



# **A Study of Nehemiah**

A LIFE OF PRAYER

## **STUDENT'S GUIDE**

Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin  
2018: The Year of Prayer

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome to **2018: The Year of Prayer**. Our focus this year will be on God's gift of **Daily Prayer**. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we will strengthen the prayer lives of our leaders and equip our parishes to be places that are grounded in prayer. Prayer is a foundational spiritual practice and a cornerstone to building a life of Christian discipleship. Prayer has the power to transform people and communities.

A long time ago, Nehemiah was called by God to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. In the Old Testament, *Book of Nehemiah*, we read that before Nehemiah lays even one stone; Nehemiah prays. He prays for strength. He prays for protection. He prays for forgiveness. Nehemiah takes everything to the Lord in prayer. One of my "go to" Bible verses related to prayer is **Philippians 4:6**, and this will serve as our **Year of Prayer** memory verse. **"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6)**. This powerful Bible verse captures God's desire for us to pray.

What follows is a 6-session Bible study on the *Book of Nehemiah*. I want to encourage you to open your Bible, gather with a group of friends, get outside the 4 walls of the congregation, and learn what God desires to teach you. But, be careful. Be very, very careful, because God's Word has the power to transform people and communities from who we are into the people and communities that God longs for us to be. During the time of Nehemiah, the city of Jerusalem experienced a similar transformation. At the dedication of the rebuilt city wall, we read, **"They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away" (Nehemiah 12:43)**. May we also experience the great joy of God, the gracious love of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit to renew and transform our lives and communities. Prayer and God's Word has that power.

Let us pray: *God of justice and joy, as we begin this study of the Book of Nehemiah may we be inspired by your love and transformed by your will to be built into the people you long for us to be. Lead us to grow strong in our daily prayer and in our love for you. This we pray in the blessed and holy name of Jesus. Amen*

Blessings,  
Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin  
January 6, 2018  
The Epiphany of Our Lord

## Tips for Group Members

***“And the king granted me what I asked, for the gracious hand of my God was upon me” (Nehemiah 2:8b)***

When Nehemiah asked King Artaxerxes for permission to travel to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls, the king said, “Yes”. And so, did you. Thank you for your willingness to attend this Bible study. If this is something new for you, no need to worry, for like Nehemiah, the gracious hand of God will be upon you.

Now, you don't need to be a Bible scholar to attend a Bible study. You simply need to be open. Open to experiencing new thoughts, great discussion, and the potential for real growth. Think of a coffee shop conversation rather than a classroom lecture. These studies can be experienced in a variety of settings, though I would encourage you to follow the pattern of the original apostles and share these studies out in the “market place” (outside the four walls of the church building). You never know who might be watching, listening, and wondering. These studies are intended to last around 60 minutes. Below are some suggestions to assist you.\*

### Before the Study

1. Pray. 2018 is the Year of Prayer, so pray that God would guide you to learn and participate faithfully. Pray for your Bible study leader and the participants who will gather for conversation and discussion. Ask God to open your hearts and minds to hear God's Word that it may motivate you to a new way of thinking and being.
2. Come to the study prepared. Read and then slowly re-read the assigned Bible passage. Write down particular and peculiar words and phrases you have questions about. Bring those questions to the group gathering.
3. Carefully work through the lesson. Take time to meditate and reflect on each question. Write your responses in the space provided. Please set aside 60-90 minutes for prep time each week.
4. Consider ways to apply the assigned Bible passage to your life.

### During the Study

1. Bring the necessary materials to your study: Bible, student guide, pen, or pencil.
2. Some tips for participating in discussion:

A. Be willing to participate. The leader will not be lecturing, but leading a

conversation. Join the conversation.

B. Stick to the topic being discussed. Try to avoid drifting off on tangents.

C. Be attentive to other participants. Listen to what they are sharing. You may be surprised by their insights. Also, be affirming. This will encourage some of the more hesitant participants to share.

D. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. Do participate, but allow others to also participate.

E. Fully expect that God will teach you something through this study and through the other members in your group. Pray that you may apply God's teaching to your daily life.

### 3. Some general guidelines

A. We will consider all conversation within our group to be confidential. We will not share confidential conversation without specific permission.

B. We will make space for each participant to share / speak as they are comfortable doing so.

C. We will listen attentively to one another.

D. We will be very cautious about fixing people and giving advice.

E. We will practice Martin Luther's explanation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor".

1. "We are to fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light".

\*adapted from *Bible Studies for Everyone* by N.T. Wright

## **BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES**

### Study Bibles

*Lutheran Study Bible* - NRSV (2009) Published by Augsburg Fortress

*Harper Collins Study Bible* – NRSV (2006) Published by Harper One

*NIV Zondervan Study Bible* – NIV (2015) Published by Zondervan

*ESV Study Bible* – ESV (2008) Published by Crossway

### Bible Dictionary / Handbook

*Harper Collins Bible Dictionary* (2011) Published by Harper One

*Halley's Bible Handbook* (2014) Published by Zondervan

### Bible Atlases

*Oxford Bible Atlas* (2009) Published by Oxford University Press

*The Student Bible Atlas* (2005) Published by Augsburg Fortress

*Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* (2010) Published by Zondervan

### Commentaries

*Ezra and Nehemiah* by H.G.M. Williamson (1985) Published by Thomas Nelson

*Ezra-Nehemiah* by Mark Throntveit (1992) Published by Westminster John Knox Press

*Ezra: A Commentary* by Lisbeth S. Fried (2017) Published by Sheffield Phoenix Press. (includes some great work on Nehemiah)

### Other

*In An Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* by Tamara Eskenazi (1988) Published by Society of Biblical Literature.

*Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps, and Timelines* (2015) Published by Rose

View Video on You Tube: "Read Scripture Ezra Nehemiah" (8:36 minutes)

## 5 SIMPLE FORMS OF PRAYER / DEVOTIONS

### TRIP Form of Prayer

**Thanks:** For whom / for what am I thankful?

**Regret:** What has caused me regret?

**Intercession:** For whom / for what do I need to pray?

**Purpose:** What action is God calling me to take today?

### ACTS Form of Prayer

**Adoration:** praise God for who God is and for what God does.

**Confess to God** the sins that I / we have committed.

**Thank God** for the abundant blessings God gives.

**Supplication:** pray for our needs and the needs of others.

### Nehemiah's Form of Prayer (1:4-11)

**Praise God** for who God is and for what God does.

**Confess to God** the sins that I / we have committed.

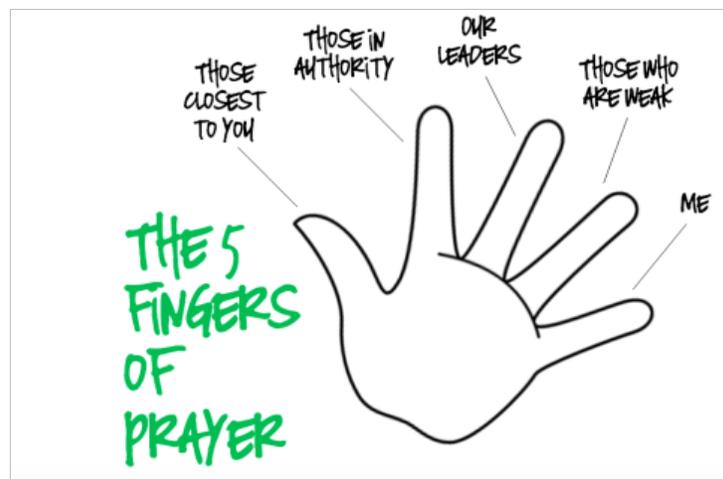
**Promises:** claim the promises God makes in Scripture.

**Petition:** pray for our needs and the needs of others.

### Faith 5 Practice

1. **Share** the day's highs and lows
2. **Read** a Bible verse or story
3. **Talk** about how the Bible verse or story relates to the day's highs and lows
4. **Pray** for one another's highs and lows
5. **Bless** one another

### Five Finger Prayer



## NEHEMIAH: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

In 586 BC the Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and took most of the inhabitants into Exile. We read in 2 Kings 24:14, that King Nebuchadnezzar, “...**carried away all Jerusalem, all the officials, all the warriors, ten thousand captives, all the artisans and the smiths; no one remained, except the poorest people of the land**”.

But God does not abandon His people, nor does God leave them without hope. As the prophet Jeremiah proclaims, “**For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile**” (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

In 539 BC the Persians and Medes, led by Cyrus the Great, defeated the Babylonians, and ended the Exile. As we read in the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah, God's people returned to the Land of Promise in three distinct waves in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. A 1<sup>st</sup> wave, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and restore the sacrificial cult (see Ezra 1-6). A 2<sup>nd</sup> wave, led by the scribe Ezra, returned to Jerusalem to initiate a spiritual and social renewal among God's people. Ezra sought to rebuild the community by teaching Torah (see Ezra 7-10). A third wave under the leadership of Nehemiah was sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city (see Nehemiah 1-6) and along with the scribe Ezra, to rebuild the spiritual life of God's people (see Nehemiah 7-13).

When we meet Nehemiah he is serving in Susa, the winter residence of the Persian kings, and though he is an Israelite, Nehemiah serves in a position of great trust and responsibility. In Nehemiah 1:11c, we read that Nehemiah serves as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. His job is to ensure that the king's wine is not poisoned, but safe to drink, thus Nehemiah has full access to the king.

Upon learning that the walls of Jerusalem are piles of rubble and that God's people are vulnerable, Nehemiah petitions and receives permission from King Artaxerxes to travel to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of the city. The cupbearer to the king becomes a builder of the wall, and in the process, rebuilds God's people into a nation.

Important themes that we will encounter in the Book of Nehemiah include: the power of vision, the importance of prayer, the nature of leadership, and the provision of God.

Much of this study will focus on the prayer life of Nehemiah. As you will note in the outline below, Nehemiah prays a lot. He is a person of deep prayer, and seeks God's guidance and favor before taking action. Most of Nehemiah's prayers are short, though the prayer recorded in chapter 9 is the longest prayer in the entire Bible. Nehemiah was a person of prayer who could intimately relate to the words written by St. Paul many centuries later to the Church in Philippi, ***“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6)***. This inspiring Bible verse and the faithful example of Nehemiah captures God's longing for all of us to be people of prayer.

### OUTLINE OF NEHEMIAH

- 1) Rebuilding God's Wall (1:1-7:3)
  - a) Nehemiah's Call (1:1-11)
    - i) Prayer (1:5-11) Prayer of praise, confession, promise, petition**
  - b) Nehemiah's Mission (2:1-10)
    - i) Prayer (2:4b) Silent prayer for guidance and favor**
  - c) Nehemiah's Inspection (2:11-20)
  - d) Work on the Wall (3:1-32)
  - e) Opposition to Rebuilding the Wall (4:1-23)
    - i) Prayer (4:4-5) Prayer vs. opponents**
    - ii) Prayer (4:9) Prayer for protection**
  - f) Obstacles to Rebuilding God's Community (5:1-19)
    - i) Prayer (5:19) “Remember me...”**
  - g) Opposition to Rebuilding the Wall (6:1-15)
    - i) Prayer (6:9) Prayer for strength**
    - ii) Prayer (6:14) Prayer vs. opponents**
  - h) Opposition to the Finished Wall (6:16-7:3)
- 2) Rebuilding God's People (7:4-13:31)
  - a) Repopulation and Returnees (7:4-7:3a)
  - b) Reading of God's Law (7:7b-8:18)
  - c) God's People Fast and Pray (9:1-37)
    - i) Prayer (9:5b-37) Corporate prayer of repentance**
  - d) God's People Confirm the Covenant (9:38-10:39)
  - e) God's People Settle in the Cities (11:1-36)
  - f) Priests and Levites (12:1-26)
  - g) Dedication of the Wall (12:27-47)
  - h) Nehemiah's Final Reforms (13:1-31)
    - i) Prayer (13:14) “Remember me...”**
    - ii) Prayer (13:22) “Remember me...”**
    - iii) Prayer (13:29) “Remember them...”**
    - iv) Prayer (13:31) “Remember me...”**

## NEHEMIAH MEMORY VERSES

### Study 1

Nehemiah 1:4 **“When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven”.**

### Study 2

Nehemiah 6:15 **“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days”.**

### Study 3

Nehemiah 5:19 **“Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people”.**

### Study 4

Nehemiah 11:2 **“And the people blessed all those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem”.**

### Study 5

Nehemiah 8:6 **“Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground”.**

### Study 6

Nehemiah 12:43 **“They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away”.**

## Student Study #1: Nehemiah's Call to Prayer

1. Opening scripture passage: Nehemiah 1:4
2. Prayer requests and opening prayer
3. Welcome and introductions
4. Announcements
5. Introduction to the study

In the Brief Introduction and Outline, we learned some of the history behind the Book of Nehemiah. Our story begins in the twentieth year (445 B.C.), in the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah, who serves as the official cupbearer to the king, is living in Susa, the winter residence of the Persians kings. Nehemiah is Jewish, a direct descendant of those taken into Exile by the Babylonians. In 586 BC the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and forcibly brought God's people to Babylon. But now there is a new sheriff in town, the Persians, led by King Cyrus, who defeat the Babylonians and allow the exiled people to return to their homes.

God's people return to Jerusalem and the surrounding area in three distinct waves during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. First, God's people, led by Zerubbabel, return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and restore the sacrificial cult. A 2<sup>nd</sup> group of God's people, led by the scribe Ezra, return to Jerusalem to initiate a spiritual and social renewal among God's people. Ezra sought to rebuild the community by teaching Torah. A 3<sup>rd</sup> group under the leadership of Nehemiah was sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city, and along with the scribe Ezra, to rebuild the spiritual life of God's people.

The Book of Nehemiah can be divided into two major parts: 1. Nehemiah 1:1-7:3, which focuses on rebuilding the walls of the sacred city (Jerusalem) 2. Nehemiah 7:4-13:31, which focuses on rebuilding a community of sacred people (the Israelites). Today's study will focus on Nehemiah's call to pray (1:1-11).

As stated above, Nehemiah serves as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (see 1:11). This is a prominent position of influence. Nehemiah has daily access to the king. During this time of service, Nehemiah learns that the walls of Jerusalem are in shambles (1:1-3). But instead of taking his concern to the King of Persia, Nehemiah takes his prayer of praise, confession, promise, and petition to the King of Kings (1:5-11). We quickly learn that Nehemiah's call is a call to a life of prayer.

## 6. Opening Reflection Questions

A. Who taught you to pray? Share a prayer with the group that you still remember from when you were young.

B. What makes a great leader? List 2-3 characteristics of a great leader?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## 7. Study and Conversation

### A. Prepping for Prayer

1. Read Nehemiah 1:1-4a
2. Where is Nehemiah living?
3. Does Nehemiah receive good news or bad news?
4. When did you last receive a word of “bad news”?
5. How do you normally react to receiving bad news? (circle one)  
a. Agitation? Anxiety? Anger? Acceptance? Other?
6. According to Philippians 4:6, what may be an alternative to agitation, anxiety, or anger?
7. What does Philippians 4:7 promise to those who choose to pray instead of fret?
8. How did Nehemiah react to the bad news he received? See 1:4a.

### B. A Call to Pray

1. Read Nehemiah 1:4b-11

2. After Nehemiah sat down and wept, he did three things. (see 1:4a)

a. For some days...

i. Nehemiah \_\_\_\_\_

ii. Nehemiah \_\_\_\_\_

iii. Nehemiah \_\_\_\_\_

3. How might mourning, fasting, and praying help us through difficult days?

4. Slowly re-read Nehemiah's opening prayer in 1:5-11. What words or phrases strike you? Write them down. What strikes you about them?

5. See below the form of prayer that Nehemiah uses.

a. Nehemiah's Form of Prayer (1:5-11)

i. **Praise** God for who God is and for what God does

ii. **Confess** to God the sins that I / we have committed

iii. **Promises:** claim the promises God makes in Scripture

iv. **Petition:** pray for our needs and the needs of others

6. Nehemiah begins by **praising** God. What are some words of **praise** that Nehemiah uses for God? (see 1:5)

7. What are some other words we might use to praise God? List five words of praise for God. Begin with words we often hear in worship.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

8. After **praising** God, Nehemiah **confesses** to God the sins that have been committed (see 1:6-7). **Whose** sins does Nehemiah **confess**?

9. **What** sins does Nehemiah **confess**?

10. How does **confession** help us grow in our love for God?

11. After **confession**, Nehemiah claims the **promises** that God has given in Scripture (see 1:8-10). What Biblical **promises** does Nehemiah claim?

- a. Exile
  - i. read Leviticus 26:33
  - ii. read Deuteronomy 28:64
- b. Restoration
  - i. read Deuteronomy 30:4
  - ii. read Jeremiah 29:10-14

12. Can you name 2-3 other **promises** God makes in Scripture?

- a.
- b.
- c.

13. Finally (not firstly), Nehemiah brings his **petition** to God (see 1:11). What specific **petition** does Nehemiah bring to God?

14. What are some other prayer **petitions** that we bring to God? List five things people bring to God in prayer.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

15. What are some prayer **petitions** you have recently brought to God?

16. As a group, write out a prayer incorporating all four parts of Nehemiah's Form of Prayer: praise, confess, promises, and petition.

a. Nehemiah's Form of Prayer (1:4-11)

i. **Praise** God for who God is and for what God does

ii. **Confess** to God the sins that I / we have committed

iii. **Promises:** claim the promises God makes in Scripture

iv. **Petition:** pray for our needs and the needs of others

17. How might praying help you in times of struggle and pain?

18. In what specific ways could this group pray for you in the week ahead?

8. Closing Question: What is your one "takeaway" from today's study? Whom might you share this "takeaway" with this week?

9. Homework

A. Read Nehemiah chapters 2-4, and 6

B. Memory Verse Nehemiah 1:4

C. Experiment by praying the Nehemiah Form of Prayer (praise, confess, promises, and petition), once a day for the next 7 days.

D. Work through Study #2

10. Closing Prayer: pray the prayer that you composed as a group using Nehemiah's Form of Prayer: praise, confess, promises, and petition.

## Student Study #2: Praying Amidst Opposition

1. Opening scripture passage: Nehemiah 6:15
2. Prayer requests and opening prayer
3. Welcome and introductions
4. Announcements
5. Review
6. Memory verse Nehemiah 1:4
7. Introduction to the study (encourage a participant to read)

In chapter 2, we learn about Nehemiah's mission as he exchanges cup bearing for wall building. After a brief prayer (2:4), Nehemiah receives permission from King Artaxerxes to travel from Susa to Jerusalem to begin the reconstruction of Jerusalem. He also receives a letter of safe conduct, a voucher for needed supplies, and a contingent of cavalry to provide protection for the journey. King Artaxerxes grants all of Nehemiah's requests, for the gracious hand of God was upon Nehemiah (2:8). A grand adventure is about to begin, but as we see in 2:10, a group of opponents is starting to coalesce. After touring the rubble of the walls under the cover of darkness, Nehemiah develops a plan that he shares with the Jewish officials. The officials eagerly respond, "Let's start building", and commit themselves to the common good (2:18). As Nehemiah rallies the people to build, his naysayers rally the opposition (2:19-20).

Nehemiah chapter 3 contains a long list of those who labored on the wall in their allotted sections. God's people respond to Nehemiah's challenge, and trust that God will lead them to success.

In Nehemiah chapter 4, we read how the rebuilding project energizes the opposition. Nehemiah prays that God will vindicate the laborers (4:4-5) and protect them from the opponents (4:9). As the opposition intensifies, Nehemiah arms and mobilizes God's people to provide a common defense while continuing to rebuild the walls of the city.

After a needed pause to focus on rebuilding God's community (Nehemiah 5), the mission to rebuild the wall intensifies, and so does the intrigue of Nehemiah's opponents. As always, Nehemiah turns to God in prayer. In 6:9 he prays for strength and, in 6:14 he prays for vindication against his enemies. Nehemiah 6 ends on a high note. The wall is completed (6:15), and in a relatively short time (52 days) for such a grand project. Nehemiah completes his mission, but knows that the work was only accomplished with the help of God (6:16).

## 8. Opening Reflection Questions

A. What are some distractions in your life that dominate your time, energy, and focus?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Tell about a time when gossip or a false accusation caused a relative or friend great pain.

## 9. Study and Conversation

A. From Cupbearer to the King to Builder of the Wall

1. Read Nehemiah 2:1-6

2. The events of Nehemiah 1 occur in Kisleev (December) while this exchange in Nehemiah 2 takes place in the month of Nisan (April). What do you think Nehemiah was doing during the intervening four months?

3. Before Nehemiah responds to the king's question (2:4a), what does he do (2:4b)?

4. Tell about a time that you prayed before embarking on a major decision?

5. Does your church seek God's guidance before making major decisions? If yes, praise God! If no, how might you encourage your parish to become grounded in prayer?

B. Maintaining Momentum

1. Read Nehemiah 4:1-9

2. Think about a time when you watched momentum come to a grinding halt. Why do you think this happened? What would you do differently?

3. What are some of the insults, words of ridicule, and threats that Nehemiah's opponents use to stop the building of the wall. List four.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

4. Can you think of a time when you experienced insults and ridicule? What helped you to overcome the situation?

5. How does Nehemiah respond to insults, ridicule, and threats? (see 4:4-5 and 4:9)

6. Why is it important to maintain a healthy balance between prayer and action?

### C. The Greater the Opposition, the Greater the Prayer

1. Read Nehemiah 6:1-15

2. Nehemiah's opponents try to distract him from his work on the wall. When that tactic fails they turn to public gossip and false accusations.

3. What are some of the false accusations that Sanballat makes about Nehemiah? See 6:5-7.

- a.
- b.
- c.

4. How does Nehemiah respond to these false accusations? See 6:8-9 and 6:14.

- a.
- b.
- c.

5. As we ponder Nehemiah's response to gossip and false accusations, what might you do differently when you experience gossip or false accusations?

6. How did the Israelites finish the wall so quickly? See 6:16.

10. Closing Question: What is your one "takeaway" from today's study? Whom might you share this "takeaway" with this week?

11. Homework

A. Read Nehemiah chapter 5

B. Memory Verse Nehemiah 6:15

C. Work through Study #3

D. This Week's Special Project: Some people are easily discouraged by distractions, gossip, and false accusations. Think of someone who is currently discouraged, and take some time this week to do three simple things.

1. Pray every day that they may be encouraged and strengthened

2. Send a hand-written note (not a text or e-mail) telling them that you are praying for them daily

3. Call them at the end of the week and ask what you might do to support and encourage them

E. Experiment this week with one of the Forms of Prayer found on page 6.

12. Closing Prayer: ***Let us pray... Merciful God, you give us the grace and encouragement that helps in seasons of struggle. Sustain us with the promise of your presence and renew us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that our hearts and minds may be transformed by the powerful name of the Risen Jesus. Amen.***

## Student Study #3: Obstacles to Rebuilding God's Community

1. Opening scripture passage: Nehemiah 5:19
2. Prayer requests and opening prayer
3. Welcome
4. Announcements
5. Review
6. Memory verse Nehemiah 6:15
7. Introduction to the study

In Nehemiah chapter 5, the work on the wall grinds to a halt so that Nehemiah can address the needs of the poor. Famine, heavy taxes, and exorbitant interest rates were affecting the most vulnerable members of Israeli society. Upon learning about the plight of those in need, Nehemiah seethes with anger, because the oppressors are fellow Israelites. The project grinds to a halt because the integrity of a wall is only as strong as the integrity of the community who builds it. Nehemiah turns to Scripture to develop a plan to ease the financial burden of the poor, and in the process, models generosity and community responsibility. Chapter 5 closes with Nehemiah praying, "Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people" (5:19).

### 8. Opening Reflection Questions

- A. What do you believe is the root of most financial problems people face today? Low wages? Overspending? A "rigged system"? Excessive debt?
- B. What does it look like to live as a disciple of Jesus? Describe what a follower of Jesus says or does.

### 9. Study and Conversation

#### A. Houston, "Jerusalem, We Have a Problem"

1. Read Nehemiah 5:1-5
2. List 3 financial issues some members of the community are experiencing.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.

3. Does God care about the poor? What are you or your community of faith doing to directly help the poor in your community?

4. Why are people tempted to remain silent rather than address a serious problem in their families, churches, or places of work?

## B. Nehemiah Reacts

1. Read Nehemiah 5:6-9

2. What is Nehemiah's first response when he learns about the plight of the poor? (circle one)

Prayer

Joy

Anger

3. Sometimes we confront troubling situations and find open hearts. Can you recall a time, when you spoke a "challenging word" to someone and it turned out positively?

4. Read Exodus 22:25 and Deuteronomy 23:19-20 and summarize these passages.

a.

b.

5. What three things does Nehemiah accuse the nobles of doing?

a.

b.

c.

## C. Making Restitution

1. Read Nehemiah 5:10-13

2. How would you define restitution? Is it important for us to make restitution when we have wronged another? Can you give an example?

3. What four steps did Nehemiah take in order to “right the wrong”?

a.

b.

c.

d.

4. Re-read 5:13. How do the people respond to Nehemiah’s plan to “right the wrong”?

#### D. Be the Example

1. Read Nehemiah 5:14-19

2. As the Governor of Judah, Nehemiah worked hard to live as an example? List three ways Nehemiah worked to “walk the walk”, and not just “talk the talk”.

a.

b.

c.

3. What does it mean to you when a leader leads by example? Can you recall a time that a leader led by example? Can you recall a time when a leader failed to lead by example?

4. Reread Nehemiah 5:19. Why does Nehemiah add this prayer at the end of this chapter? What is he trying to tell us about leadership and integrity?

5. Read over Nehemiah’s other “remember me” prayers (see Nehemiah 5:19, 13:14, 13:22, 13:31). How would you like to be remembered some day?

10. Closing Question: What is your one “takeaway” from today’s study? Whom might you share this “takeaway” with this week?

11. Homework

A. Read Nehemiah chapters 7, 10:1-29, 11, and 12:1-26

B. Memory Verse Nehemiah 5:19

C. Work through Study #4

D. During the coming week add to your daily prayers a petition about how you would like to be remembered. “Remember me, O God, for...”

E. Experiment this week with one of the Forms of Prayer found on page 6.

12. Closing Prayer: ***Let us pray... God of all space and time, lead us to be the people you long for us to be. Help us not to just do right, but to be right. That our words and actions may bring strength to the poor, solace to the suffering, and hope to the desperate. Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people. In the name of Jesus. Amen.***

## Student Study #4: Lists, Lists, and More Lists

1. Opening scripture passage: Nehemiah 11:2
2. Prayer requests and opening prayer
3. Welcome
4. Announcements
5. Review
6. Memory verse Nehemiah 5:19
7. Introduction to the study

In Nehemiah chapters 7, 10, 11, and 12 there are lists, lists, and more lists. During my time of study, I often read past these long lists of names. On one particular morning, as I was praying, God whispered a reminder to me that these were real people who lived and breathed and loved and served. God has something to teach us, even when it comes to lists.

In Nehemiah chapter 7, there is a list of 42,360 original exiles who returned to Judah from Babylon. Here is a reminder that Nehemiah is building a wall on an earlier foundation and building a community on earlier generations. In chapter 10:1-29 there is a list of those who took a sacred oath... "to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and his ordinances, and his statutes" (10:29). In Nehemiah chapter 11, there is a list of the new residents of Jerusalem. This list includes both community and religious leaders. In chapter 12:1-26, there is a list of Temple Priests and Levites. As we shall see in today's study, God has something to teach us, even when it comes to lists.

### 8. Opening Reflection Questions

A. Please make a list of your top five personal priorities as a follower of Jesus.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

B. Please write down the names of two people who faithfully and humbly serve God behind the scenes. What unique gifts/skills do these two people have?

## 9. Study and Conversation

### A. "Let's Put First Things First"

1. Read Nehemiah 9:38-10:29
2. What are some of the different types of people on this list? How many people are in each category?
  - a. 10:1a
  - b. 10:1b-8
  - c. 10:9-13
  - d. 10:14-27
3. Why are these folks listed here? See 9:38 and 10:28-29.
4. What do God's people promise to do? See 10:29.
5. How can clear and carefully written priorities (vision, mission, values, goals, strategies) help us as a follower of Jesus? How might clear and carefully written priorities help us as a community of faith?

### B. Those Behind the Scenes

1. Read Nehemiah 7:1-4 and 11:1-18
2. According to Nehemiah 7:1-4, after the walls and gates were completed there were still two other areas that needed rebuilding. List them:
  - a. 7:4a
  - b. 7:4b

3. According to Nehemiah 11:1-4, what is the solution for a city in need of residents?

4. According to Nehemiah 11:4-18 what are some of the different types of people who settle in Jerusalem?

a. 11:4-9

b. 11:10-14

c. 11:15-18

5. Behind the scenes people are important. List three people who serve behind the scenes at your place of work. List three people who serve behind the scenes at your place of worship.

a. Place of Work

i.

ii.

iii.

b. Place of Worship

i.

ii.

iii.

6. Re-read Nehemiah 11:17

a. Who is Mattaniah and what does he do? Have you ever heard of him?

b. Whenever I am out in the synod, pastors, deacons, and lay leaders tell me that they are praying for me. That means a lot.

c. For whom do you regularly pray? Who regularly prays for you? I would encourage you to give thanks to God for the “behind the scenes saints” in your life and in your community of faith.

7. Favorite Bible character

a. I am often asked, “Who is your favorite Bible character?” I used to answer: Joshua, Deborah, David, Elijah, and Paul. Now I am considering some of the unsung servants of faith.

- i. Talmon the Gatekeeper
- ii. Uzzi the Temple Singer
- iii. Mattaniah the Prayer

C. Here are two timeless truths to ponder and discuss

1. God sees every gift that is offered in love, even when we fail to notice.

2. Our rewards will be based on God's love and faithfulness, and not on public affirmation.

10. Closing Question: What is your one “takeaway” from today's study? Whom might you share this “takeaway” with this week?

11. Homework

A. Read Nehemiah chapters 8, 9, and 10:28-39

B. Memory Verse Nehemiah 11:2

C. Work through Study #5

D. Experiment this week with one of the Forms of Prayer found on page 6.

12. Closing Prayer: ***Let us pray...Ever living God, you see all and know all, and you still love us. Help us to be mindful of those who serve so faithfully behind the scenes. Let them know of your great love and favor for all the good and small things. Bless us in our serving and witnessing. In Jesus' name. Amen***

## Student Study #5: Scripture, Prayer, and Promise

1. Opening scripture passage: Nehemiah 8:6
2. Prayer requests and opening prayer
3. Welcome
4. Announcements
5. Review
6. Memory verse Nehemiah 11:2
7. Introduction to the study

The Book of Nehemiah can be divided into two distinct parts: the rebuilding of God's wall (Nehemiah 1-6) and the rebuilding of God's people (Nehemiah 7-13). What was true for God's people in ancient Jerusalem continues to be true for God's people in Northwest Ohio. We are in deep need of spiritual renewal and transformation. But where do we begin? We begin with the basics: Prayer, Scripture, Worship, Witness, and Service.

In Nehemiah chapter 8, God's people gather and Ezra unrolls the scroll of the Book of the Law of Moses, the Torah (the 1<sup>st</sup> five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Ezra reads for six straight hours, and the people hear God's Word and they respond to God's Word with deep reverence (8:5-6) and great joy (8:12). Day after day the Torah was read and a new community rises under the authority of God's Word.

In Nehemiah chapter 9, God's people gather for corporate prayer. This prayer of confession is the longest recorded prayer in the Bible (9:5b-37). This is a prayer marked by adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and obedience. Following the prayer, God's people publicly sign a binding agreement (9:38), "... to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his ordinances and his statutes" (10:29). What follows (10:30-39), is a promise by God's people to build their lives around God's Word, holy living, and sacred worship.

### 8. Opening Reflection Questions

A. When you think of the "Bible" what are the 1<sup>st</sup> three thoughts that come to mind? List those 3 thoughts and briefly discuss.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. How long should a prayer be? How long is too long? How short is too short?

## 9. Study and Conversation

### A. Scripture

1. Read Nehemiah 8:1-2

2. What are some of the benefits of reading God's Word? Read the following passages aloud and briefly comment.

a. Deuteronomy 11:18-21

b. Psalm 19:7-11

c. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

d. Hebrews 4:12

3. As you ponder the passages above, what role might Scripture play in your daily life?

4. Read Nehemiah 8:3-12

5. List three ways God's people respond to the reading of Scripture. See 8:6.

a.

b.

c.

6. Why did the Levites have to "interpret" or "make clear" the reading for the people? See 8:8.

7. Read Nehemiah 8:18

8. Ezra read from the Book of the Law of Moses "day by day". Do you have a specific place and time to read and reflect on Scripture? If so, describe it. If not, why not? What seems to get in the way?

## B. Prayer

1. An Introduction to Nehemiah 9:1-37
  - a. This is the longest recorded prayer in the Bible
  - b. This is a prayer marked by adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and obedience
  - c. This is a prayer that reaches out in four distinct directions
    - i. God's people look up (9:5-6)
    - ii. God's people look back (9:7-31)
    - iii. God's people look around (9:32-37)
    - iv. God's people look forward (9:38, and 10:29)
2. Read Nehemiah 9:5-6 God's people look up in adoration
3. What are some of the words or phrases used here to describe who God is and what God does? Let's list five:
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
4. Do you have a favorite word or phrase that you like to use to describe who God is and what God does?
5. Read Nehemiah 9:7-31 God's people look back to their ancestors
6. In this lengthy part of the prayer we are given a whirlwind tour of Israel's past. God's people look back and see how God's gracious hand has always been present. Do you recognize some of the great Old Testament events in this part of the prayer? How many can your study group come up with?

7. As you look back and reflect on what God has done in your life, are there two of three moments that come to mind for you?

a.

b.

c.

8. Read Nehemiah 9:32-37. God's people look around at their present situation.

9. The Israelites are beginning to "get it". God is good and God is gracious. As you consider God's grace and willingness to forgive, how might this change your life in one area? Pick one and share

a. The way you view yourself and God's love for you

b. The way you respond to daily temptations

c. The way you treat those closest to you

d. The way you treat those in need

10. Read Nehemiah 9:38 God's people look forward

11. God's people make a public promise to be obedient and then they sign a binding agreement to follow God's Word (10:29). Are there places in your life that could use a bit more obedience and a bit less defiance? Please share as you are comfortable.

10. Closing Question: What is your one "takeaway" from today's study? Whom might you share this "takeaway" with this week?

11. Homework

A. Read Nehemiah chapters 12:27-47 and 13

B. Memory Verse Nehemiah 8:6

C. Work through Study #6

D. Circle 1 of the suggestions below, and try to implement it this week:

1. **Hear God's Word:** listen to an audio version of the Bible (CD's, MP3, cell phone) while driving, exercising, or preparing meals.
2. **Read God's Word:** select a daily Bible reading program. Try reading different versions of the Bible. Establish a night time Bible reading schedule with a spouse or child.
3. **Study God's Word:** Use a Study Bible to read through the Bible. Attend a weekly study (like this one). Purchase and read a Bible commentary.
4. **Reflect on God's Word:** Allow a Bible passage or verse to ruminate in your mind. Discuss it with friends or family members. Allow your heart to absorb it as you ponder it throughout the week.
5. I plan to **implement** my choice this week by.....

E. Experiment this week with one of the Forms of Prayer found on page 6.

12. Closing Prayer: ***Let us pray, Lord, God we praise you for your goodness and your grace. Draw us closer to you through Scripture, prayer, and worship. Lead us to be mindful of our great need for renewal, and send your Holy Spirit to guide us. In the powerful name of Jesus we pray. Amen.***

## Student Study #6: Celebrate and Separate

1. Opening scripture passage: Nehemiah 12:43
2. Prayer requests and opening prayer
3. Welcome
4. Announcements
5. Review
6. Memory verse Nehemiah 8:6
7. Introduction to the study

In Nehemiah chapter 12:27-47, God's people gather to dedicate the newly completed wall of Jerusalem. It is a festive time of celebratory worship as two large choirs process on top of the city wall and meet in the courtyard of the Temple. There in the house of God, "They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away" (12:43). "Rejoiced... great joy... rejoiced... joy". The dedication of the city wall is a time for the community of faith to celebrate.

After serving 12 years as the governor, Nehemiah returns to King Artaxerxes to seek permission for a longer stay in Jerusalem. While Nehemiah is away, the people fail to obey God's commands, regulations, and decrees. An old opponent, Tobias, takes up residence in the Temple. The people fail to provide provision for the religious leaders. Merchants are conducting business inside the city wall on the Sabbath. Israelite men are marrying women from outside the Jewish community, and their children are not learning the Hebrew language. When Nehemiah returns from his brief stay in Babylon, he institutes a number of significant reforms. He drives Tobias from the Temple. He reinstates the Temple tithe. He demands that the Sabbath be observed and that Sabbath Day commerce comes to an end. He puts a stop to mixed marriages. The Book of Nehemiah ends, as we might suspect, with a prayer, "Remember me, O my God, for good. (13:31). And God did remember Nehemiah... and so do we.

### 8. Opening Reflection Questions

- A. Recall a time when you experienced joy in worship. Share your experience with the group.
- B. If you were to name your most vexing current problem, what would it be? Describe how this problem affects you.

## 9. Study and Conversation

### A. Dedication and Celebration

1. Read Nehemiah 12:27-43
2. Describe some of the actions and activities that occurred during this celebratory worship service / procession.
3. What would have been the mood of the worshipers / processors?
4. Can you recall a time when worship engaged both your heart and mind? Share your experience with the group.
5. When we were young and complained to my mother about going to worship, she would say, "Worship is not about you. Worship is about God. Now get in that car!" What did my mom mean when she said, "Worship is not about you. Worship is about God"?
6. Some people describe community worship as corporate prayer. Do you agree or disagree? Comment.

### B. Separation

1. Read Nehemiah 13:1-9
2. In Nehemiah 13:6, we read that Nehemiah temporarily returns to Babylon to meet with King Artaxerxes. We are not certain how long he is gone, but long enough for the people of Jerusalem to get themselves into trouble. Though they promised to obey God's commands, regulations, and decrees, their obedience wanes while Nehemiah is away.
3. Who is Tobiah? See 2:19, 4:7, 6:1

4. What did Nehemiah do when he discovered that Tobiah was living in the Temple?

5. Why couldn't Nehemiah have simply looked past the Tobiah problem? Is there a current problem that you are choosing to look past? Why?

6. Read Nehemiah 13:10-14

7. Describe the financial fiasco that Nehemiah discovers upon his return from Babylon.

8. What are some of the potential effects of financial misconduct? Have you ever experienced a financial fiasco at your place of work or place of worship?

9. Why couldn't Nehemiah have simply looked past the financial fiasco? Is there a current financial fiasco that you are choosing to look past? Why?

10. Read Nehemiah 13:15-22

11. Describe two ways that God's people are not "keeping the Sabbath holy".

a.

b.

12. What practical steps does Nehemiah take to keep the Sabbath as a day of rest and not simply another day of work?

a.

b.

c.

d.

13. Why couldn't Nehemiah have simply looked past the Sabbath issue? Is there a current issue of faith that you are choosing to look past? Why?

14. Read Nehemiah 13:23-31

15. Why is Nehemiah so worked up about mixed marriages? Do you agree or disagree with Nehemiah? Comment.

16. Why couldn't Nehemiah have simply looked past the marriage issue? Is there a current marriage issue / concern that you are choosing to look past? Why?

17. Take a moment to silently pray about the things that you are choosing to "look past".

18. Re-read 13:31 the closing prayer of Nehemiah

19. Nehemiah prays that God will remember him with favor. Did God remember Nehemiah with favor? How will each of you remember Nehemiah?

10. Closing Question: What is your one "takeaway" from today's study? Whom might you share this "takeaway" with this week?

11. Homework

A. Memory Verse Nehemiah 12:43

B. Schedule a Time to Celebrate

12. Closing Prayer