2. Read Acts 2 to see how revival came to the early Church.
3. Read Acts 10 to see how revival came to the Gentiles.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. What role did sound Bible teaching play in this revival of Nehemiah 9? How are you doing learning God's Word?
2. What role did prayer play in the revival of Nehemiah 9? How is your life of prayer?
3. The repentance of God's people is on full display in Nehemiah 9. How is repentance to God and forgiveness from God truly a blessing that lifts our burdens and restores our joy?
4. What do you think it would look like if revival came to your family, church, and community? How can you be praying for this very thing?

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How do you make a family mission statement?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 10

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 10:39 – “...We will not neglect the house of our God.”*

Commentary: In politics, business, and religion, commands tend to come from the top down. In Nehemiah 10, we witness an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and people’s response as they commit to living in covenant relationship with God and one another. Their response is not top down, but instead inside out. As their hearts and desires are changed through hearing God’s Word preached and repenting of their sin, God’s people publicly commit themselves and their families to living by godly principles.

In some ways, this chapter of Nehemiah is a bit like a family mission statement that numerous families agree to so that they would live united as God’s people on God’s mission. Once a mission statement is adopted, the decisions that follow can be made in light of the principles and priorities guiding life. Imagine a nation without founding legal documents enshrining their form of government, a business without a mission statement, or a sports league without a rulebook and then ask yourself if you and your family have a mission statement that guides your decision-making.

Those who signed the covenant include the leader Nehemiah and his assistant, along with the priests (like a pastor today) who are listed by their family names as they signed on behalf of their extended families (10:2-8), the Levites (like ministry staff and leaders) who helped the priests to teach and care for the people (10:9-13), followed by 44 prominent leadership families, along with

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everyone else who was faithfully serving God in this Old Testament Church in various ministry services (10:28-29). Essentially all of God's people agreed to sign a covenant binding them to certain obligations not because they had to, but because they wanted to out of love for God and one another.

To summarize the united family mission statement, it basically says:

1. We will obey Scripture
2. We will lead our families
3. We will worship our God
4. We will give generously
5. We will make church a priority
6. We will only marry believers
7. We will conduct business ethically

The people were devoting their spiritual life, family, schedule, budget, and sexuality fully to God without reservation. When a true revival movement of God the Holy Spirit occurs, every aspect of life is affected. Because King Jesus is Lord over all, there is no such thing as a division between sacred and secular things. When His Lordship is lived out by His people, there is no aspect of life that remains unchanged and unaffected. When true revival happens, vice and crime go down, economic prosperity goes up, mental health improves, social unrest wanes, and the Kingdom of God starts to show up on earth as it is in Heaven. The truth is that everyone lives in a culture, and there are ultimately only two sources from which culture is created. One, most people live hell up – pulling the culture of bitterness, vengeance, selfishness, pride, addiction, and brokenness into their lives. Two, some people live Kingdom down inviting the Holy Spirit to bring Heaven to earth with the fruit of the Spirit manifest in the lives, families, and communities of a culture. This is what we see happening in Nehemiah 10.

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Since this was all very public, the husbands and fathers who signed the covenant were committing to being men of God. This allowed their wives and children to encourage them to live up to their promise, and also welcomed the men to spur one another on to love and good deeds. In this way, God's people were giving up their selfishness so that they could live, work, and worship together like one big extended family made up of individual families. In doing so, they were demonstrating faith that God would provide for them in every way.

For generations, these families had professed a faith that they did not practice, and often did not possess. They gave lip-service to God but did not live a lifestyle that was godly. The Bible had been ignored, worship services had stopped, people were not giving to God, they were marrying pagans and unbelievers, but now were going forward and not looking back. Today, believers face the same kind of temptation to become lethargic and lukewarm, forsaking the corporate worship of God for business and recreational opportunities, not give generously to the cause of Jesus Christ, and living lives that are not much different than everyone who does not know God. The good news from Nehemiah's report is that everything can change quickly and supernaturally if God's people will repent of their sin and obey His Word as God graciously and generously pours out His blessing upon His people.

Previously, the people lived independently and now they were striving toward unity. They did not make God or church a priority, and now they were. They did not think or plan in terms of generational legacy for their children and grandchildren, but that was all about to change. This chapter reports the result of repentance. People stop fighting with God and start following God. People stop arguing with God and start agreeing with God. People

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change their lives because God has changed their heart, mind, and desires.

Dig Deeper.

1. Read Ezra 9-10 to get more insight into the results of the revival reported in Nehemiah 10.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. Does your family have a mission statement that guides your decision-making throughout life? If not, would you be willing to create one?
2. What do you think it was like for children seeing their fathers publicly repent and covenant to lead their family in the will of God?
3. What do you think it was like for the wives of these men listed in the public covenant of Nehemiah 10 to have such a sudden and dramatic change in their husbands?
4. Of the seven areas they pledged, which would be the most difficult for you personally? Why?

NOTES

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Why should Christians get upstream in culture?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 11

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Matthew 5:14*
– “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden...”

Commentary: My wife Grace and I have been doing ministry together our entire marriage, always in larger cities, having even moved a few times in response to God’s calling. We know many ministry families, including international missionaries, who have done the same thing. For people who are not believers, the thought of moving your entire family to a large city where you know few if any people, on the hope that you will be able to put life together for your family, and minister to others, can sound a bit crazy. From the days of Abraham and Sarah to the present, this is exactly what God has repeatedly asked some of his people to do. We see this very thing happen in Nehemiah 11 for at least six reasons.

One, cities are strategic to God’s plan for the world. While there must be faithful churches wherever there are people, cities and their surrounding areas are of strategic importance. Sociologists such as James Davison Hunter, have shown that culture flows downstream from urban areas where government, education, healthcare, information, entertainment, trade, travel, and industry are concentrated. An urban area is marked by density and diversity. According to some estimates, over half of the world’s population lives in cities, and over two-thirds of Americans live in a city of some size.

The Bible opens with a garden and the cultural mandate to build culture, which would result in cities. The Bible ends with the unveiling of the heavenly city of

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the New Jerusalem, an urban paradise for God's people.^a While we need churches and ministries in rural areas, cities are strategic centers from which to send out ministry and gather in people.

Two, some believers should intentionally live in major cities because of their strategic importance. This is exactly what happened in Nehemiah's day as roughly 10 percent of the people were chosen by God through the casting of lots to determine who should relocate to the city for missions purposes. Those who moved into the city relocated to the neighborhoods in the city where their families had resided in previous generations. In our day, this would be akin to various families taking responsibility upon themselves to be missionaries to their neighborhood and maintaining that ministry from one generation to the next.

Three, believers living in cities should love the whole city and serve the common good. Christians and churches in cities are to live as Jesus taught^b, as a city within the city whose beliefs and behaviors are countercultural to the city so that the Kingdom models what a truly great city could look like under the rule of King Jesus. This happens as our beliefs and behaviors are guided by the Scriptures so that how we do such things as gender, sex, work, money, power, family, and pleasure is in a manner that is different, or holy.

Four, urban believers will pay a price to do so. Cities tend to be statistically non-Christian and are also filled with people that are vocally not Christian and therefore opposition and criticism is to be expected. Sin also tends to be concentrated in cities because of the anonymity they provide people. Lastly, cities are expensive, especially for families raising children.

Five, cities are worth the effort to reach because they

^a Revelation 21-22 ^b Matt. 5:14

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are ripe for the gospel. Despite the obvious difficulties in the doing of urban ministry, such as occurred in the days of Nehemiah all the way to our own day, there are many reasons, including the following, why cities are worth the effort:

- Jesus said that the harvest was ripe, and the workers were few, and that is especially true of cities.
- Because the city has a higher concentration of sin, it is exactly the kind of place that the gospel of forgiveness might be most easily understood.
- Because the city is more open to change than more established traditional areas, people may be more open to changes such as converting to Christ.
- Because cities make it difficult for large churches, the new opportunities to be a multiple campus and church-planting church that sends congregations out to various parts of the city is an opportunity for Christians to scatter on mission, just like the days of Nehemiah.
- Because cities are expensive and less charitable, the generosity of faithful Christians is a very visible demonstration of their true priorities and love for both Jesus and the whole city.
- From a city, outlying areas and even the world can be reached.
- The high concentration of innovators, emerging leaders, and highly creative people in the cities means that their conversion results in the ongoing reformation of the church for good.

Six, Jesus Himself relocated from Heaven to demonstrate for us how to be missionaries in our city. In John's gospel, Jesus tells us no less than 39 times that He was a missionary from Heaven who came to minister incarnationally (literally God "in flesh") in an earthly

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culture.⁹ Furthermore, Jesus also commands us to be missionaries in culture as He was, saying in John 17:18, “As you **sent** me into the world, so I have **sent** them into the world.” He also said in John 20:21, “As the Father has **sent** me, even so I am **sending** you.”

In closing, I want to share with you an example from history of what happens when the principles of Nehemiah are practically applied to a church-planting church in a city. In the 1550s, John Calvin saw the population of his city of Geneva double as Christians fled there from persecution. One of those refugees was the Englishman John Bale, who wrote: “Geneva seems to me to be the wonderful miracle of the whole world. For so many from all countries come here, as it were, to a sanctuary. Is it not wonderful that Spaniards, Italians, Scots, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, disagreeing in manners, speech, and apparel, should live so lovingly and friendly, and dwell together like a...Christian congregation?”⁶

In His loving providence, God forced Geneva to become a short-term training ground in urban missions. Christians from varying cultures lived together there under the teaching of John Calvin and they had to determine what to receive, reject, and redeem from their culture in order to effectively contextualize the gospel and do evangelism.

After they had such wonderful theological training and missiological experience, many of the Christians returned to their cultures once persecution subsided. The result was an explosion of contending, contextualizing, and church planting. There were only five underground Protestant Churches in France alone in 1555, but by

⁹ John 3:34; 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 36, 37, 38; 6:29, 38, 39, 44, 57; 7:16, 28, 29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44, 45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21

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1562, 2,150 churches were planted, totaling some three million people. Furthermore, some of the churches were megachurches, with anywhere from 4,000-9,000 people in attendance.

Additionally, church-planting missionaries were also sent by Calvin to Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, and the free imperial city-states in Rhineland. The Atlantic Ocean was even crossed by church-planting missionaries Calvin sent to South America and what is Brazil today, often starting in cities and spreading out from there into regions and nations.

Dig Deeper.

1. Read Revelation 21-22:5 to see the city of the New Jerusalem God has prepared for His Kingdom.
2. What believers in the Bible lived in pagan cities and were used by God to greatly influence culture? (e.g. Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah)
3. Look up the ministry journeys of Paul, which are likely in the maps in your Bible, to see how he strategically moved from city to city to establish churches as ministry centers to serve entire regions.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. Has God ever called you to move for ministry reasons? What was that journey like?
2. What do you think would happen to cities and the cultures they create if the Christian Church were not present and active in those places?
3. What are some of the greatest needs that only the gospel and Christian faith can meet where you live?
4. How can you be praying for and being a blessing to the people and culture you live in?

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NOTES

How is our worship up to God also a witness out to others?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 12

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 12:43 – And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.*

Commentary: For most people, the most boring parts of the Bible are the various lists of names. Admittedly, it can be difficult to get excited about and learn deep truths from what reads like pages from ancient phone books.

Christian ministry happens when God does a saving work for someone, then does a sanctifying work in someone, that culminates in a serving work through someone. The list of names in Nehemiah 12 are new leaders who were rising up to help lead their urban ministry as a city within their city. The multiple lists of names scattered throughout the book of Nehemiah show us that a healthy ministry needs a continual influx of new leaders with new skills to pursue new opportunities that can ensure the continued health and success of the ministry.

Behind the simple list of names in Nehemiah 12 is a host of complex challenges. The rising up of new leaders means that some preexisting leaders were being redeployed in the organization based upon performance, rising new leaders were ascending the ladder of influence quickly, seats were available at the table of senior leadership for new leaders, and pre-existing leaders were reassigned to new tasks. Obviously, it was yet another season of reorganization and the complex pains that

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accompany a movement that desires to keep moving.

Just as the people had stacked the stones together to rebuild the wall, God is now stacking the saints together. Each of the names listed is in some sense an important stone that God had chosen to bring wisdom, insight, service, counsel and such to the city within the city so that it could remain a vibrant ministry.

Nehemiah 12:27-43 then reports the enormous worship service in honor of God to celebrate all that He had accomplished in their midst through their sacrifices and dedication. The entire point of rebuilding the walls and city, relocating believers back into the city, was to renew the worship of God.

The worship of God is a mega-theme of the entire Bible. Christian worship is not just a musical style, religious issue, something that happens in a church building, or something that starts and stops, although it does include all of those things. The Bible says, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”^a In some ways, worship involves every nook and cranny of life.

Hebrews 13:15–17 says, “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

In this section we see that worship includes:

1. Praise: Who or what do you praise most passionately and frequently?

^a 1 Corinthians 6:20, 10:31

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2. Proclamation: How commonly and clearly do you confess Jesus Christ in the words you speak, type, and sing?
3. Service: Do you serve others with gladness in response to God so faithfully serving you? Or are you someone who prefers to be served rather than to serve? Do you serve when it is inconvenient or unnoticed or when you are unmotivated?
4. Love: Are you an active participant in the life of your church and community? Do you give your time, talent, and treasure to share God's love in tangible ways with others?
5. Generosity: For whom or what do you sacrifice your time, health, emotion, money, and energy? What do these acts of worship reveal about what you have chosen to deify in your life?
6. Submission: Are you submissive to Godly authority or do you tend to ignore or rebel against Godly authority (e.g., parent, teacher, pastor, or boss)?

Our English word "dedication" comes from the Latin word which means "to offer" or "to give". The dedication that occurs in Nehemiah 12 is part of their worship of God. It would have likely included ceremonial washings, reading of Scripture, repentance of sin, and possibly temporary abstention from marital sexual intimacy to focus on God. Their dedication included the following three categories:

1. Leaders - because leaders set the example and pace of a people it was important to establish godly known leaders that are named in Nehemiah 12, with the mention that they obeyed what the Bible commanded.
2. People - as the people dedicate themselves to God in Nehemiah 12, their joy and unity is emphasized showing them as God's holy people, which means

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they were devoted to God and set aside by God for blessing and joy.

3. Things – because the money and stuff in our life are meant to be used in such a way that God is worshipped as we live as stewards. In Nehemiah 12 the people give their first fruits generously, and everyone and everything is stewarded wisely.

As a result of these dedications, God's people were showing that worship was, for them, a daily lifestyle with incredibly practical implications that was marked by joy. In many religions, there is a noted absence of joy among worshippers. In some religions the people chant a few choruses that are more akin to a dirge. In other religions, the religious leaders sing but the people do not participate in songs to God. However, in Christianity, corporate worship includes joyous and enthusiastic singing in delightful response to who God is and what He has done and is doing for us through Jesus Christ. In the example of Nehemiah 12, we see this truth shine forth in three ways.

First, there was delight in people's hearts for who God is and what God had done in their midst. As a result, the Scriptures use the words "gladness", "thanksgiving", "thanks", "rejoiced", "rejoice", "great joy", and "joy" in various English translations.

Second, there were instruments in peoples' hands. These include cymbals, harps, lyres, trumpets, as well as other unnamed instruments.

Third, there were songs on peoples' lips. As a result, we are told that, in delight, the choirs sang as well as the people in the words, "singing", songs that "gave thanks", and "great sacrifices." Summarizing this grand event, Nehemiah 12:43 reports, "And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And

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the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.”

By gathering to worship God through songs of rejoicing, they were showing that not only did they worship God while scattered throughout life, but also while gathered as His people to celebrate all that He had done for all the people.

In summary, people who have been loved and served by God respond by dedicating themselves and their things to God so that they worshipped God in everything and every day. They gather together to delight in the goodness of God by singing with joy the praises of their good God. Everyone and everything are for God, which is the mark of real revival.

Dig Deeper.

1. Read Revelation 4:1-11 to see how God is being worshipped right now in the unseen realm.
2. Look up Romans 11:36-12:1 to see how Paul defines Christian worship.
3. If you would like to learn more about Christian worship in the Spirit, there is a free, four-part sermon series at <https://realfaith.com/sermon-series/worship-the-king/>.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. What are the various ways God is worshipped in Nehemiah 12?
2. Why is corporate worship, where God's people meet together under teaching and leadership, vitally important?
3. How did the people treat their leaders near the end of Nehemiah 12? Has that kind of relationship between people and their ministry leaders been common or uncommon in your church experience?
4. What do you most appreciate about the people, leaders, and ministries in your church?

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NOTES

How can you turn your anger into action?

Scripture to Read: Nehemiah 13

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation: *Nehemiah 13:31 – Remember me, O my God, for good.*

Commentary: Were the Bible written by the same people who write the popular fairy tales in our day, chapter 12 would have simply concluded by saying, “and they lived happily ever after...” Thankfully, the Bible is an honest look at human nature, human history, and human fickleness. The Bible is the most truthful and painfully honest book ever written, and the closing chapter of Nehemiah is tragic. God brings real revival, and the people return to ruin. The account of apostasy is presented in three snapshots, each concluding with a personal prayer from Nehemiah (13:14, 13:22, 13:31).

After all the work to rebuild the wall, renew the city of Jerusalem, and return to the worship of God, the people went right back to the same old sinful behavior that caused the 141 years of discipline in the first place. Nehemiah had served as governor in Jerusalem for 12 years (5:14), and then returned to the capital city of Susa, which had been his home. Presumably, he felt that his work in Jerusalem had been successfully completed and that the leaders and policies left in his wake would ensure the ongoing worship of God and evangelization of the world from that city. Sadly, within an undisclosed number of years (perhaps between one and seven), he had to return to Jerusalem to salvage the gains that took 12 years of his life to make.

Importantly, Nehemiah is feeling “very angry” throughout this section (13:8). His anger is righteous because people are denying God and destroying

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themselves. Exodus 34:6 says that God is “slow to anger”, but He gets angry, nonetheless. Even Jesus was angry on more than one occasion, and as God’s image bearers, we too should find ourselves experiencing righteous anger in the face of sin, evil, and injustice. Righteous anger should compel us to fight for holiness, goodness, and justice in ways that honor God and obey the law. Indeed, without anger, we are left with a passionless faith that is impervious and unmotivated to be an agent of change in a fallen and dying world.

At this point in the story, Nehemiah is perhaps in his fifties or sixties. Rather than retiring, Nehemiah is determined to finish with his boots on, working for his King and Kingdom. The final chapter of Nehemiah are pages from his personal journal, stressing both his actions and feelings as marked by his frequent use of “I”, which is noteworthy.

This brutally honest section of Nehemiah reveals to us a process that took place in the lives of many of God’s people, threatening to destroy their entire ministry and city. That process, which is perennially tempting, is as follows:

1. In the name of politeness or personal gain, God’s people have friendships with those who do not care for God and, rather than converting their friends to the Savior, they are themselves converted to sin (for more on this see 6:17-19 where the godless Tobiah who opposed Nehemiah and threatened his very life married into a prominent family and wound up with his own apartment in the house of the God he despised and opposed). Simply, tolerance overtakes truth as a priority.
2. Friendships and business partnerships outside of the ministry become more important than God. In time, those who do not know God are given

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prominence among God's people so that God is dishonored by godless spiritual leaders.

3. Zeal and passion for God invariably wanes among God's people as the accommodation of godless spiritual leaders results in godless spirituality even among professing worshippers of God. Simply, the distinction between Christians and non-Christians is muddled starting with ministry leaders.

Not unlike Jesus many years later at the Temple, Nehemiah feels angry (13:8), takes action, and prays to God for vindication as the people would have treated him like a villain. Nehemiah was angry that the Sabbath was violated, and the worship of God was neglected. Rather than taking a day off from their work to worship God and rest with their family and friends, people kept working because it increased their own wealth. Nehemiah sought to end this sin by shutting the gates to the city so that business commerce would have to cease. Rather than obeying God and taking that day to Sabbath, the merchants simply lined up outside of the city and waited for the gates to open, not unlike what happens outside a store debuting a new product or theater debuting a new film. Tragically, people so loved their wealth and work that they chose to waste an entire day for a good spot in line rather than returning home to worship God and enjoy a Sabbath day with their family and friends.

Nehemiah was angry that believers were marrying unbelievers so that there would be no godly legacy in future generations. The burden of this responsibility fell on the believing fathers who merit Nehemiah's anger most intensely as they had failed as covenant heads to lovingly lead their family in the purposes of God. Nehemiah was also angry that God's men did not teach their children the biblical language of Hebrew, meaning children had no understanding of God or Scripture and were raised by the

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world instead of the Word.

Nehemiah turned his anger into action, holding the men accountable for their failed leadership. He also removed unfit ministry leaders who were not teaching the Bible or leading the people to obey God.

Theologically, what Nehemiah was battling is called apostasy. Unlike unbelievers who never claim to belong to or believe in the God of the Bible, apostasy happens when someone professes a faith they neither possess or practice. A Bible Dictionary calls apostasy, “A public denial of a previously held religious belief and a distancing from the community that holds to it. The term is almost always applied pejoratively, carrying connotations of rebellion, betrayal, treachery, or faithlessness.”⁷

The Greek term for apostasy is often used in ancient literature to describe a military treason where a soldier joins forces with their enemy to attack their former allies. Apostasy, in this case, is the spiritual warfare version and is common in every generation by those who want to deconstruct their faith altogether, turn the Bible into nothing more than social justice moralism, present Jesus as a good example but not a sinless Savior, or start an entirely new religion altogether while still claiming Christ.

Fittingly, the book ends with a simple prayer from a humble elderly man who has lived his life storing up his treasures in Heaven, who longs to be with the God he has given his life to serving faithfully. It also leaves us with the question of whether we will live our lives boldly in faith as Nehemiah did or live our lives badly and falter as many others did.

Dig Deeper.

1. Read Malachi chapters 2 and 4 to see how this pattern of apostasy was a tragic, but frequent,

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- occurrence among God's people.
2. If you want to learn more about what apostasy looks like in the Christian church, the book of 1 Corinthians is filled with examples.

Walk it out. Talk it out.

1. This section is a page from Nehemiah's personal journal. What does journaling look like in your life? If you've not done it, would you be willing to give it a try?
2. What does apostasy look like in the Christian Church today? What issues are the same as in the days of Nehemiah 13?
3. According to Nehemiah 13, it is the men and ministry leaders who are first held accountable. Why is this still the way things should be?
4. Nehemiah had a righteous anger. What does righteous anger (versus unrighteous anger) look like today?

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MARK DRISCOLL & REALFAITH

With Pastor Mark, it's all about Jesus! He is a spiritual leader, prolific author, and compelling speaker, but at his core, he is a family man. Mark and his wife Grace have been married and doing vocational ministry together since 1993 and, along with their five kids, planted Trinity Church in Scottsdale, Arizona as a family ministry.

Pastor Mark, Grace, and their oldest daughter, Ashley, also started RealFaith Ministries, which contains a mountain of Bible teaching for men, women, couples, parents, pastors, leaders, Spanish speakers, and more, which you can access by visiting **RealFaith.com** or downloading the **RealFaith app**.

With a master's degree in exegetical theology from Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, he has spent the better part of his life teaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible, contextualizing its timeless truths and never shying away from challenging, convicting passages that speak to the heart of current cultural dilemmas.



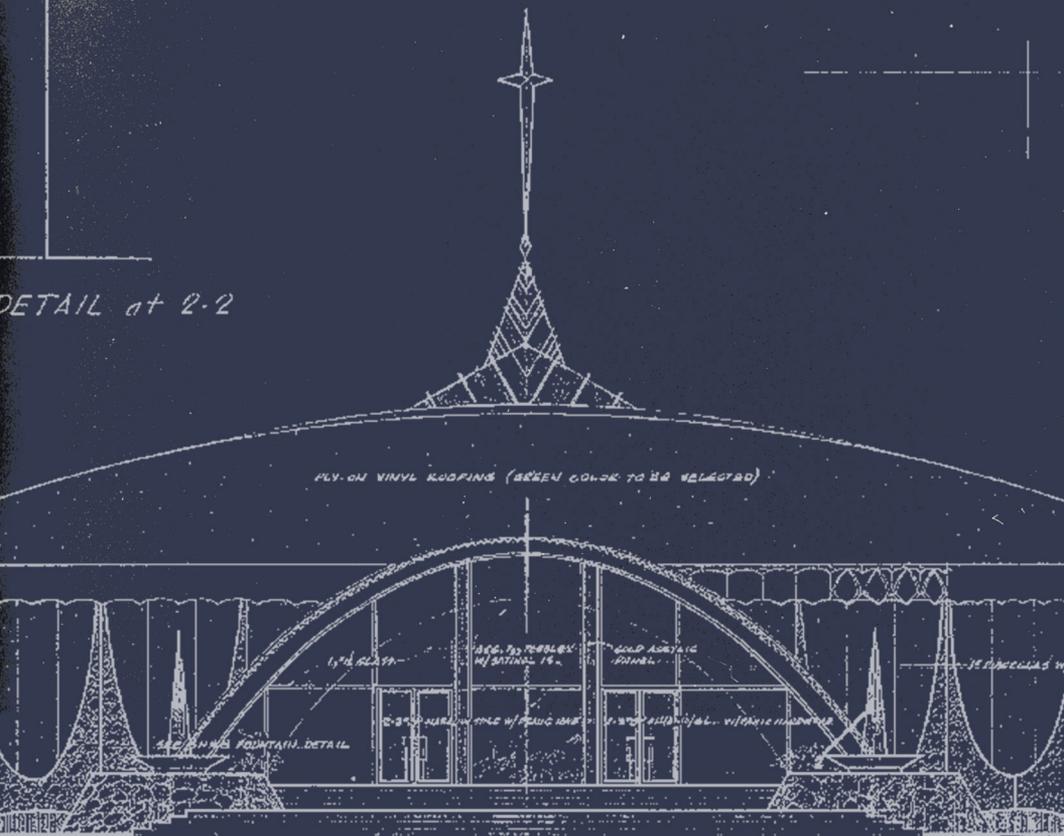
Together, Mark and Grace have co-authored *Win Your War* and *Real Marriage*, and he co-authored a father-daughter project called *Pray Like Jesus* with his daughter, Ashley. Pastor Mark has also written numerous other books including *Spirit-Filled Jesus*, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, *Vintage Jesus*, and *Doctrine*.

If you have any prayer requests for us, questions for future Ask Pastor Mark or Dear Grace videos, or a testimony regarding how God has used this and other resources to help you learn God's Word, we would love to hear from you at **hello@realfaith.com**.

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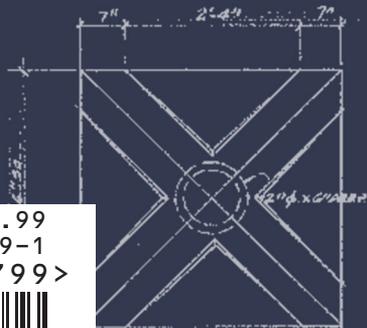
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