

FIRST BAPTIST **ROGERS**

valiantwarrior

# introduction

## TO VALIANT WARRIORS

In the Old Testament, certain groups of men were noted as “valiant warriors” or “men of valor.” These men displayed courage and determination in battle. King David had his “mighty men.” These men proved themselves to be trustworthy in battlefield situations. These brave warriors were not limited to one tribe or people group. They were only limited by their courage and determination.

Valiant means possessing or showing courage or determination. Obviously, a warrior is one who is engaged in a war. A war has been underway since the Garden of Eden. The kingdom of God has been under assault by the kingdom of darkness. Satan’s temptation to Adam and Eve that led to their sin resulting in the Fall of all mankind was the declaration of war against God’s kingdom.



Biblical manhood and masculinity was also attacked in the garden on that day. Adam had been created first, given dominion over the earth and even named his wife. Satan did not initially go to Adam but to his wife, Eve with the temptation. It is understood that Adam was most certainly right there while his wife was being tempted. Adam abdicated his leadership responsibility in protecting his wife. He then followed her into the same sin that she had

committed. Since then, God’s people have battled against the kingdom of sin and darkness. But also, men have battled for biblical manhood and masculinity.

Men are at their best when they are valiant warriors, battling for the kingdom of God and rescuing the disadvantaged in the name of the King. Robert Lewis subtitled “Men’s Fraternity,” A Quest for Authentic Manhood. Valiant Warriors hopes to be another leg in the race or step in the journey in this quest. David challenged his son, Solomon in 2 Kings 2:2-4, “I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn, so that the LORD may carry out His promise which He spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons are careful of their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’”

We hope to show men how to be men, valiant warriors through this study. We believe that the key to men being transformed is first by the Word of God.

Another key is men in small groups for discussion, prayer, accountability and encouragement. As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. It is out of that desire and vision that we have embraced the following guidestones.

### **Valiant Warrior Mission**

To disciple men to follow Christ and to live and lead in their homes, churches, and communities for God's glory.

### **Valiant Warrior Vision**

To see an army of men devoted to Christ leading their families and this church to serve Christ and bring Him glory until Jesus returns.

### **Valiant Warrior Strategy**

To disciple men in small groups to lead their families and their church to serve Christ and bring Him glory until Jesus returns.

### **Valiant Warrior Promise**

Judges 6:12 "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior."

### **Valiant Warrior Code of Honor**

To grow in Christlikeness personally. To be committed to my family and Christ's church. To intentionally encourage other men in Christlikeness and commitment to the church.

### **Valiant Warrior Scripture References**

2 Chronicles 14:8 *"Now Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, bearing large shields and spears, and 280,000 from Benjamin, bearing shields and wielding bows; all of them were valiant warriors."*

Deuteronomy 3:18 *"Then I commanded you at that time, saying, 'The Lord your God has given you this land to possess it; all you valiant men shall cross over armed before your brothers, the sons of Israel.'"*

Joshua 1:14 *"Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but you shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all your valiant warriors, and shall help them."*

Joshua 8:3 *"So Joshua rose with all the people of war to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night."*

Joshua 10:7 *"So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the valiant warriors."*

Judges 6:12 "The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior.'"

Judges 11:1 "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior..."

Judges 18:2 "So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it;"

1 Samuel 10:26 "Saul also went to his house at Gibeah; and the valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him."

1 Samuel 14:52 "Now the war against the Philistines was severe all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man, he attached him to his staff."

1 Samuel 18:17 "Then Saul said to David, 'Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the Lord's battles.'"

1 Samuel 31:12 "All the valiant men rose and walked all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there."

2 Samuel 2:7 "Now therefore, let your hands be strong and be valiant; for Saul your lord is dead, and also the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."

2 Samuel 17:10 "And even the one who is valiant, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will completely lose heart; for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man and those who are with him are valiant men."

1 Chronicles 28:1 "Now David assembled at Jerusalem all the officials of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the commanders of the divisions that served the king, and the commanders of thousands, and the commanders of hundreds, and the overseers of all the property and livestock belonging to the king and his sons, with the officials and the mighty men, even all the valiant men."

2 Chronicles 13:3 "Abijah began the battle with an army of valiant warriors, 400,000 chosen men, while Jeroboam drew up in battle formation against him with 800,000 chosen men who were valiant warriors."



# session one

A STUDY OF NEHEMIAH  
CRYING OUT IN BROKENNESS

Throughout the Bible we find a recurring theme of restoration. It began shortly after creation, continued throughout biblical and church history, and will continue throughout eternity. What our heart cries out for and desperately needs today will one day be celebrated as accomplished throughout all eternity. The Second Coming of Christ and heaven are the restoration. His plan of restoration is seen immediately after Creation when Adam fell.

The background of this study is biblical history: Creation-Fall-Flood-Promise-Law-Land-Judges-King-Divided Kingdom- Prophets. . .722BC Assyrian Captivity. . .586 BC Babylonian Captivity.

The Medo-Persian Empire dethroned the Babylonian Empire. The Persian Empire had displaced the Medo-Persian Empire. Although Israel was still in captivity, she had been given permission to return and rebuild the temple under Ezra's leadership (458BC). But the walls surrounding the city of Jerusalem still lay in waste.

**The book of Nehemiah demonstrates God's providential and unstoppable plan in preserving for Himself a people through exile and captivity.** God raised up a leader to restore a wall that had been destroyed. Nehemiah, through God's power, restored much more than a wall. He restored spiritual disciplines such as prayer, worship, the Word of God, covenantal community living, and purity. Ultimately, this book is about restoring people to whom God had created them to be.

Leading up to this point, we really do not know much about Nehemiah. We can speculate. He was living in the palace. He was a cupbearer. But there had to be a nagging question about his people and his homeland because he asked the question in Nehemiah 1:2. Based on his response, he really did care what was going on in their life. So really in our story, we have at least two groups of people: those who were living in brokenness represented by a destroyed wall and some of these were no doubt downcast in their brokenness and those who were probably indifferent to their brokenness. They had embraced as their destination with no hope.

This is the story of a man God used to bring restoration and revival to His people. It is also about walls that had been destroyed being built back. It is a journey from brokenness to blessing or from ruin to revival. It is about a man and about a people. It is about a burden and indifference. It is about a brokenness within a people and task of rebuilding a wall that would help and represent rebuilding of their lives. God gave His leader and His people something to do.

It is also a book about heartfelt burden leading to a detailed

assessment that produces a compelling vision. It is a story of compelling communication and motivation overcoming opposition in delivering a monumental product. It is a physical construction project and spiritual growth project. It contains great discipline and effort. It also has the supernatural and providential hand of God.

God does not need a wall, but Israel needed that wall. More importantly, God ordained for them to rebuild that wall. As they rebuilt the wall and saw it rise from the ashes of destruction, it served as an object lesson for what God could and would do with their lives. Building buildings, ministries, Bible studies, mission strategies, and the like represent on the outside what God is doing on the inside. Men, in particular, need a task, a project, something to do in order to stay engaged and see the work of God.

"Nehemiah" means "the LORD comforts." The Lord used Nehemiah to revive the spirit of the discouraged exiles and bring them hope. Hope is restored. We will select the title "Restored" for our study. The wall is restored, and the hope of the people is restored. Nehemiah is a great book about godly and humble leadership.

Let us begin our journey through Nehemiah.

*"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. **Now** it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They said to me, 'The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.' When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I said, 'I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. 'We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. 'Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather*

them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.' "They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. "O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man." **Now** I was the cupbearer to the king."

This first chapter is about prayer. The journey to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem began in prayer. Regardless of the journey or project, God is calling us to cry out to Him in prayer.

### **Valiant Warriors like Nehemiah are dependable.**

*"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. **Now** it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital,. . . **Now** I was the cupbearer to the king."*

Nehemiah was a guy you could count on. He was dependable with responsibilities regarding earthly and heavenly kingdoms. He recorded the words that would be included in the canon of Scripture. The fact he was in the capitol speaks of his responsibility. He was selected by kings for his position. In verse 10, he identifies himself as a cupbearer. It is like a secret service assignment of protecting the king. Only those who were considered trustworthy and dependable would be assigned the cupbearer role. Nehemiah was close to the king in proximity but also, as we will see, in relationship. We will see he was willing to sacrifice his vocation and his location for the sake of others.

Nehemiah's dependability is evidence of God already being at work in Nehemiah's life. Through a disciplined life, Nehemiah had positioned himself where he was able to make a difference in the lives of his people. It appears God most often uses those who are faithfully serving, not looking around for greener pastures (Moses in the desert of Midian, David watching his father's flock, etc.).

Can you think of others in Scripture, church history, or even recent history who demonstrated dependability over time and how God gave them an opportunity in His redemptive history plan?

### **Valiant Warriors like Nehemiah are caring.**

*"that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem."*

Nehemiah was sensitive to the needs of others and God's plan. It would



be easy to see why Nehemiah could have distanced himself from his fellow Jews. He had security and comfort in palace life.

Palace life did not corrupt him.

Personal comfort did not control him.

He cared about others. He inquired about others.

How can you tell if a person is not just concerned about himself? What does God ask you or others to do to demonstrate your care for others? How can we develop a heart that cares for others? How do we develop that in our children at home and at church? Why is this important?

**Valiant Warriors like Nehemiah embrace brokenness in prayer.**

*"They said to me, 'The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.' When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven."*

When Nehemiah found out the condition of his people, he was broken over their condition. He identified with his people. When you and I connect with lostness and suffering around the world, then we are closer to bringing light and life into the dark crevices of life.

The people are identified as the "remnant" indicating they are the ones who God had preserved to restore His kingdom. The description of the situation was alarming. The people were in "great distress and reproach." The wall was "broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

**He took on brokenness emotionally.**

He was not so removed from the need that he ignored it or just paid lip service to the need. He felt deeply about their brokenness to taking it on. Nehemiah wept over the condition of the remnant, much like Jesus wept over Jerusalem when He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. The burden of the brokenness of this world breaks the hearts of those who notice with a heart like Jesus. Their outward human condition was only part of the problem. There was an even greater issue.

**He took on brokenness spiritually.**

It was bigger than a wall being down and people being in distress physically and emotionally. He connected the dots between the external wall broken down and the internal issue of brokenness in people's lives. It is only when we see the spiritual battle and brokenness behind the physical

pain that we begin to understand the need to carry burdens in prayer on behalf of other people. Before Nehemiah could build the wall, he had to weep over the ruins.

This understanding and identification with spiritual bankruptcy of this world helps to see biblical ministry is not a hobby for the faint-hearted. Rather, it is a battlefield for seasoned and well-prepared soldiers who are strong and courageous valiant warriors.

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*  
Matthew 5:3

"People who are poor in finances are broke. People who are poor in spirit are broken." - Kerry Shook

When Nehemiah heard the sad state of Jerusalem, he wept. How do you respond when you are confronted with a sad state of the church in general and specifically? Do you weep, become angry, give up and quit, or seek to help? Discuss the variety of responses to spiritual difficulties in personal lives and in the church.

### **As broken people, Valiant Warriors are desperate for God. 5, 10**

*"When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I said, 'I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments.'"*

Nehemiah's desperation drove him to his knees. He practiced prayer. There are nine prayers in Nehemiah. He understood the desperate nature of the situation. The circumstances he heard of moved him emotionally and spiritually. The situation was so grave and desperate it was outside his ability to correct it. It was an impossible situation and would require divine intervention.

Nehemiah's familiarity with the Word of God served him well in articulating a biblical prayer God would answer.

### **As broken people, Valiant Warriors cry out in desperate prayer. 6-10**

*"let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not*

kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.' They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man.' **Now** I was the cupbearer to the king."

He knew to whom to pray, how to pray, and what to pray.  
"I said, 'I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments.'"

He prays to the Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God. He appeals to the faithfulness and love of God. "Lovingkindness" is the Hebrew word "chesed," which means covenant loyalty. It is the saving and unconditional love of God. He is speaking to the God who had saved him and was keeping him and loving him.

Valiant warriors would do well to understand and comprehend the love of God (Ephesians 3:14). But even more, the valiant warrior must experience the love of God to express the love of God. We so underestimate the magnitude and reach of God's love.

Someone has suggested it is better to taste honey than it is to know the chemical composition of honey. One appeals to your mind, while tasting appeals to your experience which is multi-faceted. J.I. Packer would argue knowing God personally is much better than just knowing about God. Prayer is enhanced and empowered when we intimately know the One we are praying to.

He prayed with humility.  
"let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your **servant**"

He prayed with intensity.  
"...I sat down and **weped and mourned for days**; and I was **fasting** and **praying** before the God of heaven"

He prayed with urgency.

*"...and make Your servant successful **today** and grant him compassion before this man."*

He knew what to pray.

His prayer included confession of sin. 6-7

*"...confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses."*

His prayer reflected confidence in Scripture. 8-9

*"Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.'"*

His prayer expressed concern for the kingdom. 10

*"They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand."*

His prayer requested clear success now. 11

*"O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man."*

Discuss a time of utter desperation you have felt.

How can you better identify with pain and brokenness with others? In our church? What lessons in prayer can you take from what Nehemiah did? What are you going to do moving forward in your prayer life?

How do you think Nehemiah became a responsive and prayerful person to a need that seemed far away from him?

Do you genuinely care about the plight of lost people or saved people in India, China, Nigeria?

**Brokenness that leads to prayer is the first step towards restoration.**

At this point Nehemiah is not praying specifically for the walls to be rebuilt. He is praying for favor in the presence of the king, "grant him compassion before this man."

He will be asking for the king's favor in returning to build the walls. There will be opposition to the rebuilding of the walls.

**Nehemiah brought hope to others.** Nehemiah brought hope to discouraged people. Along comes Nehemiah, **he steps out of the palace into the brokenness in every way- emotionally, prayerfully, geographically, and in responsibility.**

Happy is the saint who is thus subject to the will of God and enabled to be His agent in consoling his discouraged fellows and restoring them, through a ministry received in times of sorrow, when they are backslidden and disheartened.

What are some things in your life that are a great concern for you?

What are some things in the lives of others you are genuinely concerned about?

How will you cry out to God on your behalf? On behalf of others you know?

What other lessons on prayer and care can you learn from Nehemiah?

<sup>1</sup>Ironside, H. A. (1913). *Notes on the Book of Nehemiah* (p. 11). Loizeaux Bros.

# session two

VISION AND HOPE  
NEHEMIAH 2:1-20



Brokenness was the first step towards restoration. The next step is hope or vision. Without hope, people plummet into despair. Hope gets us out of despair and keeps us out of despair. Another word for hope is vision. The way we are defining vision is seeing a better future which is hope. Proverbs 29:18 is one of the best-known verses on vision: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The phrase "the people perish" can also be translated "the people are unrestrained." The idea is that they have no direction. They are all over the place and never in the right place. This kind of living leads to despair and perishing.

The message of the Bible is overcoming despair with hope of restoration. That is the message of the Gospel, the good news of salvation from sin, Hell, destruction, loneliness, and despair. While Nehemiah embraced brokenness, he did not remain in brokenness and live his entire life in brokenness.

All the Valiant Warrior studies at some point mention vision. Vision is so important for all people, but especially a valiant warrior. A man leading his family and leading himself must have hope and vision.

Some approach this chapter as preparation and planning. Vision and hope are developed and grow in the rhythms of life. The experiences of Nehemiah personally and spiritually shaped what he saw and felt. His vision was being shaped and developed by what he knew of God and what he saw of God's people and His city walls.

### **Valiant Warriors anticipate or see a better future.**

If no one sees it, then it is not vision nor hope.

We are going to look at some qualities of Nehemiah that positioned him to see the vision or have the vision. This particular vision is not some kind of dream or out of body experience. This vision, like most visions in my opinion, came out of a consistent walk with God and His Word and in prayer listening to His voice.

Discuss the importance of vision and the keys to developing a proper vision.

Nehemiah was positive. 1b

*"And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. **Now I had not been sad in his presence.**"*

His consistent positive attitude positioned him to be noticed by the king. He was not an emotional roller coaster such that the king could dismiss his countenance as he is just having another bad day. Nehemiah did not have bad days. While Nehemiah had experienced brokenness in fasting, weeping, and prayer, his positive attitude allowed him to hope and look for a solution or a better future. This is not a fake positive mental attitude. This positive attitude comes from being informed by the

Word of God, of Who God is, and what He has done and is doing for and in His people. If His intentions toward us are kind and good, then we can anticipate with a positive attitude what He has in store for us.

Why was having a positive attitude so important to the task that was before Nehemiah?

Discuss the importance of emotional stability in family life, work life, and church life.

Discuss how Nehemiah's change in demeanor actually gave him credibility before the king. How do you think Nehemiah's prior service in the king's palace impacted his interaction with the king on this day?

Nehemiah was courageous. 2

*"So the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.' Then I was very much afraid."*

Someone has rightly said courage is not the absence of fear, but rather it is doing the right thing in spite of fear. Here we see Nehemiah readily admitted he was "very much afraid." But his fear did not prevent him from facing the king and speaking to the king.

Valiant warriors do the right thing in spite of their fears. Jesus in us calms our fears and gives us courage to face our fears and overcome them.

Fear is one of the most common sins among God's people. Hundreds of times in Scripture we are told to not fear.

What are the keys to being courageous in today's world? What are some areas of life that will require courage today?

Discuss the misconception that getting on Facebook or social media is courage hiding behind a screen and a keyboard as opposed to sitting down face-to-face with someone.

Discuss how courage to help others is better than being self-serving or self-protecting. Nehemiah was the exact opposite of politicians and bureaucrats today. Today's bureaucrats and politicians, who are supposed to be our leaders, enact laws and mandates on people they do not observe themselves or are held accountable to. Nehemiah and Jesus demonstrated and call valiant warriors to a different way- servant leadership. Valiant warriors die to their selfish desires for the benefit and blessing of others.

Nehemiah was transparent. 3

*"I said to the king, 'Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?'"*

The pressure was always on Nehemiah to be positive in the presence of the king and he was every time except this time. It was not that Nehemiah was being disingenuous all the other times. It was that this was right time for him to be transparent. Every problem in Nehemiah's life was not an emergency. He did not wear his feelings and every thought on his shoulder.

We certainly respect and identify with a person who is candid and transparent. I strive to be transparent and candid and often equate that with being authentic. Because Nehemiah was positive most days, the contrast of his demeanor on this day caught the attention of the king.

Conviction and burden were evident in Nehemiah's life. The burden of chapter one has carried over months later and impacted his work in the palace. True biblical conviction cannot be turned on and turned off depending on our context. It is lived out 24/7.

Discuss the need for transparency. Discuss when too much information or too much candidness can be more detrimental than helpful. Consider the need for wisdom and biblical leadership when it comes to disclosure and transparency versus confidentiality and unnecessary distraction.

Nehemiah was prepared. 4

*"Then the king said to me, 'What would you request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven."*

According to this verse, how was Nehemiah prepared? Discuss the importance of prayer in preparation. Give some examples of how God used prayer to prepare you in difficult situations. Give examples of how God intervened on your behalf because of your prayer or His divine intervention.

Nehemiah shared a compelling future. 5

*"I said to the king, 'If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.'"*

Nehemiah expected success. 6

*"Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, 'How long will your journey be, and when will you return?' So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time."*

Nehemiah anticipated problems. 7-8a

*"And I said to the king, 'If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go.'"*

He was not paranoid about problems.

He was not paralyzed by problems.

He was prepared for problems.

Nehemiah understood the importance of God's hand. 8b

*"And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me."*

Discuss how Nehemiah depended on the favor of God in a situation he had no control over. Have you been in a situation like that? Discuss it.

Discuss how Nehemiah's vision and request were not self-serving to him personally. Think about and discuss the kinds of prayers answered and doors opened if our prayers were not self-serving. Come up with two or three things you could ask God to do.

### **Valiant Warriors execute the vision they see.**

Nehemiah evaluated the situation. 11-16

*"So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work."*

Discuss the importance of counting the cost and evaluating the situation.

Develop a strategy based on what Nehemiah did for going from felt need to detailed project design.

Nehemiah motivated the congregation. 17-18

*"Then I said to them, 'You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that*

we will no longer be a reproach.' I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. **Then they said, 'Let us arise and build.' So they put their hands to the good work."**

He identified with the people.

He identified the problem.

He proposed a solution.

He painted a better future.

He pointed to a divine purpose.

(He led by conviction and with credibility.)

### **Valiant Warriors clarify the cause continuously. 19-20**

*"But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, 'What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?' So I answered them and said to them, 'The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem.'"*

"There is a wall to be built around the city of your soul. There is a wall to build, a testimony to be erected around your church...For whenever the people of God say, 'Let us arise and build,' Satan says, 'Let me arise and oppose.'" (See citation)

He caused an opposition to arise.

The plans of God will always be opposed by the people of the enemy.

He communicated confidence in the Lord.

Nehemiah said the God of heaven will give him success. His confidence was not in himself but in the God of heaven. You have to know the God of heaven and what He does in order to have confidence in what He wants you to do.

He kept the vision before the people.

Their vision was to arise and build, so Nehemiah restates this vision again.

He cut off the opposition.

He not only demonstrated courage in standing for God, but he also understood a contaminated workforce or an army full of traitors was not the solution to the problem. In reality, these were the same people who had not built the wall and remained questioning and critical of anyone who thought about rebuilding the wall. Nehemiah understood these corrupt and compromised men were not God's plan for rebuilding.

You cannot build the kingdom of God with the methods of the world. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem represent the fickle way of the world. They were corrupt and had no intention of being helpful. It was only about them. Watch out for people who are selfish and self-promoting. Watch out for people who have no kingdom focus in

their lives. Watch out for those who long for the spotlight and credit and praise.

Nehemiah saw it, seized it, and shared it!

Discuss the importance of communication, motivation, buy-in, and execution in a project.

Discuss the pitfalls and keys of keeping the vision alive during a long project or mission endeavor.

Share some life lessons learned dealing with opposition and difficult people when leading a team or when you are a team member.

Better, a thousand times better, to rise up in the spirit of Nehemiah, and throw oneself in the breach as a builder, The heart may be grieved and the countenance sad, but there will be a deep-toned joy in seeking thus to enlighten, instruct, and edify weaker brethren; endeavoring in the fear of God to close up the breaches sin has made, and occupy saints with the blessed Gatherer Himself instead of the failure of those gathered.

### **Gospel implications of vision/hope restored:**

We must see the need for a better future.

We must seek this better future.

We must share God's plan for a better future.

<sup>2</sup>Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Service: Studies in the Book of Nehemiah*, Revell, 1958, 18.

<sup>3</sup>Ironside, H. A. (1913). *Notes on the Book of Nehemiah* (p. 17). Loizeaux Bros.



**notes:**

# session three

DETERMINATION/ACTION

NEHEMIAH 3:1-4:23

Remember we are the people and we can be Nehemiah in some ways. We are broken and need hope, plus we identify with the broken and give hope.

*"So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work." Nehemiah 4:6*

Chapter three is about organization, participation, and delegation to get the wall built. Those same actions are necessary to rebuild a marriage, a family, a relationship, or a life. How do we get out of our brokenness (chapter one) into a hope filled vision (chapter two) to a restored life, marriage, and relationship? **At some point we must grab a hold of the vision, the hope, God has given us and with determination execute a plan of restoration.**

Larry Walters allegedly tied hot air balloons to his lawn chair and floated up hundreds of feet in the air. When asked, "Why did you do it?" he answered, "Well, you just can't sit there."

Nehemiah just could not sit there either. He had to do something. Nehemiah had experienced brokenness then hope through vision of a better future. Now it was time to do something about it. In Nehemiah's life, the wall was still broken down and not yet restored. He now had hope and vision. But hope and vision without plan of execution and determination is simply a dream. Personally, it is the difference between a dreamer and a leader. The same is true for your restoration. The hope you hold in your heart must lead to action. Your plans and your actions do not diminish the grace of God but only validate His work in you.

**Valiant Warriors demonstrate determination along with organization to accomplish big things for God.**

People often consider organization as unspiritual. Disorganized and undisciplined people in particular consider organization as unspiritual. I agree sometimes it can be. "You cannot organize a spiritual problem and you cannot spiritualize an organizational problem." If you will notice, in Scripture and throughout church history, many of the people who did significant things for God's kingdom displayed some degree of organization. Noah's building of the ark, Moses ruling of the people, and here Nehemiah had 45 sections, 10 gates, and 40 plus groups working together. Everyone did not do the same thing nor have the same assignment. Someone had to make the assignment and make sure those performing the tasks could do the task.

"You cannot organize spiritual problems, and you cannot spiritualize organizational problems." - Bob Sorrell

## **God blesses our strategic steps when they are intended for His purposes.**

3:1-2

*"Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel. Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built."*

They were building doors and walls and consecrating them. They were not just sitting back and waiting on someone else to do what they were supposed to do. There were proven and tried methods of construction that involved hard work and determination. God had provided hope, vision, leadership, permission, and materials and they were the labor force. Without question, God was the key to this restoration. It could not happen without Him. But it was not going to happen without them either. It is the connection between faith, hope, and obedience.

*"consecrated"* = set apart, to be holy, removed from common use, subject to special treatment.

They were building the wall for God. They would have a great sense of protection and significance in its construction. But it was really more important because it was for Him and not them.

Motivation without organization leads to frustration.

Organization without motivation leads to stagnation.

Discuss how scale (size) and complexity of projects require organization. Discuss the tension and balance between organizational structure in spiritual endeavors. How should they compliment each other? How can the organizational or spiritual perspective get in the way of the other and ultimately prevent the God-given assignment from completion?

## **God restores us through participation and cooperation in and through a community of faith.**

*"Next to him (them)"* occurs 15 times, and *"After him (them)"* occurs 16 times in our biblical text. So in 32 verses, words were used 31 times that specifically connected the wall builders to each other. God intended on restoring His wall through this community of faith. I really believe God wants to restore you and me in whatever we need to be restored in and through a community of faith. Not in isolation, but in cooperation and participation in a community of faith like Ephesians four speaks of. What do you get from a community of faith or a church? The church does so much for us. I think we believers in the West have so embraced "priesthood of believer," that we have embraced a false doctrine of independence and disconnectedness from the other believers in the church. Accountability and submission in spiritual

matters and to spiritual leadership are not readily embraced. The result contributes to more brokenness and devastation with little hope for restoration.

Just like the restoration of the Jerusalem wall, God wants to restore you not in isolation, but in cooperation and participation in and through a community of faith.

Participation with cooperation leads to restoration.

It was accomplished through simplification of tasks and participation of the people.

Expect people to help.

Work with the willing.

Clarify and specify expectations.

Delegation of the tasks.

Do not worry about who gets the credit.

Transfer the ownership to the people.

Cooperation for the sake of the cause.

Discuss communication, cooperation, and motivation in getting things done. Can you put these in some kind of order of importance and order of occurrence?

What particular ministry assignments or projects could be improved by improving one or all of these areas?

**Valiant Warriors demonstrate determination to overcome obstacles.**

**We must expect opposition but not be derailed by it.**

Opposition will come. 4:1-3; 7-8; 11-13

*"Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?' Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, 'Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!'"*

*"Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it."*

*"But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night. Thus in Judah it was said, 'The strength of the burden bearers is failing, Yet there is much rubbish; And we ourselves are unable To rebuild the wall.' Our enemies said, 'They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work.' When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, 'They will come up against us from every place where you may turn,' then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows."*

Discuss opposition to God's work in today's world. Consider opposition from the outside of the church. Consider opposition from within the church. Discuss what those voices sound like. What is different? What is in common? How do Christians discourage each other?

Discuss ways to overcome opposition.

### **We must pray and listen to the right voices.**

*"Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders. So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work."*

We must continuously cry out to God for His help in our times of trouble and in our process of restoration. We never get to a place where prayer has passed us by and we no longer need to cry out to Him. As a matter of fact, we become more aware of our utter dependence upon Him. But also become more aware of His complete sufficiency to work in our behalf. This prayer is more of a prayer against the opposition. But verse six is a victorious verse of answered prayer. The wall built halfway up toward completion. But the biggest answer to prayer was *"for the people had a mind to work."*

*"When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: '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 houses.' When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work.*

*From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. **Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon.** As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the*



wall far from one another. 'At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. **Our God will fight for us.**' So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared. At that time I also said to the people, 'Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day.' So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water."

Nehemiah provided words of encouragement in times of discouragement, fear, and accusation. As a leader, we must provide those kinds of words. It is the sign of the leader. But also, as the discouraged which we all are at times, we must choose to listen to the right voices and the right words. Nehemiah's voice was not the only voice speaking in those days.

It is important to note that "God had frustrated their plan" in verse 15. The enemies realized God was working on behalf of Nehemiah.

The ones building the wall did not proceed unprepared or unarmed either. Verse 17 is one of those classic verses that gives a picture of men working on the wall with a weapon in his hand. They had a plan in the event that they were attacked. But there ultimate hope was "our God will fight for us" (20).

How can you direct people to the awesome and great calling of God's work as Nehemiah did?

How can you be an encourager to those working on the wall?

Discuss the wall workers carrying a weapon on the wall along with their tools. What would that look like in today's spiritual battles?

Men in particular often serve God by doing and building. Nehemiah's wall building project captures the best of both worlds. Discuss how men thrive in spiritual work that involves physical work. What are some particular ministries where these are combined? How can we grow in these ministries to involve more men in this kind of ministry?

How do you balance God fighting for you and you carrying a spiritual weapon to fight for yourself in today's spiritual battles?

### **We must prepare for battle while keeping the vision.**

Oliver Cromwell said, "Trust God and keep your powder dry." Although they did not draw an arrow or pull a sword, their preparation most likely discouraged an attack. We must be prepared to fight but we must remember what we are fighting for. Some just fight to fight. The fight cannot be a distraction from the goal. They were

building the wall. God is building His kingdom. We are fighting for restoration of our homes, marriages, children, relationships, our unity, our very lives. It is worth fighting for.

Our lesson theme is determination. Vision, organization, cooperation, motivation, communication, and execution are all important. But determination can make up a lot of margin when any of these falls short. And without determination, those other disciplines will fall short.

As Churchill is credited with saying, "Never, never, never give up," and "If you're going through hell, keep going."

Share some examples of when determination made all the difference in the world.

How do we inspire or develop determination in our children, teenagers, and younger adults?

What should we as valiant warriors be determined about?

### **Gospel implications of our determination.**

#### **We are called to work out not work for our salvation.**

It is more than just an idea or thought. It requires action on our part also.

#### **We are to cooperate with God in our practical restoration.**

God does it and provides the power for spiritual transformation and sovereignty over circumstances. We obey Him to realize the restoration.

#### **We are to continue towards our restoration through faith, obedience, and connectedness to the body.**

We must overcome discouragement, opposition, and criticism to finish. A key element in that is the church providing protection, encouragement, and guidance.



# session four

RESOLVING CONFLICT  
NEHEMIAH 5

Chapters four and six deal with external problems. Chapter five deals with an internal problem. External problems are sometimes easier because they can unite people. But an internal problem, by its very nature, tends to divide people. Nehemiah's handling of this internal problem of resolving internal conflict was a great measure of his leadership. The Hebrew people were charging their fellow Hebrews usury or interest during an economically challenging time. The building of the wall was taking away from time that typically would be devoted to the harvest.

An overview of this chapter looks like this:

5:1-5 An Internal Outcry Concerning Financial Extortion.

5:6-11 Nehemiah Rebukes the Financial Creditors.

5:12-13 Repentance from the Rebuked.

5:14-19 Nehemiah leads with an unselfish example.

He denied himself what he could have claimed.

He saw his self-denial as unto the Lord (5:19).

In Nehemiah five, we see...

Unresolved conflict was impeding the completion of the walls.

Unresolved conflict is an obstacle to restoration.

Conflict was caused by mistreatment among those building the wall.

Unresolved conflict was overcome by humble leadership showing the way.

This conflict is exposed as self-centered immorality and self-centered materialism.

The climate we are in now requires the careful defining of terms. The term "social justice" has become a lightning rod topic or term for many. For the sake of clarity and time's sake, let me cut through the discussion and provide a clear statement of our position on the subject of "social justice."

Valiant warriors believe all justice is defined and rooted in Scripture. Therefore, cultural and social structures cannot provide an adequate definition of biblical justice. Justice begins with a just God.

Valiant warriors recognize all people are sinners by nature and by choice. This sin problem is total depravity meaning people are incapable apart from the redeeming work of Christ in salvation of providing or even understanding a perfect biblical justice. We cannot create nor even comprehend it. We are all guilty of violating biblical justice, so we are all in need of grace.

Valiant warriors recognize even saved-by-grace redeemed people still struggle with sin, so even in sanctification, saved saints are flawed and fall short in God's ideal of justice. This does not serve as an excuse for neglecting a genuine and fervent pursuit of justice. But it does recognize perfect justice will never occur until Jesus Christ returns and establishes His eternal kingdom on earth.

Valiant warriors should diligently pursue biblical justice. Valiant warriors should take

up the cause of the mistreated, vulnerable, underserved, and weak brothers and sisters along with others. The pursuit is flawed because those pursuing the justice are flawed. Again, this is not an excuse to fall short, but is a humble acknowledgement of weakness and shortcoming in all matters. Valiant warriors should keep the message and power of the Gospel at the forefront of all efforts in this cause. Valiant warriors believe a relationship with Jesus Christ and the power of the Gospel is the only way biblical justice can be achieved. Neglecting the power and the primary place of the Gospel in any pursuit of biblical justice will be futile.

Therefore, valiant warriors reject any philosophy, theory, or approach that negates, minimizes, or compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ as the only basis and power to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation. Valiant warriors believe in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and the sufficiency of the Gospel without the help of secular, humanistic, societal solutions to spiritual problems that are sin. Therefore, any suggested solution that adds to the sufficient Gospel is no solution, but a direct violation and contradiction of salvation by grace alone in faith alone in Christ alone.

### **Valiant Warriors listen to outcries made within the community. 1-5**

*"Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. For there were those who said, 'We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live.' There were others who said, 'We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine.' Also there were those who said, 'We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage already, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others.'"*

The Hebrew community had biblical requirements for how they should treat one another. Deuteronomy 4:6-8, 10:17-18, 15:7-8; Job 29:12-17, 31-13:28; Psalm 146:7-9; Proverbs 14:31, 31:8; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3; Micah 6:8

Understanding the basic needs from the perspective of those with the needs is imperative. Nehemiah listened to the people who had the complaint. In listening to what they had to say, he was better equipped to make a better determination as to the accuracy of their complaint and the responsibility in helping to correct a potential injustice. Our temptation often is to just assume the complaint is illegitimate.

Here the facts were that the poor Hebrews had large families with tremendous real needs of feeding their families. Due to a famine, these poor people did not have margin to see them through the famine. Some of these poor families mortgaged their houses and lands to be able to purchase food to eat to stay alive. Because of the famine and the high interest payments on the loans for food, they are having to sell their children into slavery. Now they have no capacity of getting their children out of



slavery because they no longer own their own fields and vineyards.

There is a reality the poor are much more vulnerable than the wealthy in a multitude of areas.

A person who has no margin in their income and their bills cannot survive a large car repair bill. If they have no margin, then they cannot get their car repaired. If their car is not repaired, then they cannot drive to work, they cannot drive to the doctor's office, they cannot drive to the DMV, etc. If they cannot work, then they get further in the hole and cannot pay their rent or their utility bill. With late fees, even if they could secure a loan, they will never be able to dig their way out of the hole because they do not make enough money to meet their basic needs and have enough to pay for the loan to repair the car or the cash to repair the car.

The same is true in our legal system. If a person gets a ticket for an out-of-date registration car tag, they have to appear before a judge possibly so they have to miss work and therefore, they do not get paid. They get fined more because they have no legal representation or advice because they cannot afford it. Large companies have the advantage in legal proceedings against poor people. Poor people cannot afford expensive lawyers. Jails and prisons are filled with poor people. It is not to say some of these poor people are not deserving of being imprisoned. It raises another question of why is crime more prevalent in poor communities? To ignore this reality because it does not affect you or your family is negligence as a valiant warrior.

The enormity of this poverty problem often discourages believers from engaging the problem. But as believers, we must engage poverty as we engage lostness. We cannot reach everyone with the gospel, but that should not prevent us from reaching someone with the gospel. Our mission is to reach and help people in the name of Jesus and for His sake. We will not see all be saved, but that does not stop us from reaching our family and our community and going on mission trips and giving money to missionaries. When some reject the gospel, it does not mean we do not try to reach others.

Valiant warriors listen to others, in particular, those who are within the church when they cry out about injustices within the body. If you are not in need yourself or your family member, then it is imperative you understand you will have a tendency to overlook or minimize or explain away the real poverty problem in the lives of other people.

Valiant warriors listen to God (through His Word and prayer) about the needs of others.

Valiant warriors reject socialism in preference to biblical generosity.

## **Valiant Warriors identify and take up the cause of their faith family. 6-7**

*"Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, 'You are exacting usury, each from his brother!' Therefore, I held a great assembly against them."*

Disunity is a great enemy to the work of God. Jesus gave us the priority of unity in the body in His high priestly prayer in John 17. The problem facing the wall construction here did not come from outside but was from within. Nehemiah will address this matter with integrity and appropriately. But we must look ahead to see why he could do that.

### **15" *...But I did not do so because of the fear of God.*"**

The exacting of usury on people who borrowed money was a legitimate and acceptable business practice as it is today. The difference here is God had commanded the people to not charge interest to their brethren. The only reason a brother would need to borrow money is because they were poor. God always made provision for the poor among His people. The year of Jubilee was set up for many reasons, but one of the reasons was that all debt would be forgiven. So, there would not be long-term debt people could never get out from under. This period of history had neglected the wall reconstruction but also the Word of God as we will see in chapter eight of Nehemiah. So, these people had not been obeying God in many different ways.

It would not be unreasonable for Nehemiah to be guilty along with his more well off financially brethren of charging usury to others. It would be easy to see him along with the others. Let us say as a side note if he was guilty, then I certainly believe he could have and would have repented of that practice. But he was not guilty of this practice. So, he had the moral authority and integrity to address this problem. And he did exactly that.

God restores broken people and that is what this study is all about. But God often raises up people with moral authority and integrity to lead in times of conflict. There is a reason God calls His elders to be "above reproach."

Can you see the importance of raising boys and young men with moral purity and integrity so God might one day give them moral authority to lead? Discuss the great need for this. Discuss how a person can recapture moral integrity after forfeiting or sinning it away. In your discussion, consider the great grace of God in contrast to the consequences of sin in forfeiting some opportunities because of sin.

The outcry was heard.

The injustice was felt.

The injustice was considered.

A solution was contended for.

### **Valiant Warriors understand and communicate basic bottom line biblical truth. 8**

*"I said to them, 'We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?' Then they were silent and could not find a word to say. Again I said, 'The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?'"*

Creation in the image of God values people.

Redemption by the grace of God rescues people.

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus addresses neglect of brothers and sisters who, in particular, are engaged in ministry by other professing believers. For Jesus, this was a litmus test for the authenticity of their salvation. Those in the story who neglected the needy brothers and sisters who were hungry, thirsty, sick, and in prison will be cast into eternal fire.

Read Matthew 25:31-46 and discuss the groups, the actions, and the consequences in this text.

### **Valiant Warriors strive to act in a way to correct injustice. 10-13**

*"And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury. 'Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them.' Then they said, 'We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say.' So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. I also shook out the front of my garment and said, 'Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.' And all the assembly said, 'Amen!' And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise."*

Luke 10:25-37; Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37 Individual action led to community action.

What are some ways or causes valiant warriors can engage to change injustices in

particular to fellow believers and the vulnerable?

### **Valiant Warriors set examples of servant leadership. 14-19**

*"Yet for all this I did not demand the governor's food allowance, because the servitude was heavy on this people."*

*"Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance. But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. **But I did not do so because of the fear of God.** I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. Moreover, there were at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox and six choice sheep, also birds were prepared for me; and once in ten days all sorts of wine were furnished in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the governor's food allowance, because the servitude was heavy on this people. Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."*

Nehemiah recounted his appointment to leadership.

Valiant warriors acknowledge and respect God-appointed leadership. Sometimes the valiant warrior is the God-appointed leader. When that is the case, the leader recognizes and assumes their responsibility instead of abdicating it. An abdication of this leadership is often seen in the home and the church where the Scripture clearly gives men a responsibility (1 Timothy; Ephesians 5:22-31). The leader also understands this appointment is by grace. While the leader may possess leadership traits, he understands anything and everything they have comes from God and can be removed in a moment. This understanding creates a humble servant leader.

Sometimes the valiant warrior is not the God-appointed leader. When that is the case, the valiant warrior serves and supports the leader. He sets an example for his brothers in followship. It has been widely noted good leaders are and have been good followers. Jesus Himself set a perfect example of submitting to God the Father's will in incarnation, humiliation (Philippians 2:5-11), and crucifixion.

Nehemiah recounts and contrasts the previous governors considering his leadership. Nehemiah did not claim the food that was due to him as the governor. He voluntarily denied himself some of his privileges. His self-denial helped him identify with his people. The line or level between leadership and followship was minimized. Those building the wall could more easily connect with Nehemiah because he ate the same things they did, and he was on the wall himself like they were.

Discuss the importance of self-awareness in leadership.

Discuss the importance of following biblical authority and leadership.

Discuss the difference in worldly leadership and biblical servant leadership in light of Nehemiah's leadership.

Further consideration or additional study:

In the current climate of a "social justice" pursuit, we cannot let cancel culture and those who compromise the inerrancy of Scripture and the power of the Gospel hijack the conversation about helping needy people. In politics, the more liberal politicians have championed themselves as caring about the poor, when in reality, they have oppressed and kept the poor poor. Socialism has oppressed poor people and has never been successful in history. Unfortunately, the cancel culture of today does not consider undeniable facts of history that verifies what should easily be seen in the great flaws of socialism. The same is true of those who are liberal theologically attempting to paint theological conservatives as cold, unkind, and uncaring toward people who are in need. This is a totally false narrative.

Historically, theological conservatives have cared deeply about those in need and have demonstrated it through generous giving. Liberal politicians and theologians spend their time criticizing people who are actually serving and sacrificing for others from their ivory towers of criticism and advocating the giving away other people's money (not their own money). While we reject this, we cannot be duped into a worthless conversation with those who have no desire of making a situation better. We cannot waste our energy, effort, and good testimony on engaging in worthless dialogue.

We must honestly assess our situations recognizing the potential, possibility, and probability of falling into a sinful blind spot when it comes to meeting the needs of others. That is another reason why we need a band of brothers sharpening one another through a myriad of different experiences and backgrounds. We strive to not be guilty of the Pharisees' sin of looking down our noses at others picking the speck out of their eye while neglecting the log in our own eye. A good discussion should challenge valiant warriors considering the story of the Good Samaritan.

### **Who is my neighbor? "Love your neighbor as yourself." —Jesus Luke 10:25-37**

Jesus does not limit how we love and who we love.

A Samaritan helping a Jew transcends race, politics, class, and even religion.

Jonathan Edwards preached in 1733 a sermon entitled, "The Duty of Charity to the Poor," from the Good Samaritan Parable.

He was addressing a poverty and segregation/social stratification due to poverty issue in his community. Conflicts between creditors and debtors, the new and the established, old and young were emerging. Edwards addressed questions he often heard when preaching on helping the poor.

1. "They are not destitute or starving yet." Love them as Christ loved you. Love them as you love yourself. You do not wait until you are starving to death to eat or feed your own children.
2. "I have nothing to spare." Actually, I have nothing to spare without affecting the way I choose to live. But you see that is exactly what biblical love requires. Part of suffering for Christ's sake could be associated with our generosity out of our own poverty (2 Cor. 8-9). Also, consider the idea of bearing one another's burdens. Can we really bear another's burden when it is no burden at all to us?
3. "The poor have brought this upon themselves and are ungrateful." We all want to help kindhearted, grateful people whose poverty came upon them through no foolishness or contribution of their own, and who will respond with gratitude, joy, and a change out of their poverty. The problem with that is almost no one like that exists. We all agree our help should be wise, not create dependency to the best of our knowledge; but in reality, it is never perfect. The truth is when we look at God's grace extended towards us...we were undeserving, ungrateful for a season (and some of you are still in that season), we have not always faithfully reflected Christ in everything since receiving His grace. Some people have no ability in the area of managing their affairs. They are like people with poor eyesight and cannot see. Those who can see should help them and not cease to help them because they continue fall down because they have poor eyesight. Without question, discernment is required. But also without question, the poor will always be among us according to Jesus.
4. "What if they are persistent in sinfulness?" Be grace-filled and long-suffering as Christ is with us. We have many examples of long-suffering parents whose prodigal children eventually came home (Luke 15). We also have examples where they did not come home, they died on the streets, fell into a drug or alcohol addiction. How often are we obligated to forgive someone, seven times? Not seven times seventy according to Jesus.

In the Good Samaritan story, what if the Samaritan was on the side of the road instead of the Jew? We like being the religious guy helping others, but this story is the religious guy as the victim. You are the victim in need of help here. Your son, daughter, grandchild, wife- they are on the side of the road beat up, hurting in a bad neighborhood, in a foreign country. Do you want someone to stop and care for you, your family? Imagine the panhandler, the person in need is your son, your daughter, your grandson, your granddaughter. Would you want someone to stop and help them?

The point is Jesus is the Great Samaritan. We were dead on the side of the road in our sins and trespasses. We were like the Jews who had despised the Samaritans, marginalized them, criticized them, avoided them, and despised them. The Great Samaritan looked beyond all that in you and while you were still His enemy, He came to you, He paid for your recovery, your restoration, He reached down and touched you and loved you. The only way you and I can ever show this kind of radical love is we must first receive it.

### **What is our motivation for justice?**

Every person is an image-bearer of the most High God.

Every person is an immortal who lives forever somewhere.

Every person is a steward, not owner, of their life and His gospel.

What if you had been born in Albania in the fourth century? It is doubtful you would have achieved the degree of success you have today, no matter how hard you worked or how smart you are. You most likely would have lived and died without ever even hearing of Jesus Christ. You are a product of the divine sovereign choice of God in time, place, giftedness, and everything else. You have a temporary opportunity now that certainly impacts your eternity.

Reject self-indulgence and materialism for sacrificial living and generosity towards others.

There is an outward expression of justice that reflects an inward transformation of being made just (righteous). James 2:15-16

The world says you are your bank account balance, your social status. What do you say?

The Gospel changes the attitude of the wealthy towards the poor.

The Gospel changes the attitude of the poor about themselves.

Push the button of the Gospel of grace instead of guilt when it comes to generosity, service, and sacrifice.

We are all temporary stewards of our time, talent, and treasure. Our temporary stewardship will have eternal reward or loss of reward depending on how we use our time, talent, and treasure.

**Provide layers of help that go beyond a one-time gift or momentary concern. This is discipleship.**

**Rescue:** direct immediate help and gospel sharing

**Reform:** life skills, instructions, and discipleship through spiritual disciplines

**Responsibility:** employment opportunities, service and mission opportunities

**Relationships:** fellowship in the body and a band of brothers who rescue others

Can you think of ways the church can take practical steps in providing a pathway from lostness in spiritual poverty and destitute in financial poverty to spiritual growth and financial responsibility? After discussing a pathway that works in a discussion or on paper, consider the problems and pitfalls that will have to be overcome in order to see it to fruition. Is such a cause worth the time and effort? Are you willing to involve yourself in such a cause? Are there already processes or pathways out there you/we could join? Would it be better for you/us to start another such lifeline to the spiritually and financially poor?



**notes:**

# session five

FINISH  
NEHEMIAH 6

Valiant warriors finish what they start and do what they say they will do. Nehemiah stuck his neck out and put his life on the line when he went to the king and shared his plan. The joke around a lot of houses is all the projects that have been started by men and never finished. That is even more true when it comes to spiritual projects and goals. Rebuilding this wall was a spiritual project and a physically demanding project.

So many spiritual projects are really never finished. The same is true for Nehemiah. He will pursue reinstatement of the Word of God and extend a call for repentance and revival in the chapters ahead. The same is true for us. We are growing spiritually but we have a long way to go. That is why certain markers in our lives spiritually are good to have for encouragement along the way to keep us going. If a person works hard for a long time and thinks they have made no progress or contribution to anything, then they will certainly quit. But markers along the way help to see the progress.

As some say, I am not where I want to be, but thank God I am not where I used to be.

Building this wall was a major accomplishment for a people who had been more broken down than that wall. Their apathy and satisfaction with the way things had been with no spiritual growth was represented in that broken down wall. Nehemiah's assessment, plan, and execution would outwardly represent what God was wanting to do in the hearts of His people.

This wall rebuild is just what the men of that day needed. In the same way, men today need work projects and activities that allow them to get their hands dirty and their bodies tired in the service of God's kingdom. Men need opportunities to work outside and sweat for the glory of God. Before the Fall, God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to "cultivate it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Hard work and physical labor are good things God ordains.

Obviously, there is more than just hard work going on in these chapters. Spiritual work and emotional strength are necessary to move forward. This wall represents faith in God. We know "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). This wall represents obedience to God. This wall represents hope in a better future.

Discuss the importance of markers or guide stones along the way to help measure and encourage you on a spiritual journey. What are some of those guide stones? How can church building projects reflect outwardly what God is doing inwardly in a congregation? How can a church building program be seen like Nehemiah rebuilding the wall?

**Valiant Warriors are diligent in overcoming ungodly opposition.**

All opposition is not necessarily ungodly. Some opposition can actually be godly. Valiant warriors should never assume they are always right. It is possible and probable you will be wrong at times if not a lot of the time. A band of brothers we know and trust and have shared life with are necessary to help us discern what is an attack from the enemy or a loving rebuke or correction from a friend.

Nehemiah demonstrated ongoing **discernment** throughout this journey. His good decisions previously helped him to make wise decisions here. His good decision-making record also makes it easier for others to listen to and follow Nehemiah. From his previous dealings with these men, he did not acquiesce to their request for a meeting. They wanted to meet with Nehemiah in the plain of Ono. Nehemiah's response was in essence, "Oh, no!"

*"Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, 'Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono.' But they were planning to harm me."*

Nehemiah responded to his enemies' request for a meeting of the minds with one of the classic statements of this book. Nehemiah was not just protecting himself from harm although there is nothing wrong with that. Nehemiah understood the higher calling, the greater work in all this.

How can you tell the difference between godly advice and ungodly advice? Sometimes in Scripture God used ungodly or uncommon means to speak to His people (i.e. Babylonian captivity, Balaam's donkey, etc.). How have you experienced an unusual messenger to give you a message from God? How can we guard against a defensive attitude of taking messages intended for our good as criticism?

*"So I sent messengers to them, saying, 'I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?' They sent messages to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way."*

Nehemiah understood he was doing a great work. That was what kept him on that wall. Valiant warriors believe they are engaged in a great work. It seems I spend a lot of effort at times trying to convince men they are doing a great work. I have often told my sons they should pursue a work that helps people. Almost any job can be viewed in a way as helping others, or even helping your family have their needs met, at the very least.

When we work for kingdom and help others, it is a great work. It is too important for us to come down off that wall. I think the direction of "coming down" is

significant. To do less than what God has called you to do is a step down. There is no higher calling and no greater work than God's work. For Nehemiah and his contemporaries, that great work was rebuilding the wall around the city. Much more than a wall went up. Their dependence on God went up. Their teamwork and unity went up. Their spiritual understanding went up. Their courage went up. Their walk with God went up. Their testimony for good and against evil went up. Their example to their children and grandchildren went up. Their credibility in spiritual matters went up.

I think the following verse is certainly worth memorizing or at least hiding it in your heart as a man and as a valiant warrior. ***"I am doing a great work and I cannot come down."*** Nehemiah also speaks of the fact the work will stop if he comes down. What he was doing on that wall mattered. The work will stop. Why should the work stop? If the work is great, then is there any reason that would justify stopping the great work? Nehemiah understood to "come down to you" wherever they are would require a descent on his part.

It is noteworthy they sent these messengers four times requesting Nehemiah come down. The temptation of the enemy and enemies of God is persistent. Jesus Himself was tempted in the wilderness at least three times. It is not enough to resist temptation one time then succumb to it on the second, third, or fourth time. Nehemiah "answered them in the same way" each time. He believed what he had heard from God more than what he heard from the naysayers.

Valiant warriors know who to listen to. They demonstrate discernment to go along with their determination and devotion. These three "D" words- discernment, determination, and devotion- are a powerful trinity when it comes to believing, obeying, and glorifying God.

When requesting Nehemiah to come down four times did not get him off the wall and away from this great work, his enemies upped their efforts with threats and lies.

How important is it for men to think they are engaged in a "great work?" How can men envision their jobs as a "great work?" I believe almost every job, unless it is immoral or unethical at its core, can be approached as a great work. What are some ways you can see and view your job and the jobs of others as a great work?

We all agree God's work is the greatest work. So, how do you organize your life to ensure you are engaged in a great work? What are some specific things you are doing or will do to be a part of a great work?

Discuss the connection between "staying on the wall and not coming down" and understanding what they were doing was a great work. What are some specific "great works" you will keep you on the wall no matter the pull to come down?

*"Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand. In it was written, 'It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports. 'You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'A king is in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together.'"*

Satan is the father of all lies. Deception is the name of his game. "It is reported" reflects this is a rumor. The rumor had no name attached to it. The scope of the rumor was "among the nations." O. S. Hawkins in *The Nehemiah Code* points out rumors are "nameless and shameless." Sanballat accuses Nehemiah of wanting to be the king and the motive behind building the wall was for Nehemiah to become the king. When they could not discourage his work, they threatened to discredit him personally by accusing him of selfish motives.

*"Then I sent a message to him saying, 'Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind.' For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, 'They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done.' But now, O God, strengthen my hands."*

Nehemiah responded to the accusations of his enemies. He denied these accusations. Nehemiah suggested they were inventing these things in their own mind. Whether they actually believed these things or were knowingly thinking up lies to discredit Nehemiah is unclear. The reason behind these deceptive lies is to frighten the wall workers so they would cease working on the wall. The enemies sought to discourage them. One of Satan's primary weapons is discouragement. People are typically easily discouraged. There are so many ways and areas of discouragement. Discouragement often leads to defeat and depression. Discouraged men would climb down off the wall. The result would be that the wall would not be constructed.

A great question is why would these men not want this wall to go up? Is it that they would lose control? Is it that Hebrews would have protection from outside enemies? Is it that the completion of the wall would energize and give hope to the Hebrew people instead of them being a defeated and apathetic people?

In the face of discouraging threats, Nehemiah requested God strengthen his hands. It was with his hands he would keep building the wall. It would be with his hands he would defend himself from physical harm. Nehemiah continued to keep his focus on the assignment God had given him.

What are some ways we can get sidetracked and distracted from doing what God wants us to do? What are some of the voices of opposition and criticism today seeking to distract to a side street or stop the work of God?

*"When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, 'Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night.' But I said, 'Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.' Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me."*

The deception continues with an invitation to go and meet in the temple. This almost sounds spiritual. The reason allegedly for this invitation was for Nehemiah to flee from those coming to kill him. Nehemiah refused to flee to save his life. He also perceived this attempt was by a hired deceiver. Nehemiah also considered if he became frightened and fled that would be sin for him (verse 13). His fleeing would ultimately be used against him in bringing reproach upon him.

Can you think of ways some spiritual-sounding arguments can confuse or distract us from the work God has called us to? Chapter five is a good example in our Nehemiah study. Today there are real issues that need attention, but some of the solutions deny the power of the gospel. How do we do avoid the noise of meaningless discussion but not neglect to engage in critical issues of the mission and the gospel?

*"Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me."*

Nehemiah prayed and gave it over to the Lord. Nehemiah demonstrated how to face opposition. He stood up to it repeatedly and then he gave it over to the Lord.

Can you think of situations where you had to eventually just give it over to the Lord because it was outside your ability to change it? Discuss how hard that is, how do you do that, and what have been the results of giving it over to the Lord.

*"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."*

Nehemiah never lost sight of the goal and God's call upon his life. He finished. This reminds me of Paul's words in 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

*"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have*

*kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."*

Not only was Nehemiah a rewarded servant like Paul and all who finish the course, but his enemies were also defeated. The nations lost their confidence, because they recognized God was with Nehemiah. "If God be for us, then who can be against us?" Even ungodly nations and ungodly people can see the hand of God upon the lives His obedient servants.

The immediate plan was the wall was built.

The ultimate plan was God was glorified.

A brief review of chapter seven demonstrates steps that were taken after the completion of the wall that preserved all the work that was done. Preserving the physical work was important but looking ahead beyond chapter seven casts a vision of preserving the spiritual work and continuing that work.

Nehemiah enlisted qualified leadership. 1-4

Nehemiah counted and considered all the people. 5-69

"Then my God put it into my heart..." 7:5

"Know well the condition of your flocks..." Prov. 27:23

While the wall was completed, the work was not finished. People had to be recruited to man the wall and live in the city. Steps had to be taken to preserve the work of the wall, so it did not end up in ruins as it had before. The spiritual formation, in some ways, had just begun. The reintroduction of the Word of God in chapter eight. The worship, confession, covenant, and ongoing correction of the last several chapters remind us our spiritual journey is never over and there is always work to be done and ground to be gained spiritually until Jesus returns.

Discuss the idea our spiritual battle and growth is never over until we go to heaven. How can that be discouraging and how can we be motivated to keep on going? How does the completed wall encourage the people? What are the temptations of a completed project? Have you ever seen a decline after a goal or vision is realized? I heard one person say about another church their goal was to get out of debt. They got out of debt and have not done anything since.

What is an appropriate way to celebrate God's accomplished work in us and through us, but look ahead because He has not completed His work in us or through us?





# session six

THE WORD  
NEHEMIAH 8

The seventh month was important to the Hebrews (7:73). The first day was the Feast of Trumpets, the tenth day was the Day of Atonement, and on the fifteenth day the Feast of Tabernacles began.

The wall was rebuilt, but it was the Word that ultimately rebuilt the people. The wall was restored by the hands of the people, but the people were to be restored by the Word of God. The two things that live forever are emphasized in this passage, "people and the Word of God." In Scripture from this point forward, the emphasis is clearly more focused on the Word of God than the Temple of God.

### **Valiant Warriors are restored to the Word of God in community.**

The community of faith is emphasized throughout the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah closely identified himself with the people of Israel. The people are identified together throughout the book. Here we see "people" occurs 13 times in verses 1-12 and "all the people" nine times. These verses emphasize the community of faith again. Verses 1-2 speak of women and all who could listen with understanding. The Word was for everyone, not just a select few. Over time, the Word for all people drifted to the elite and educated. The Reformation recaptured the message of the Bible of justification by faith and emphasized sola scriptura (Scripture only). The Word being in the hands of the community of faith holds all of us accountable.

Valiant warriors value the Word of God and community. The Word of God and the community of faith are friends and work together for our sanctification and God's glory and His mission.

*"Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you **appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.**" Jude 3*

Discuss how the community of faith (the church) has the responsibility for the Word of God. How does that work itself out? Consider the protection against heretical teaching in the saints "contending" for the faith as opposed to elite Bible teachers telling everyone what to believe.

### **The Word was read publicly. 3**

*"He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law."*

A few quick observations are the length of time he read, the presence of both men and women, the ones who could understand, and their attentiveness to the Word.

From early morning to midday would be six hours. Ezra knew nothing of brief sound bite sermonettes. The inclusivity of men and women testifies again the high

value the Lord God has always put on both men and women in His kingdom. This exercise was not a mindless event where there was no comprehension. Those who participated understood what was being read.

This six-hour event was not only understood, but it held the attention of hearers. Our "short attention spanned, keep me entertained" culture can be overcome through a God-given appetite and attentiveness to the powerful and eternal Word of God. These people did not know what they had been missing until they started hearing the Word being read aloud. They understood the significance of God speaking to them through His Word. Their focus gave testimony to their authentic relationship with God. They recognized God's voice through His Word.

*"Jesus said, 'My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me.'"*  
John 10:27

*"Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen!' while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading."*

The posture was noted for the reading of the Word. Ezra was standing and when he opened the book, the people stood. The people worshiped the Lord as Ezra blessed the Lord. They worshiped God with, "Amen." They worshiped God with lifted hands. They worshiped God bowed low with faces to the ground.

The Word was read, explained, and translated so the people could understand the reading of it.

Discuss the importance of God's Word in our personal lives and our congregational lives. What kind of difference does the Word of God make in your life? How do we keep attentive and hungry hearts for the Word of God like we see in this section of Nehemiah? Consider the analogy the Word of God is Jesus and the Bread of Life. How does feeding on Jesus and His Word create a greater appetite for His Word? Discuss how young children respond the first time they taste sugar or candy or cake and compare that to people who have neglected or not been exposed to the Word of God.

Why is it important for the Word of God to be available, taught, and understood by all the people of the congregation and not just a few elite Bible teachers?

Why is it important to involve children in the worship services and the Word of God?

What does it mean to you to stand for the reading of God's Word?

Discuss the importance of the Word of God in the worship of God. Discuss the misnomer that music in a worship service is "worship" and then there is preaching which is spoken of as different than the worship portion of the service. Discuss the value of studying God's Word so it can be explained, translated, and applied.

*"Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, 'This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.' For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, 'Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.' So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, 'Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.' All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them."*

As the people worshiped, they evidently began to mourn and weep. At this time, the people were told not to mourn or weep. This day is declared holy to the Lord. It is in this passage where we find the well-known statement, "the joy of the Lord is your strength." In this emotional time of hearing the Word of God read and explained, God wanted this emotion to generate joy in the hearts of His people. This joy is cultivated with eating and drinking with others. They understood the words and they did it.

What moves your heart in worship? When is the last time you have been moved to emotion or tears in a worship service? What does it take to touch your heart to the point of emotion? For many it is children, grandchildren, patriotism, acts of kindness, mistreated people or animals that will bring a tear into your eyes. How much more should consideration of the Word of God that informs us and transforms us by God's grace and power to peace and prosperity and protection?

Ask God to touch your heart with what touches His heart. Ask God to soften your heart so you might hear His voice and He might touch your heart.

What does it mean the "joy of the Lord is your strength?"

Contrast and discuss the two responses to the Word of God of "tears and mourning" and "joy and eating and fellowship." Consider how both can be appropriate.

*"Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law. They found written in the law how the LORD had*

commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, 'Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written.' So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing. He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance."

The next day they gathered to hear more of God's Word and to "gain insight into" the Word. Upon hearing about the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles to be observed in the seventh month, they immediately sought to obey what the Word said. The Feast of Booths celebrated God's protection over the Jewish people while wandering in the desert living in booths on the way to the promised land. It had obviously been neglected. So, it was like something new to these hearers although it was really something ancient. This is the way of the Word and the Lord. There is "nothing new under the sun," but "His mercies are new every morning." We teach and read an ancient book, but it is relevant and alive today. The Word of God is amazing!

What have you or someone you know read in God's Word and immediately obeyed after reading it like the Israelites did with the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles)?

Consider and discuss how the outward act of observing the Feast of Booths (it required a lot of work) was important as opposed to just observing it "in the hearts and minds?"

God restores people to His Word and through His Word.

Below is a summary of what the Word of God accomplishes seen in this study.

The Word of God brings people together in unity.

*"And all the people gathered as one man at the square..."*

The emphasis of nine times in verses 1-12 of "all the people" shouts the power of the Word to unite people.

The Word of God is the catalyst and the core for worship.

*"And all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen!' while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground."*

The people stood up when the Word was opened up. 5

Ezra blessed the LORD 6a

The people responded. 6 Their response was 1) Amen 2) lifting up hands 3) bowed low 4) worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Their worship reflected submission to God's Word and humility.

The Word of God produces tears in God's people.

*"For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law."* The Bible has the power to transform lives. It convicts, comforts, sets free, instructs, and guides. I have on occasion had people say to me when they come into our worship service, all they can do is cry. There are times during our song services the truthfulness and biblical soundness of what we are singing along with the Holy Spirit moving in my life brings me to tears and I cannot sing. Some are tears of joy, some of repentance, some are of spiritual significance of which we have no words for.

The Word of God instructs the people and produces obedience.

*"They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses..."*

The Word of God provides instruction for the people of God. In verse 11 we see that 1) the day is holy 2) be still 3) do not be grieved.

*"...because they understood the words which had been made known to them." 12*

The Word is to be understood which leads to obedience.

*"...were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law." 13*

The Word of God produces joy in God's people.

*"...the joy of the Lord is your strength (10)...and there was great rejoicing (17)"*

We can see the importance of the Word of God in the life of the people of God.

The biblical illiteracy among many today creates an environment where Satan can have a heyday through heretical teaching, which leads to an openness to cults, immorality as acceptable behavior even among believers, and syncretism of beliefs with the world giving equal value to worldly thought. These result in some type of "worldly Christian culture" where word meanings are nuanced resulting in the heart and core of the Gospel being changed.

We need a revival by the Word and of the Word. When we know worthless, insignificant stuff and do not know the Word of God, we are either lost spiritually or impotent and ineffective spiritually. Both have contributed to the spiritual vacuum of compromise or nothingness that permeates the world we live in and unfortunately is invading the churches we gather in.

Valiant warriors must be men of the Word. All falls when our commitment to the Word of God is compromised or confused. Many things in the Word are hard and difficult to be for sure, but many things are not hard to understand with centuries of church history contending and confirming those rock-solid doctrinal declarations.

### **Psalms that emphasize the Word of God.**

- 12:6 The words of the LORD are pure words  
18:30 The word of the LORD is tried  
33:4 The word of the LORD is upright  
33:6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made  
56:4 In God, whose word I praise  
105:8 The word which He commanded to a thousand generations  
106:12 Then they believed His words; They sang His praise  
107:20 He sent His word and healed them  
119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your Word  
11 Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.  
16 I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.  
17 Deal bountifully with Your servant, That I may live and keep Your word.  
25 Revive me according to Your word.  
28 Strengthen me according to Your word.  
38 Establish Your word to Your servant. As that which produces reverence for You.  
41 May your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O LORD, Your salvation according to your word;  
42 So I will have an answer for him who reproaches me, For I trust in Your word.  
57 The LORD is my portion; I have promised to keep Your words.  
58 I sought Your favor with all my heart; Be gracious to me according to Your word.  
65 You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word.  
67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.  
74 May those who fear You see me and be glad, Because I wait for Your word.  
O may Your lovingkindness, comfort me, according to Your Word.  
81 My soul languishes for Your salvation; I wait for Your word.  
82 My eyes fail with longing for Your word,  
89 Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven  
101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word.  
103 How sweet are Your words to my taste!  
105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path  
107 Revive me, O LORD, according to Your Word.  
114 You are my hiding place and my shield; I wait for Your word  
116 Sustain me according to Your word  
123 My eyes fail with longing for Your salvation and for Your righteous word.  
130 The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.  
133 Establish my footsteps in Your word  
140 Your word is very pure, therefore Your servant loves it  
147 I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Your words  
148 My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.



154 Plead my cause and redeem me; Revive me according to Your word  
160 The sum of Your word is truth  
161 But my heart stands in awe of Your words.  
162 I rejoice at Your word  
169 O LORD, Give me understanding according to Your word.  
170 Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word  
172 Let my tongue sing of Your word  
130:5 I wait for LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope  
138:2 For you have magnified Your word according to all Your name.

**notes:** \_\_\_\_\_

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FIRST BAPTIST **ROGERS**