"Re-Forming Again"
Nehemiah 13:15-22
Week of November 19, 2023

Opening Question:
• Has there been a time that you know you have experienced God's favor as a result of your faithfulness? Share the story with your group.

Pray this prayer (one person or the whole group together):
Lord, as we come together to study your Word, we bring all of who we are with our needs, our hopes and our expectations. Meet us here in the power and presence of your Holy Spirit. Give us insight and understanding as we listen carefully for your voice. And then give us courage and conviction to align our lives with the way of Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

Read aloud this introduction:
        We have arrived at the end of the book of Nehemiah, where the closing line is "Remember me with favor, my God." The story we have lived in for the last 13 weeks took place 2,500 years ago in Israel. It is the story of God's people and the leadership of Nehemiah, one of their fellow Jews, who traveled 1,300 miles to come live among them in Jerusalem and lead the rebuilding of the walls of the city. This critical step opened up the opportunity for the restoration of spiritual and communal life with God and each other in ways they desperately needed.
        The Jews of Jerusalem and the towns of Judah in Nehemiah's day have gained ground in their restoration. They've rebuilt the temple under the leadership of Ezra the scribe. The city wall has been rebuilt and repaired under Nehemiah. There have been days where the people learn what the Law of God says and seek to apply it. Elements of spiritual life and obedience to God have returned as the people weep at their failures and give themselves to greater faithfulness. They have responded to God with celebration and thanksgiving.
        If only we could leave it there! But we find out in Nehemiah 13 that there is an on-going reforming work that needs to be done. Nehemiah has now been the governor of Jerusalem for twelve years. In Nehemiah 13:6 we learn that he has made a round trip back to visit King Artaxerxes. When he returns to Jerusalem, he sees undeniable evidence that some of the restorative gains that had been underway have been lost. He addresses this situation in ways that may startle us in light of our modern sensibilities.

Read Nehemiah 13:15-22 aloud OR read the entire chapter as time permits

The five areas Nehemiah addresses in chapter 13 are these:
Vs. 1-3 who gets to worship at the temple.
Vs. 4-9 an enemy of God's work has been welcomed back.
Vs. 10-14 they aren't giving the full 10% of their income to support the ministry.
Vs. 15-22 they are not taking a day of rest each week. (Sabbath)
Vs. 23-29 they have married people who do not believe in God.

Questions for Exploration:
• Rather than recoil from what seems restrictive, harsh, and antithetical to the welcoming, loving call of Jesus that we know, what common threads do you see in the need for these on-going reforms?
• How would you express what you see as Nehemiah's primary concern for the people of Israel?
• What do you "hear" in Nehemiah's repeated prayer to God for remembrance?

Questions for Pressing it Out:
- How should we go about faithfully aligning our lives with God's written word?
- What on-going reformation is needed in our churches/community/country/world?
- What on-going reformation is needed in your life?
- Is there something specific you sense God is calling you to do at this time?
- If you were to adopt Nehemiah's ending prayer "Remember me with favor, my God," how might it change your thoughts/attitudes/actions today?

Closing Prayer (pray together as a group or have one person lead):
Creator God, from the beginning of time, you have revealed yourself as the One who brings order out of chaos. You take what is broken and make it into something new and beautiful. Build and restore us, O Lord. Take the broken-down places of our lives and our world and build them up, not so we can hide behind walls of protection, but that from places of peace and safety, we can testify to your amazing grace and love that makes all things new.