

Welcome to Nehemiah! It is such a joy to be sharing in this wonderful book together! The subtitle for our series is "From Rubble to Revival." I have chosen this title not just because it's catchy, but because it speaks to the greater reality that I believe can happen in your heart if you allow God to powerfully speak to you through this series. In fact, that is my prayer for you throughout this series: "May God bring revival and renewal in areas that may be deteriorating or destroyed."

Nehemiah is a book about leadership, vision and prayer. The story of Nehemiah is about rebuilding a city, specifically the rebuilding of a broken wall; but we can very easily draw a parallel to our own lives. This epic story, which sometimes reads like a historical account and sometimes reads like Nehemiah's journal, gives us a guide on how to overcome troubles and trust in God. We see an ordinary man rise up and become a legendary hero by trusting God and making himself available to God's purposes.

Nehemiah challenges each of us to ask: "How will I live my life? Will I live for myself, treating my life as something I own, to be used for my purposes and comfort? Or will I see my life as something given by God, that I can steward for His pleasure and purpose?"

Nehemiah was not a priest like Ezra or a prophet like Malachi. He served the Persian king in a secular position before leading a group of Jews to Jerusalem. This is so encouraging, as God can use all manner of people in all manner of places to do all manners of work for His glory. You, too, can be used by God! Be encouraged; God doesn't limit Himself to your vocation, age or even ability.

Context of the Book:

After 70 years in exile, the Jews had returned home and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem under the Priest Ezra. They were able to worship God in their own land, but the city still lay in ruins. The once-great capital of the Promised Land was a depressing rubble heap exposed to enemies and shame.

The book of Nehemiah opens in the Persian city of Susa in the year 444 BC. Later that year, Nehemiah traveled to Israel, leading the third of three returns by the Jewish people following their 70 years of exile in Babylon. (The previous book of Ezra describes the earlier two returns.) Most of the book centers on events in Jerusalem. The narrative concludes around the year 430 BC, and scholars believe the book was written shortly thereafter.

One of the challenges with taking a book so rich in content is that I cannot cover everything in a 40-minute message. This is where community groups become vital in the process of "digging deeper." The questions that will accompany my sermons should act as a guide or reference to fostering deeper conversation and greater insights in relation to my message. However, be attentive and open to other topics and areas of discussion that may arise (which may not have been covered in the message). May God bless you and encourage you individually and/or your group as you dive into God's Word together!

Feel no pressure to answer every question, like on a test. Remember *transformation*, not *information* is always the goal.

Reflect on the following questions:

1. Please read Nehemiah chapter 1 out loud as a group. Nothing is known about Nehemiah's youth or background; we only meet him as an adult in the Persian royal court as the personal cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Upon hearing of the Israelites' situation, it drove Nehemiah to weep and mourn for days. Why do you think he was moved with such compassion? What does this show about his heart? Have you ever felt so strongly about something that it moved you to tears and made you weep for days? Is there something you have become numb to that maybe should move you to compassion? Is there something in your life that you feel needs, rebuilding yet is challenging?

2. Do you believe that God might weep over the broken areas of your life? As a group, spend a little time looking up the following verses:

- Luke 19:41-44
- Isaiah 58:11-12
- Psalm 144:12-15
- Isaiah 29:14-20

How do these verses relate to our study?

3. It is vital to remember that God is always about the work He is doing in us. As residents of a predominantly wealthy country, we can easily fall into the temptation of thinking we are better than the brokenness around us. Exposing us to the brokenness of others lets God heal our brokenness as much as theirs. Talk about how you've experienced this truth in your life.

4. How does praying scripture and remembering God, His character, His promises and the inheritance we have in Him help us move forward in His purposes and plans after we encounter brokenness?

5. What is your understanding of corporate repentance? Do you think corporately we should ask forgiveness for past sins and current injustices? If not, why? If so, how would this affect your prayer life?

6. What specific part of Nehemiah's reliance on God encourages you? Do you see how ordinary people who depend on God can do the extraordinary together for God's kingdom? How does this first chapter show clearly Nehemiah's view of God and of himself?

Personal Reflection:

Do you ever think, "I'm not the hero type. How can I possibly make a difference? Surely someone else could do better."? If so, I want to encourage you to think about what opportunities God is placing in front of you. Pray that God would give you wisdom and courage to step forward into surrender and obedience and begin restoring broken walls around you.