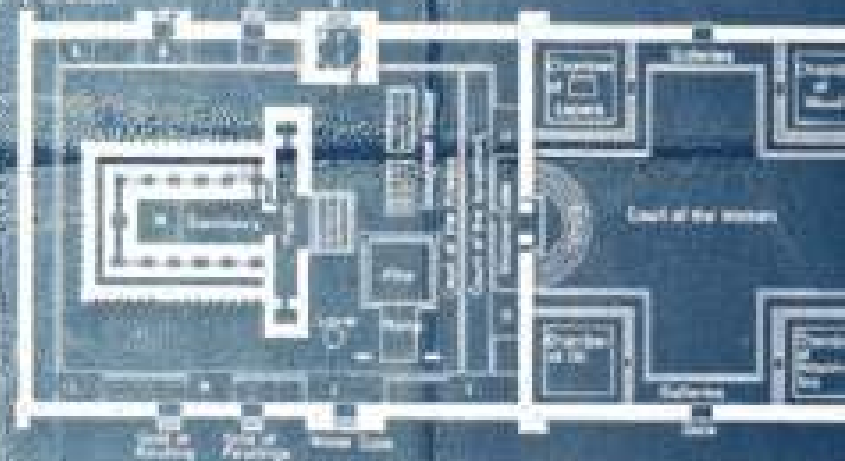




(RE)DECONSTRUCTION



**GROUP
STUDY GUIDE**

SESSION 1: NEHEMIAH 1:1-11

NOTE TO LEADER

We intentionally created this study guide with more than enough material so that you can pick the questions that work best for your group. Before your meeting, watch the video, read the study guide's corresponding session, and decide which questions you'd like to discuss. For more information on using this guide in your group, click the three lines in the menu bar and select How to Use This Guide. Thank you for choosing this study and for faithfully leading your group.

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: We can pray to God humbly and boldly when we encounter tragedy or fail to represent him well.

Head Change: To know that we represent God and have access to him through prayer.

Heart Change: To feel reverence toward God when approaching him.

Life Change: To respond to our brokenness and suffering by praying bold and humble prayers.

OPEN

When have you had to ask someone for something you needed—like a ride to the airport, a new job, or wise advice? How did you feel before that conversation, and how did the conversation go?

Asking for something can be a humbling experience. We may fear we are imposing on others or burdening them with our problems. But often, the help we need comes when we make simple and direct requests. And, when it comes to our relationship with God, he wants us to ask for help in big and bold ways.

The Book of Nehemiah begins with jarring news, prompting Nehemiah to ask for God's help. His bold prayer led to the reconstruction of Jerusalem and God's people. What reconciliation could our prayers bring about? In this session, pastor and author Dr. Eric Mason will break down Nehemiah's prayer, teaching us how to pray to God when we are facing challenges, tragedy, and chaos in our lives.

READ

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11.

*Note: We will not have time to cover every verse of Nehemiah during small group time. We have made a reading guide for the book of Nehemiah so you can walk through the entire book during this study. You can find an overview of the reading plan, and this week's plan, at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What does it mean to be God's representative?

How should we approach God in prayer?

What are the elements of an effective prayer?

Show Session 1: Nehemiah 1:1-11 (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

The Book of Nehemiah was written at the end of an extended period of exile. Seventy years before the time of Nehemiah, Israel was disobedient to God and was removed from the Promised Land and taken into captivity. But despite his people's actions, God remained faithful and began bringing his people back into the broken city of Jerusalem to restore and rebuild. **In what ways has sin left your city and its people broken or in need of restoration? In what ways would you want to see God redeem and rebuild your city?**

*[Note: To learn more about the biblical context of Nehemiah, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.]*

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4.

The book of Nehemiah starts with a problem: Jerusalem's walls had been broken down, making the already feeble city even more susceptible to attacks from enemies. Upon receiving the news of the city, Nehemiah wept. When the people and places we love are damaged, we, like Nehemiah, should mourn. **What people and places that need restoration are close to your heart? What do you think it looks like to faithfully mourn their broken situation?**

Eric reminded us that we are God's representatives, and our actions, words, and attitudes should reflect him. But often, we fall short. When God's people are in disarray, the world will not see a clear picture of God's will, Word, and love. **How well do you think the church is representing God today? In what ways are we in disarray? In what ways are we representing God well?**

Nehemiah's initial response to the news of Jerusalem was to pray. Eric said, "When you're dealing with a lack of clarity in representation, you need to go back to the one you represent." **When are you most likely to pray? In what ways are you praying for the church and God's will to be done in your city?**

*[Note: Nehemiah coupled his prayer with fasting. To learn more about the spiritual practice of fasting, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.]*

Read Nehemiah 1:5-7.

Eric emphasized that the first and most important component of Nehemiah's prayer is acknowledging God. We need to be enthralled with the one we represent. **What attributes of God captivate you the most? What would it look like to appropriately praise God in prayer before anything else?**

After Nehemiah acknowledged God and his greatness in verse 5, he humbly confessed sin to God in verses 6 and 7. When we see God for who he is, we cannot help but see our own sin in comparison. If we are to actively represent our holy God, we need to consistently confess and turn from our sin. **When do you think we need to repent of our sins? What do you think it looks like to repent in front of God and those we have sinned against?**

In what ways do honest confession and repentance represent God to those who do not know him?

There are two aspects of Nehemiah's confession: personal sin ("I and my father's family") and corporate sin ("Israelites"). He owns up to what he and his family had done as well as Israel's guilt. This section of Nehemiah's prayer might feel counter-cultural for us today. We feel the need to shift blame to others rather than owning up to our portion of the problem, and often reject the need to take responsibility for other people's sin. **What difference do you think it would make if we completely owned our personal sin? What difference would it make if we completely confessed and repented of the church's corporate sins and errors?**

Eric made a point to say that, since we are God's representatives on earth we should repent of our divisiveness. He said we've allowed small disagreements in the church to take us off mission. **Do you agree with his assessment? Why, or why not?**

In what ways are the divisions of our culture present in the church?

Nehemiah's acknowledgment of God caused him to have a posture of humility, but it also prompted him to pray with boldness. Read Nehemiah 1:8-11.

Nehemiah asked God to remember the promises he made to his people through the Mosaic Covenant, which God gave to Israel after he rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Nehemiah could pray boldly to God because he knew God loved his people and desired for them to be restored. **In what ways does understanding God's love for you impact the boldness of your prayers?**

Nehemiah prayed using passages from the book of Deuteronomy in verses 8-10. His boldness before God was rooted in his knowledge of God's Word. When we know who God is, we can rightly approach him and praise him in truth. **Take a moment to go back to Deuteronomy to read the verses Nehemiah referenced. What verses do you know that describe who God is?**

The prayer ends with Nehemiah asking God for success as he prepares to talk to the king about the issue in Jerusalem. **Do you believe it is okay to ask God for success in something you are about to do? Why, or why not?**

Eric said that Nehemiah's prayer is an example of effective prayer. **Why would Nehemiah's prayer be considered effective? What elements of his prayer are commendable?**

What are you praying for right now? What can you implement from Nehemiah's example of prayer into your own prayers?

LAST WORD

Where do we turn when we face tragedy or when we fall short as God's representatives? God wants us to come to him—he is all-powerful and loving, eager to hear from his people. Nehemiah gives us a great example of what it looks like to go to God in prayer in the wake of difficult news and impossible situations. We can approach God boldly and humbly, as Nehemiah did, and know God hears us and will respond.

This week, turn to God in prayer. Use Nehemiah's prayer as a template for your conversation with God and take notice of how he answers you.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. The Context of Nehemiah

While Nehemiah is found in the middle of the Old Testament, it is the final narrative book before the Incarnation. It concludes the story beginning with Adam, moving through the covenants of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, setting the stage for Jesus. So, it is normal to be confused when reading Nehemiah for the first time. Nehemiah begins in a Persian palace, but how did we get here and why is Jerusalem destroyed?

After the reigns of David and Solomon, the people of God fell into deep sin and conflict with one another. The nation of Israel fractured into two kingdoms: the southern kingdom of Judah, made of the tribes of Benjamin, Levi, and Judah, and the northern kingdom of Israel, comprised of the remaining nine tribes. The books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles tell the story of these two kingdoms.

The kingdom of Israel was marked by wickedness and idolatry. Of their nineteen kings, none obeyed the Lord. God repeatedly sent them prophets—Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea—but no one would listen. To judge the people, God allowed Assyria to conquer Israel by 722 BC.

Read 2 Kings 17:6–17. **What specific sins did the people of Israel commit? In what ways can you see God’s faithfulness in these verses?**

The southern kingdom of Judah experienced periods of faithfulness under kings like Hezekiah, but soon followed in Israel’s footsteps, rejecting God in favor of idols. As a result, God allowed them to be conquered and taken into exile by the armies of Babylon (2 Kings 24–25). But God sent a prophet to Judah, declaring hope in the midst of their judgment.

Read Jeremiah 29:1–7; 10–14. **What does God want his people to do in exile? What are his promises to his people?**

As Jeremiah wept over the ruin of Jerusalem (see the book of Lamentations), he also knew that God had prepared a glorious redemption for his people. Their redemption began with the events recorded in Ezra, and in the opening chapter of Nehemiah God’s plan continues to take shape.

What can we learn from the failures of Israel and Judah?

What encouragement can we gain from God’s faithfulness despite his people’s rejection?

In what ways does the context of Nehemiah better prepare you to understand this story?

2. Prayer and Fasting

When Nehemiah discovered the news about Jerusalem’s walls being destroyed, he immediately devoted himself to prayer and fasting. Throughout Scripture, fasting is a normative spiritual practice when people seek guidance for an important or difficult decision (Judges 20:26–28), grieve and repent from sin (1 Samuel 7:2–6), or mourn over loss (2 Samuel 12:16–17). **When, if ever, have you fasted? What did you learn during your fast?**

Today, fasting is often not a normal part of Christian life and is sometimes reduced to a kind of spiritual diet. But the purpose of fasting is much bigger than simply avoiding food. Fasting is a physical sign of an inward dedication to the Lord and a desire for deeper fellowship with him. Those who fast, in essence, are saying, “There is nothing I need more than God.” **In what ways do you need God today? In what areas do you need his guidance most?**

Fasting was always a temporary practice focused on hearing from God. As a result, our concern should be with how God sees us, rather than the way we are perceived by others. Read Matthew 6:16–18. **Why do you think it is tempting to impress others with our spiritual commitments?**

Fasting is not a way to compel God to do something—fasting changes us, teaching us that God will provide for all our needs. If you need to hear from God, consider joining your prayers with fasting as God’s people have done for millennia. Pick a specific duration for a fast schedule that is most healthy for you. For example, you could fast each Wednesday for a month or skip lunch for a week to pray. **What prayers do you need God to answer? How might fasting help you focus on your dependence on God and his guidance?**

Note: It is essential that you consider your personal medical situation before fasting. If you have a medical condition that might be affected by fasting, please consult your doctor or a medical professional before fasting.

3. Reading Plan

This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entire book of Nehemiah so you can dig deeper into God's Word. Here is the weekly breakdown for the ten weeks of the series:

- Week 1: Nehemiah 1-2:10
- Week 2: Nehemiah 2:11-3:32
- Week 3: Nehemiah 4
- Week 4: Nehemiah 5
- Week 5: Nehemiah 6
- Week 6: Nehemiah 7
- Week 7: Nehemiah 8
- Week 8: Nehemiah 9
- Week 9: Nehemiah 10-11
- Week 10: Nehemiah 12-13

This week, use this reading guide to break up Nehemiah 1:1-2:10, with some additional texts to provide context for Nehemiah's story. As you read this week, consider God's commitment to his people and how we can pray to him when we are troubled.

- Day 1: Judah Taken into Babylonian Captivity: 2 Kings 25:1-21
- Day 2: First Return to Jerusalem: Ezra 1:1-11
- Day 3: Second Return to Jerusalem: Ezra 7:1-10
- Day 4: Nehemiah's Prayer to God: Nehemiah 1:1-11
- Day 5: Nehemiah Talks to the King: Nehemiah 2:1-10

SESSION 2: NEHEMIAH 2:1-20

OPEN

Have you ever been dared to do something but didn't do it? What was the dare, and why didn't you go through with it?

There are several reasons we wouldn't go through with a dare, but the core reason is that we don't trust something or someone. Life presents us with opportunities to take risks, and if the risks outweigh our trust, we won't go through with them.

In session 2, Eric will share how Nehemiah responded to the risks he faced in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. We will observe how Nehemiah's trust in God's power prompted him to boldly move forward with the assignment God had given him.

READ

Read Nehemiah 2:1-20.

*Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Nehemiah 2:11-3:32 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

How does God's sovereignty play a role in Nehemiah's position?

How does Nehemiah respond to the opportunity given to him by God?

Watch Session 2: *Nehemiah 2:1-20* (11 minutes).

DISCUSS

Nehemiah 2 emphasizes God's sovereignty and how Nehemiah took the initiative to bring restoration to Jerusalem. We will walk through the chapter to observe how Nehemiah displayed his trust in God through his bold actions.

Eric shared that God's sovereignty is "God's control and rule over all creation." God holds authority over all our circumstances that he either allows or causes to happen. **Is it hard for you to grasp God's sovereignty? Why, or why not?**

What are some ways you notice God's sovereignty at work in your life?

Read Nehemiah 2:1-5.

*[Note: To learn more about waiting on God see **Go Deeper Section 1**.]*

Eric pointed out that God's sovereignty is on display because God put Nehemiah in a strategic position as cupbearer to the king. Nehemiah was uniquely positioned to help his people. **Has God ever placed you in a strategic position to help others? If so, what were the circumstances?**

No matter where God has placed us, we can sometimes fail to acknowledge his power even though we know he is sovereign. **While God is uniquely sovereign over everything, why do we sometimes fail to trust him to lead us?**

God is trustworthy, and we can follow him even when we're afraid, in pain, or worried about the future. While Nehemiah trembled at the thought of the king harming him or preventing him from the work he felt convicted to do, he still acted. **Have you ever had a moment when you pushed past your fear and acted? What motivated you to take initiative even though you were afraid?**

Nehemiah's trust in God's guidance and sovereign power propelled him to take bold steps to accomplish the mission God gave him. Like Nehemiah, our level of trust in God is often revealed through our obedient words, actions, and attitudes. **In what areas of your life might you need to trust in God's sovereignty?**

Read Nehemiah 2:6–10.

Even though God was sovereign over Nehemiah's situation, Nehemiah knew he would still face opposition and would need to gather supplies. So, he was proactive. In verses 7–8, he asked the king for letters to provide safe passage and resources to rebuild the wall. **What has it looked like for you to be proactive in your faith? In what ways did God's sovereignty play a role in how and why you acted?**

God reigns over our circumstances, but he doesn't make obstacles go away. Instead, he empowers us to face them. **How might your faith in God, who is sovereign, influence your mindset toward obstacles you face?**

Nehemiah not only had a clear direction from God, but he also had confidence that God was with him. Nehemiah says in verses 8 and 18 that "the hand of God was on [him]" to show that God guided him, even in the face of obstacles. **Have you ever felt God's guidance amid opposition? If so, what was that like?**

To summarize Nehemiah's interaction with the king, Eric said that Nehemiah's character, competence, commitment, and courage all helped him leverage his relationship with the king so he could build the wall. God put Nehemiah in a position to grow in each of those characteristics so that, at the right time, Nehemiah could get everything he needed to rebuild the wall. **Have you noticed God using something you learned—maybe while at a job, during a time of difficulty, or through a relationship—to prepare you for something else later? If so, what did you learn? How did God use what you learned?**

Out of the four characteristics that Eric mentioned (character, competence, commitment, and courage), which one do you think God is calling you to strengthen? Why?

*[Note: To learn more about God's favor on Nehemiah through the support of the king see **Go Deeper Section 2.**]*

Read Nehemiah 2:11-15.

Nehemiah took responsibility for rebuilding the wall by inspecting the damage, but he also acknowledged that God sovereignly prompted him to do it in verse 12. Nehemiah viewed the mission as a partnership with God. **What is helpful about seeing a God-ordained mission as a partnership with God rather than our singular responsibility? In what areas of your life could you remind yourself that you're partnered with God and not doing it all on your own?**

Read Nehemiah 2:16-19.

Nehemiah also took the initiative to restore the wall in verse 17 by gathering people to accomplish the mission. He knew the mission God called him to could not be accomplished by himself. The people responded favorably, and God strengthened their hands for the work. **What are the benefits of a group of people joining each other to work on a common mission together?**

How might you be able to contribute to a group of people in a restoration effort in your community, at work, or through your church?

While a group of Israelites came together for the restoration project, it all started with an individual's pain. God sovereignly used Nehemiah's grief over Jerusalem's destruction to propel him to restore it. We will all, like Nehemiah, experience suffering. When we do, we can choose to respond in faith. **When have you experienced suffering? What was your response to those difficult circumstances? How was your faith impacted?**

We see in Nehemiah's story that God is sovereign—he's always at work according to his plan. We can trust him, even in difficulty. **What does it look like for you to trust that God is sovereign when you suffer? In what ways might viewing our pain through the lens of God's sovereignty influence our response to suffering?**

What sorrow, grief, or trouble are you experiencing now? How could this group care for you?

This session showed us what a faithful response to God's sovereignty can look like. Nehemiah acted boldly, he trusted in God, and he knew God was with him. When we believe God is sovereign, we can respond as Nehemiah did. **What could it look like for you to respond to God's sovereignty this week? What bold step could God be calling you to take?**

LAST WORD

At times it may be difficult to trust that God is sovereign. But God is at work even in the midst of our pain and encourages us to bring restoration where others are experiencing brokenness. He is above all things and will strengthen our hands as we join others in the mission he has given us to work on. He can be trusted. He will never fail us, and his faithfulness enables us to be bold even when we experience fear in the face of challenges.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. Waiting on the Lord

We may assume that Nehemiah's interaction with the king would have immediately followed his prayer to God at the end of Nehemiah 1. However, the months of Chislev (Nehemiah 1:1) and Nisan (2:1) on the Babylonian calendar fell about four months apart from one another. Nehemiah prayed and agonized over Jerusalem's walls being torn down for quite a long time before he approached the king.

Have you ever waited and agonized over something for what seemed like forever? Describe your thoughts and emotions during that time.

King David can relate to the difficult season of waiting and gives us encouragement in the Psalms.

Read Psalm 27:1-14.

Biblical scholars believe David wrote this psalm when he was on the run from King Saul, who was jealous that David was popular with the people and had been anointed the true king of Israel. David was waiting on the Lord to move on the promises God gave to him to make him king.

Some of us may be waiting for something that God has not promised us. **Have you ever waited for something that God has not promised you? How do you know if you are waiting for the right thing?**

In verse 14, David encourages his listeners to "wait on the Lord." Although we may be in a difficult season, David beckons us to focus our attention on the Lord rather than anything else, including reprieve from our circumstances. **What benefits can we receive from waiting on the Lord?**

Waiting on the Lord requires discipline—we must diligently shift our focus back to God when our hearts become restless and impatient. **What could it look like for you to shift your focus back to God when you feel restless?**

2. Contentment

Nehemiah and Ezra took two different approaches to use the support of the king on their return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah asked for letters that would ensure him safe passage as well as materials to build the wall. The king granted these requests and even gave him a royal escort as a show of his approval of the mission (Nehemiah 2:9). In Nehemiah's eyes, this grand display of support showed God's glory.

Ezra, on the other hand, did not want to ask the king for protection because he thought it would have projected a lack of faith in God's ability and strength to protect them on their journey. Both instances displayed God's glory, showed that God is sufficient for meeting his people's needs, and proved God's people can find contentment in him alone. Contentment characterizes the people of God, even in the New Testament.

Read Philippians 4:12-13.

The apostle Paul shares that he has found the secret to being satisfied in life even though he has had either a little or a lot. Ultimately, his external circumstances did not dictate his level of contentment. **Have you struggled with contentment in your life? If so, how have you struggled?**

If we let them, our circumstances can guide us away from the Lord. **How could having "plenty" contribute to us straying from the Lord? How could having "little" contribute to taking our focus off Christ?**

Philippians 2:13 is a popular verse that can be taken out of context and used to champion our own self-sufficiency. However, verse 12 and the preceding verses tell us we are not self-sufficient. Only Christ's sufficiency can sustain us.

How do you think your attitudes and actions would be impacted by finding contentment in Christ?

This week, meditate on Philippians 2:12-13. Write it where you can see it every day—on your bathroom mirror, a notecard in your wallet, or a sticky note in your office. May Paul's secret to contentment no longer be a secret in your life.

3. Nehemiah 2:11-3:32 Reading Plan

This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entire book of Nehemiah so you can dig deeper into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Nehemiah 2:11-3:32. As you read this section, consider how God's sovereign plan for his people is for them to work together to accomplish the mission he has placed on their hearts.

Day 1: Nehemiah Inspects the Damage to the Wall (Nehemiah 2:11-15)

Day 2: Nehemiah Rallies the Workers (Nehemiah 2:16-20)

Day 3: The Sheep, Fish, and Jeshanah Gates Repaired (Nehemiah 3:1-12)

Day 4: The Valley, Dung, and Fountain Gates Repaired (Nehemiah 3:13-21)

Day 5: The Priests Repair Their Own Houses (Nehemiah 3:22-32)



SESSION 3: NEHEMIAH 3:1-32

OPEN

When have you noticed the energy at a large sporting event, concert, or worship service? What was the event, and how did it make you feel?

Large gatherings aren't for everyone, but there is something powerful about a mass of people engaging in the same activity while in close proximity to one another. In this session, Eric will share how the whole community of Israelites in Jerusalem came together in unity to rebuild the city walls. This monumental task required each person to participate in the construction project. We'll see how Nehemiah 3 displays the power of unity that God wants all his people to experience.

READ

Read Nehemiah 3:1-32.

*Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Nehemiah 4 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 2**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

Why is everyone's participation essential to our unity as God's people?

What does Scripture say about unity among God's people?

How does working together impact the sense of community among God's people?

Watch Session 3: *Nehemiah 3* (12 minutes).

DISCUSS

Nehemiah 3 shows us how much God's people can accomplish when they come together and work under a unified purpose. Each person had a valuable role and responsibility to repair the broken wall.

Read Nehemiah 3:1-5.

The chapter starts with the repair of the Sheep Gate in verse 1. By verse 32, the Israelites had worked their way counterclockwise around the city walls to end where they started—at the Sheep Gate. The author intentionally references the gate twice to show the extent of the damage. The destruction impacted the entire city. **What difference does it make to your reading of this chapter to know how extensive the rebuilding effort was?**

As Eric mentioned, the author repeats the word "repair" or "rebuilt" all throughout the passage to emphasize the unified effort to rebuild the wall. Israel had to work together. **What stands out to you about the unity of the Israelites in this chapter, and why?**

When have you seen people work in a unified way like Israel? How did their unity impact what they were working on?

Israel in this chapter gives us an example of what unity as God's people can look like. Eric pointed out that coming together as the church is a daunting task today not only because we represent Christ, who is perfect, but also because people have been drawn away from gathering for various reasons. **In what ways is it difficult for the church to be unified? What do you think could help us come together?**

A key element of unity is leadership. When people need to come together, the leaders set the tone. This passage gives us two contrasting examples of leadership: Eliashib in verse 1 and the nobles of Tekoa in verse 5. One promoted unity, the other division. **In what ways have you seen a leader impact the unity of a group or team?**

Eliashib was Israel's top leader as the high priest, yet his position did not prevent him from getting his hands dirty. He humbled himself and led by example. **What leadership characteristics do you admire the most from good leaders in your life? How can you implement what you have learned from them in your interactions with others?**

Eliashib showed his level of commitment to the people by helping with construction. But, according to verse 5, the nobles of Tekoa refused to help. We are not told why they would not help, but because they were affluent leaders, they might have thought the work was beneath them. Eric said, "Some people think they are too high and mighty for the work." Undoubtedly, a pompous attitude would have threatened unity among God's people. **How have you seen pride cause divisiveness in a group of people?**

What are some ways you can prevent pride within yourself from creating division?

With the threat of disunity looming among leaders in the community, the people came together and each played their part in the rebuilding project.

Read Nehemiah 3:7-9, 12, and 21.

There were many different types of people represented in the rebuilding of the wall. Here is a breakdown of some of the diversity represented in the project:

- People from different towns (v. 7)
- Various professions (v. 8)
- Government leaders (v. 9)
- Families (v. 12)
- Faith leaders (v. 21)

The workers' different backgrounds show us that everyone who helped had their own unique skills, but they were all unified in the same task of restoring the wall. **How would you describe the attitude of the people that helped repair the wall?**

This passage points to how some instances require us to step in and help whether or not the task is something we want to do or feel gifted to do. **Why do you think we sometimes avoid stepping in and helping where we see a need? What could it look like to meet needs even if we don't feel like it or don't feel gifted to help?**

*[Note: To learn more about the valuable role of women in the rebuilding effort, see **Go Deeper Section 1.**]*

Eric mentioned that there are some things we can't do as God's people unless everyone pitches in and helps. We need each other. **What are some areas where we need to lean on one another as God's people? What do we miss out on when we don't work together?**

We see in this passage that the whole group of Israelites was made up of individuals all playing their part. We're also individual members of a group—the church. We each have value to contribute to the Body of Christ. **Do you feel like you have a valuable role to play among God's people? Why, or why not?**

We might not have a reconstruction project to unify us, but Eric said we are “positionally unified” through Christ's work on the cross. We are one family. In what ways do you see the church today acting like a unified family? **In what ways does the church not act like a family?**

Eric shared that the mission to rebuild the wall provided an opportunity for the unity Israel shared internally as God's people to be experienced externally. **When have you felt most unified with other Christians? Why do you think you felt closer to them?**

Read Nehemiah 3:23 and 28–30.

The work of restoration was vast and required each person to fully participate, so the Israelites repaired the portions of the wall closest to their own homes. They each jumped in and met a need in close proximity to them. Much like the Israelites in this passage, sometimes achieving unity requires us to meet needs right in front of us. **What needs do you see in your church, community, or neighborhood that you could meet? How might your group seek to meet a need in your church or community?**

God calls his people to be unified. As we saw in this session, a great way to pursue unity is through serving alongside one another. **How might serving alongside one another unify your group? In what ways can you help promote unity in your community, church, or home this week?**

LAST WORD

Nehemiah 3 gives us a hopeful picture of what can happen when we come together. Our unity can sometimes be challenged by our pride, lack of willingness to serve, or by not knowing how we can contribute. But we know God has already unified us through Jesus, and he provides opportunities for us as the church to rally around meeting needs and serving together. We can experience unity as God's people—but we have to be willing to do our part.

This week, consider the unity—or lack of unity—in your small group or church. How could you help promote unity? How could you serve? Pray for unity and see what God has in store for you!

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. Influential Women

The book of Nehemiah places a heavy emphasis on men and how God has used them to bring restoration. However, there are instances when Nehemiah mentions women being in prominent positions to help influence the rebuilding of the wall. Read Nehemiah 3:12 and 2:6.

The queen of Persia was right by the king's side when he decided to let Nehemiah return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. In Nehemiah 3 we see the daughters of Shallum helping their father, the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repair the wall. These women remind us that God doesn't show favoritism—he works through all types of people to make an impact. **For what reasons is it important that we recognize the contributions of women to God's work in the world?**

Read Luke 8:1-3.

Jesus and his disciples also relied on women in influential positions to fund their ministry. God has sovereignly put women in positions of influence to help carry out his work of restoration in the world. **How has God used women in your life to influence you? In what ways can you welcome their continued influence?**

There was space for many different types of backgrounds and skill sets used in the rebuilding of the wall, including space for women. We also need to create space for women to use the gifts God has given them to help build up the church. **How can your church help women to use their gifts? If you are a woman, in what ways can you seek to use your gifts in the church?**

2. Nehemiah 4 Reading Plan

This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entire book of Nehemiah so you can dig deeper into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Nehemiah 4. As you read this section consider how God's work of restoration will always be met with resistance, but God will equip and strengthen his workers.

Day 1: Sanballat and Tobiah Mock the Builders (Nehemiah 4:1-3)

Day 2: The Builders Pray and Work (Nehemiah 4:4-6)

Day 3: Enemies Plot to Stop the Building (Nehemiah 4:7-10)

Day 4: Nehemiah Instructs and Encourages the Builders (Nehemiah 4:11-14)

Day 5: A Weapon in One Hand and a Tool in the Other (Nehemiah 4:15-23)



SESSION 4: NEHEMIAH 4:1-23

OPEN

What's something you've had to endure (like a complicated project at work, a long line at an amusement park, a family reunion, etc.)? What helped you keep going?

Whether we're at the back of a line or waiting for a promotion, we often aren't where we want to be. In those instances, we need endurance—a characteristic that's hard to come by in our fast-paced world. If we face opposition and resistance, we're encouraged by our culture to take the easier route. But God often calls us to keep going. So what does it look like to push through opposition as we seek to follow God wholeheartedly?

In Session 4, Eric will share how the Israelites were able to face persistent pressure from their enemies and make progress on restoring the wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah 4 gives us a glimpse into how we can endure the resistance we face as we follow God.

READ

Read Nehemiah 4:1-23.

*Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Nehemiah 5 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

Why do we face opposition?

Where does opposition to God's kingdom come from?

How do we endure the opposition we face?

Watch Session 4: *Nehemiah 4* (12 minutes).

DISCUSS

Nehemiah 4 provides us with raw imagery of the difficulty the Israelites faced in rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. Despite opposition, God's people endured with a shovel in one hand and a sword in the other.

Read Nehemiah 4:1-3.

As the Israelites began to make progress on the wall, Tobiah and Sanballat opposed them by mocking them in verses 1-3 and later plotting to fight against them in verses 7-8. We might not face the same kinds of adversaries as the Israelites, but we can experience opposition to following God in many ways, including opposition within ourselves or external forces. **In what ways have you faced opposition as you've followed God and his commands?**

Eric told us that we should expect opposition to God's kingdom, yet many of us are surprised by opposition. **Why do you think many of us are caught off-guard when we face opposition?**

*[Note: To learn more about how God's people can respond to persecution see **Go Deeper Section 1.**]*

On the surface, Sanballat and Tobiah's antagonism toward Israel seems simply personal. But Eric told us that much of the resistance God's people face originates from an unseen spiritual enemy, Satan. Even if we're opposed by people, we know there's often a spiritual foundation behind them. **In what ways is it difficult to grasp that surface-level issues often have a spiritual foundation to them? How might viewing your obstacles as spiritual change the way you respond to them?**

Eric said that we need "situational awareness" to notice spiritual opposition in our lives, especially when we are seeing growth in our faith. We need to observe what's going on in us and around us so we can be in tune with the spiritual reality behind our circumstances. **When have you noticed spiritual opposition in your life? What were the circumstances that helped you realize what was going on?**

Being aware of opposition is helpful, but we also need to know how to combat it. Our faith in God gives us hope to move forward in the face of opposition. Notice how Nehemiah expresses his faith in God.

Read Nehemiah 4:4-5.

Eric pointed out that the first thing Nehemiah did in the face of opposition was talk to God. Nehemiah shows us what it can look like to turn to God in difficult circumstances. **How do you typically respond to a difficult situation? What does it look like for you to go to God in prayer in tough circumstances?**

*[Note: To learn more about the heart behind imprecatory prayers and how it applies to us in light of the command to love our enemies see **Go Deeper Section 2.**]*

Even though they encountered opposition, the Israelites persevered in faith and made progress on the wall.

Read Nehemiah 4:6-9.

The essence of the chapter is found in verse 6: Despite opposition, the people persevered to rebuild the wall. Facing opposition is always difficult, but our faith in God propels us forward through it. **How has your faith in God helped you persevere through a tough situation?**

Despite their enemies' schemes, the Israelites' faith stood firm. Eric said that we can experience great growth in our faith during times of opposition. **In what ways have you seen your faith in God grow while facing something difficult?**

Our growing faith helps us face even greater opposition, which is what the Israelites faced in verses 7–8 as their enemies plotted to fight them. The Israelites responded by praying to God and stationing a guard. Their faith and actions went hand-in-hand. **How can our actions reflect our faith in God?**

The Israelites could have just prayed and not stationed a guard, which would have risked the progress they made. Instead, they thought practically and strategically and acted. **What does it look like to discern when we need to strategically act on our faith? How might God be prompting you to act strategically in your life?**

Read Nehemiah 4:10–14.

As the enemies of Israel threatened those rebuilding the wall, the Israelites became disheartened. Nehemiah told the people to not be afraid of their enemies because of the greatness of their God who was with them. Nehemiah called them to place their trust in God. **What makes God trustworthy? What does it look like to trust him, especially in difficult times?**

Read Nehemiah 4:15–23.

The Israelites worked on the restoration of the wall while arming themselves to defend their people if necessary. Their actions were practical, but they were motivated by their belief in God. **In what ways does your faith in God motivate you throughout each day? What do your actions at work, at home, and in your community reveal about your faith?**

Verse 16 tells us that half the people worked on the wall while the other half stood guard with weapons. By working together, they helped each other rebuild the wall and stay safe from their enemies. We can also help each other when we encounter opposition, whether it's spiritual, physical, or emotional. **In what ways do you value others' support when you are facing a challenging season? How might you support a fellow believer who's facing difficulty?**

In verses 19–20, Nehemiah shared that God would fight for Israel. The Israelites were reliant on God to defend them against their enemies—they had to trust him. When we face difficult situations, we too can trust that God defends us and fights for us. He's always with us, and he ensures we are spiritually safe with him. **How does knowing that God is with you affect the way you respond to opposition?**

This chapter reminds us that when opposition comes our way, we can exercise our faith in God by taking practical steps forward. Faith and action work hand-in-hand to help us endure difficulty. **In what ways are you experiencing opposition or difficulty right now? How might you trust God by taking action this week?**

LAST WORD

As God's people, we will face opposition. We might experience resistance on a surface level, but we know it originates in the spiritual realm as the enemy seeks to discourage progress of God's kingdom in and through our lives. In order to withstand attacks from the enemy, we must cling to a deeply rooted faith in God and move forward with practical action.

Remember, God actively fights for us. Therefore, we can move forward through opposition with hopefulness because our God is with us. This week, consider how you can endure opposition by expressing your faith through prayer and practical action.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. Persecution by Enemies

From the opposition we see in Nehemiah to the persecution of the early church, God's people have a long history of being oppressed for their faith. Some of us have faced and will face persecution for believing in Jesus, and Scripture gives us clear guidance on how we can joyfully endure persecution.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-14.

Peter reminds his audience they should expect to face ill-treatment from others because of their faith in Jesus. Some early Christians lost their lives or experienced economic loss, and many were rejected by friends and family. **Have you ever experienced persecution? If so, how?**

How can you prepare yourself to be persecuted for being a Christian? What fears do you have about potentially being persecuted?

Peter encourages his listeners to rejoice in suffering, because their suffering will produce deeper fellowship with Jesus. **What do you think rejoicing in persecution could look like for you?**

Peter points his listeners to a future hope of glory that far exceeds the pain and suffering we face today. Our eternal hope should shape the way we respond to suffering and the way we conduct ourselves. **How might your eternal hope in Christ affect how you go about your week? What could it look like to regularly remind yourself of your eternal hope?**

2. Imprecatory Prayers and Vengeance

Nehemiah's initial response to his enemies' mockery was to turn to God and pray for justice. The prayer found in Nehemiah 4:4-5 is known as an imprecatory prayer, which God's people used to express anger toward someone and ask God to bring justice—even if justice included harm to their enemies (see Jeremiah 18:19-23; Psalm 35; Psalm 58). We all have felt a deep anger toward someone or something. **Have you ever felt like praying for someone else to be harmed? If so, why did you want to pray for them to be harmed?**

It's normal to want those enacting injustice to receive judgment. But instead of allowing those desires to fester, God wants his people to come to him about injustices because he cares for them and can bring justice. **In what ways have you cried out to God to ask him to make things right?**

Today, Christians debate how asking for others to be harmed fits with Jesus's call to love and pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Regardless of which side we take, imprecatory prayers can teach us about God's justice and our desire for revenge. The Apostle Paul also wrote about justice and vengeance to the Roman church, which was facing persecution.

Read Romans 12:19-21.

In verse 19, Paul reminds the church in Rome that justice or vengeance is ultimately God's responsibility to carry out. Paul, in keeping with the imprecatory prayers we see in the Old Testament, encourages Christians to ask to God to bring justice instead of taking matters into their own hands. **How do we, as individual Christians, lack the ability to carry out the justice God desires? What makes God especially able to bring about justice?**

We can trust God in all circumstances, especially when we have been hurt. **How might seeking revenge against someone who has harmed us show a lack of faith in God?**

In verses 20-21, Paul tells the church what a trusting response to God looks like when we are hurt. We are called to overcome evil with good and to actively show kindness and love to those who wish to harm us. **Is there someone God is calling you to love? How can you show that person kindness this week?**

3. Nehemiah 5 Reading Plan

This week, use this reading guide to study Nehemiah 5. As you read this section, consider how God cares deeply about how his people treat one another.

Day 1: Outcry against Slavery among the Jews (Nehemiah 5:1-5)

Day 2: Nehemiah Calls for Justice (Nehemiah 5:6-11)

Day 3: The People Respond (Nehemiah 5:12-13)

Day 4: Nehemiah's Predecessors Burdened the People (Nehemiah 5:14-16)

Day 5: Nehemiah's Table (Nehemiah 5:17-19)



SESSION 5: NEHEMIAH 5:1-19

OPEN

If you had a superpower that was solely intended to help others, what would it be and who would you help?

In stories, heroes use their superpowers to help others and influence the world around them. In fact, any kind of power can either help or hurt people. Even though we don't have super strength or invisibility, we have all been given power to exercise influence at work, at home, or with our family and friends.

In Nehemiah 5, we encounter a situation in the Israelite community where those in power were hurting their fellow Israelites. Nehemiah responded to the injustice by bravely confronting the leaders and being an example of selfless leadership.

READ

Read Nehemiah 5:1-19.

*Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Nehemiah 6 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What injustices did Israel face, and how did Nehemiah bring about justice?

What kinds of injustices do we see in our culture today?

How should the church respond to injustice?

Watch Session 5: *Nehemiah 5* (13 minutes).

DISCUSS

Nehemiah 5 shows us how power and influence can either make or break a community of people. On one hand, we see some in power exploiting the weaknesses of the people under them for their own personal gain. Yet, Nehemiah was a leader who set aside his power to bring justice to those around him.

Read Nehemiah 5:1-5.

Many of the Israelites at the time of Nehemiah worked in agriculture. But since their attention was on building the wall, they could not generate income for themselves. Some of their fellow Jews who were more financially stable exploited those with financial weaknesses for personal gain. Eric said the people in power were utilizing their privilege to oppress people. **Why do you think some people view their power or privilege as an opportunity for personal gain rather than for someone else's gain?**

The Jews were being taken advantage of by their own people. God's people are supposed to care for each other, and God hates when anyone is mistreated. Injustice shouldn't characterize the people of God, but, unfortunately, it often does. **In what ways do people take advantage of or behave unjustly toward others today? How has the church been involved in injustice?**

Eric connected justice with God's character and our role as his image bearers. To be God's people is to be those who both desire and bring about justice. **What does it mean to you that God is just? How can we imitate his justice as his people?**

In verse 5, the people said they were powerless because what they owned had been taken away from them. **Who do you think may feel powerless in our community? Why do you think they feel powerless?**

Read Nehemiah 5:6-10.

Verse 6 tells us that Nehemiah became inflamed with anger because his own people were being oppressed. His righteous anger moved him to provide relief for the people. **Have you ever felt righteous anger over an injustice? If so, what did your anger drive you to do?**

Fueled by his righteous anger, Nehemiah boldly confronted the officials and nobles for exploiting the Israelites. Eric shared that, as Nehemiah was for Israel, the church needs to be a prophetic voice for justice issues in our world, not a "pathetic" one. **In what ways have you seen the church stand up for those who are oppressed? How can the church continue to speak up against oppression in our culture?**

*[Note: To learn more about why Nehemiah was so strongly against charging interest see **Go Deeper Section 1.**]*

Read Nehemiah 5:11-13.

Nehemiah told those in power to give back the land and all the money and resources they took from their fellow Jews. The people in power agreed, swore a public oath, and verse 13 tells us that they did as they promised. While their repentance was costly, they followed through on their word and the oppression was brought to an end. Their response shows us that for justice to be accomplished, words and actions must be in alignment. **Why do you think our actions sometimes don't match our words in seeking out justice? In what ways can we seek out justice with our words and actions?**

Read Nehemiah 5:14-19.

In verse 14, we see that Nehemiah was given power by the king of Persia to govern the Israelites. Ultimately, we know that God is the one who gives us authority and responsibility, and while we may not be a government official, we all have a sphere of influence we are responsible for. Our sphere of influence may be at home, at work, in a faith community, or with the family and friends God has entrusted to us. **What's your sphere of influence? How might viewing your sphere of influence as entrusted to you by God affect the way you operate in it?**

*[Note: To learn more about Nehemiah's function as governor and the higher calling placed on his life see **Go Deeper Section 2.**]*

In verse 15, we see Nehemiah's reasoning for not taking what was entitled to him: he feared God. Nehemiah's respect for God led him to honor others. **How might our perception of God affect the way we treat others?**

Eric shared that the fundamental reason for the injustices in our world is that we do not view everyone as created in God's image. Each person, no matter their skin color, gender, age, economic background, or any other distinction, is made by God, reflects him, and is valued by him. Therefore, every person deserves to be treated with dignity. **In what ways do you treat others differently because you view them as created in God's image?**

What might change in our community if everyone treated each other with dignity as God's image-bearers?

Former governors, who had similar motives to the nobles and officials, also oppressed the people. When leaders misuse their power, whether they are aware of it or not, the people they lead suffer. **Have you experienced a heavy burden that a leader has placed on you? If so, what kinds of emotions did you experience?**

How does knowing how your actions impact others challenge you to steward the influence God has given you?

Because Nehemiah feared God and saw his fellow Jews as equals, he did not take the resources he had a rightful claim to as the governors did before him. Instead, he brought relief to the people by denying his own rights as governor. Eric told us that in order to gain the trust of people who have been oppressed, we must be willing to make sacrifices for them. **How might making sacrifices for others who have suffered help build their trust? What kinds of sacrifices might need to be made to help those who are oppressed in our world?**

Each culture has an underlying system of values that are expressed in rights for people. Sometimes the rights our culture prizes are in line with God's Word, but sometimes they are not. **What are some rights your culture holds tightly to? In what ways might an overemphasis on our rights prevent us from acting justly toward others?**

Nehemiah's actions encourage us to lay down our rights and make sacrifices so we can help bring justice to others. We can make sacrifices like using our free time to serve the underprivileged, giving financially to a cause fighting injustice, or getting out of our comfort zone to get to know someone different than ourselves. When we put ourselves in a posture of learning and giving, we can help others thrive. **What sacrifice can you make that could help someone around you thrive?**

Eric shared that, as God's people, we are to represent him by being a beacon of light to the world. We can show God's heart for people by caring for those who are hopeless and advocating for justice. **What could it look like for you to be a light to those around you this week?**

LAST WORD

Every person has been created in the image of God, and we honor him when we treat others with dignity, especially when they are oppressed. Regardless of the culture we live in, there will always be oppressed people around us—perhaps we have experienced oppression ourselves.

God has equipped us to be a blessing to others and boldly address the injustices around us by exchanging entitlement for service. Our sacrifices will help bring freedom to those under oppression. As we seek justice inside and outside the body of Christ, we bring light to darkness and reveal God's heart to the world.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. Charging Interest

One way some of the more affluent Jews were exploiting their fellow Israelites was by charging them interest on loans, which was forbidden according to the Law of Moses.

Read Nehemiah 5:7.

In Nehemiah's day, charging someone interest on a loan was a prevalent financial practice. However, many times the loan was given to someone who was in a desperate financial situation and the interest rates were often extremely high—some scholars believe the rates were 40–50 percent of the cost of the loan. The practice of charging exorbitant interest rates would bury people financially. God did not want division or oppression for his people, so he set parameters around lending practices in the Law.

Read Leviticus 25:35–38.

In verse 35, God commanded Israel to support their fellow Israelites if they fell on hard economic times, which included lending them money. By giving this command, God reveals his heart for those in need—he cares for them and invites his people to care for them too. **What does it look like for you to support those in your community who are in need?**

Verse 36 says not to charge interest to other Israelites, which would exploit their weakness. God desires justice, especially for those who are needy. He wants us to treat people justly and avoid anything that would exploit vulnerable people. **What are some examples of exploitation today? What can we do to avoid exploitative practices?**

This passage says that the antidote to exploitation is fearing God. Having a healthy respect for God compels us to treat other people with dignity. **To what extent do you fear God? How could your respect for God lead you to bless others this week?**

2. Nehemiah's Higher Calling

Nehemiah was in a very powerful position as governor of a province in Persia. Despite his worldly power, he never lost track of his highest calling to worship God through his actions toward others.

Read Nehemiah 5:14-18.

Nehemiah was appointed to be governor of Israel by Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, which meant that Israel was being ruled by a foreign country. Regardless, Nehemiah faithfully fulfilled his duties as governor by taking on a rebuilding project, helping returning Jews get resettled in the land, and being a host to Persian officials visiting from other parts of the empire. Nehemiah was committed to his work but never lost sight of following God while carrying out his duties. **What has it looked like for you to follow God where he's placed you? What's been difficult about remaining faithful to him?**

Nehemiah honored the authority of the Persian empire but carried out his duties in such a way that brought glory to God. His example teaches us, as Christians, how to live peacefully in our world without abandoning our identity as people who belong to God. **To what extent would you say you live peacefully in your neighborhood, work, and home? Would you say the way you act in those spaces glorifies God? Why, or why not?**

Read Nehemiah 8:9.

The verse says Nehemiah was a political leader (governor), yet was exercising spiritual leadership over the people. Nehemiah leveraged his role to point others to a deeper faith in God. **How do you think God could use you to point others to him in your workplace or home?**

Just as Nehemiah did, we bring honor to God as we perform our duties honorably and point others to him for hope. Even though our commitment to our daily tasks is important, God calls us not to lose our sense of belonging to him. **In what ways can you acknowledge your identity by honoring God this week?**

3. Nehemiah 6 Reading Plan

This week, use this reading guide to study Nehemiah 6. As you read this section, consider how Nehemiah navigated discouragement and intimidation to pursue God's mission to rebuild the wall.

Day 1: Enemies Plot to Harm Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:1-4)

Day 2: Sanballat Spreads Dangerous Rumors about Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:5-9)

Day 3: Shemaiah Prophecies to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:10)

Day 4: Tobiah and Sanballat's Scheme Is Uncovered (Nehemiah 6:11-14)

Day 5: The Wall Is Completed and Intimidation Continues (Nehemiah 6:15-19)



SESSION 6: NEHEMIAH 6:1-19

OPEN

What's one thing you can always be distracted by? Why do you think it distracts you?

Whether we like to admit it or not, we all can be distracted at times. Distractions can be self-imposed, or they can come from something as simple as a text, a viral video, or a chatty friend. Though often harmless, serious distractions can prevent us from doing what we are called to do.

In chapter 6 of Nehemiah's story, Nehemiah's enemies try to distract him from his God-given task to rebuild the wall. We will see how Nehemiah was able to push past opposition to restore the wall for God's people.

READ

Read Nehemiah 6:1-19.

*Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Nehemiah 7 so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

How does the enemy use emotions to distract us?

What role does truth play in navigating our emotions?

How should we approach the enemy's distractions in our lives?

Watch Session 6: Nehemiah 6 (13 minutes).

DISCUSS

By this point in the story, the wall has nearly been completed. Israel's enemies have grown increasingly concerned that the Israelites will establish a stronghold in the area, so they've hatched a plan to distract them.

Read Nehemiah 6:1-4.

Sanballat and Geshem saw that the wall was nearly finished and tried to distract Nehemiah from his work by calling for a meeting with him outside the city. **How did Nehemiah respond to them in verses 3-4? What do these verses reveal about Nehemiah's focus?**

In verse 2, Nehemiah recognized that his enemies were trying to harm him to take him away from his God-given work. As Eric mentioned, we must identify and remove the distractions that can take us away from the work God wants to do in and through us. **What distractions in your life can pull you away from God? What do you think would happen if those distractions were removed?**

Nehemiah recognized what his enemies were trying to do and, as we see in verse 3, chose to prioritize the work on the wall instead of letting his enemies distract him. While we aren't rebuilding a wall like Nehemiah was, we all have God-given work—to become like him in our attitudes and actions, to obey him in every area of our lives, and to glorify him in our vocations. **How would you describe the work God has given you to do, both spiritually and vocationally?**

Why do you think we sometimes don't prioritize God's work in our lives? What does it look like for you to prioritize God's work in and through your life above any distractions?

Read Nehemiah 6:5–9.

Sanballat spread false rumors about Nehemiah, saying Nehemiah wanted to establish himself as the king in Israel. This rumor could have been detrimental to making progress on the wall. Nehemiah gave his response to the rumors in verses 8–9. **How did Nehemiah respond to the rumors? What did he ask God to do? What stands out to you about Nehemiah's response, and why?**

Rumors and lies can damage us emotionally and distract us from what God wants to accomplish in us. Eric reminded us that we need to speak truth to our emotions because while they may be real, they don't always point to the truth. **What makes emotions sometimes an unreliable source of truth?**

When have you noticed your emotions directing you away from the truth? How did you respond?

In verse 8, Nehemiah said the rumor was false. Though the rumor could have threatened his life, he focused on the truth instead of allowing his emotions to inform his response. **How might you allow truth to dictate your response in highly emotional situations?**

In verse 9, Nehemiah recognized that the enemy's ploys were meant to intimidate him. The Hebrew word for "intimidate" is littered throughout the passage in verses 9, 13, 14, and 19 and reveals that intimidation was the enemy's strategy to stop work on the wall. **In what ways can intimidation be an effective distraction from God's work?**

*[Note: To learn more about radical obedience amid opposition, see **Go Deeper Section 1.**]*

Instead of giving in to the enemy's intimidation, Nehemiah prayed and asked God to strengthen him. Nehemiah consistently went before the Lord when he faced opposition to his work. God wants us to go to him, especially when we experience strong emotions. **When have you turned to God in prayer in a difficult situation? What did you pray? How did praying about your problem affect you?**

In verse 9 and later in 14, Nehemiah prayed when he was threatened by his enemies. Eric said, "prayer is not the dictation of our will to God, but our alignment with his will." Prayer helps us align ourselves with God instead of focusing on our emotions. **In what ways has prayer helped you shift your focus from your emotions to what God desires for you?**

Read Nehemiah 6:10–14.

As a prophet, Shemaiah should have been a good source of truth, but Tobiah and Sanballat paid him to deceive Nehemiah. Shemaiah's deception can remind us that we need to filter what we hear from people, media outlets, or the internet—even those we trust—through the truth of God's Word. **In what ways can you use Scripture to help you discern the truth?**

According to God's Law, only priests were allowed to enter the innermost parts of the temple where God's holy presence dwelled. If Nehemiah went in, he could have sinned by desecrating the temple or even died from being in God's holy presence. Since Nehemiah knew the Law, he was not deceived by Shemaiah's deceptive warning. When we know the truth in God's Word, as Nehemiah did, we won't be easily deceived. **How well would you say you know the Bible? What could it look like to grow in your understanding of God's Word?**

*[Note: To learn more about showing reverence to God in the temple, see **Go Deeper Section 2.**]*

Read Nehemiah 6:15–19.

Despite the extent of the damage and opposition, the work on the wall was completed in fifty-two days, showing God's sovereign and capable hand over the reconstruction. Nehemiah's enemies were trying to intimidate him, but in the end the miraculous completion of the wall intimidated them. The completion of the wall shows us what God can do through people who refuse to allow distractions and opposition to get in the way of his work. **What do you think God wants to accomplish through your faith community? What distractions or opposition do you face? What would it take for you to persevere?**

No matter where we are on our journey with God, we will encounter opposition to God's work in and through us. To persevere through distractions as his followers, we can choose to focus on truth through prayer and engaging God's Word. **What could it look like to persevere this week by utilizing prayer and God's Word to focus on God?**

LAST WORD

As we pursue the Lord's work in and through our lives, we will undoubtedly encounter opposition. We may not face the same distractions Nehemiah had in rebuilding the wall, but we will face them in various forms. The enemy may try to discourage us through fear, lead us astray with ill-advised guidance, or distract us with our own ambitions. However, we can remain faithful to God by following Nehemiah's example of focusing on truth through prayer and engaging God's Word. As we follow the Lord, he will be faithful to carry out his work that will amaze us and the world around us.

When distractions come your way, stay focused on God's truth, and God will fulfill his work in and through you.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. Radical Obedience

As the wall was completed, Nehemiah still faced persistent opposition from among his own people. Between the external enemies plotting against Israel and the internal enemies secretly undermining the work, Nehemiah and the faithful workers faced opposition from all angles.

Have you ever felt like you were opposed on all sides? If so, how did you respond?

When we feel like everyone and everything around us is opposing what God wants us to do, we must hold firm to a radical obedience to him. Examples of radical obedience are throughout Scripture, including Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Babylon.

Read Daniel 3:16–18.

When Israel went into Babylonian captivity, they were surrounded by pagan worship. The king of Babylon forced everyone to worship a golden idol or else they would be thrown into a blazing furnace. Out of obedience to God, the three Jewish men did not bow down, and they did not need to defend themselves because they knew God would take care of them. They understood that God calls us to place our trust in him at all times, especially when we are facing difficult circumstances. **In what ways can you trust God's provision for you when facing opposition?**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego believed God could rescue them from the flames of the furnace. God can save and rescue us even from the most extreme circumstances, but sometimes we may struggle to believe it. **To what extent do you believe God is able to protect you as you walk in obedience to him? In what ways can your trust in him grow?**

Even though the three men believed God would rescue them, they told the king they would still not bow down to the idol if God didn't deliver them. These three men are a profound example of radical trust and obedience to God in the face of extreme opposition. No matter where you are on your faith journey, you can always grow in your faithful obedience. **What step of obedience can you take this week as you continue to grow in your trust in God?**

2. Showing Reverence to the Lord

Nehemiah's enemies opposed him by telling him a false prophecy. Although their argument might have been compelling, Nehemiah didn't buy it.

Read Nehemiah 6:10–12.

Nehemiah knew that according to God’s Law (Numbers 18:6–7; 2 Chronicles 23:6), he could not enter the temple’s Holy Place where the altar was because he was not a purified priest. Nehemiah took a risk by not following a prophet’s warning, but he showed that he revered God more than he feared a threat to his life. **To what extent do you feel like you show God reverence in your life?**

While Nehemiah showed reverence to the Lord and his temple, King Uzziah did not. His story shows us what happens when people don’t honor God.

Read 2 Chronicles 26:16–21.

King Uzziah was the only non-priest to enter the temple without divine authorization in Scripture, and it cost him his kingship and ultimately his life. He entered the temple to burn incense in the Holy Place because of his pride. **How can pride get in the way of our reverence for God?**

In verse 18, the priests took a stand against Uzziah. But Uzziah was not receptive to their rebuke and became enraged. His arrogance overpowered him to the point where even God’s priests couldn’t get through to him. Much like Uzziah, arrogance will prevent us from honoring God—and if we let arrogance run rampant in our lives, we will lash out at other people too. **When have you noticed arrogance affecting your relationship with God? What were you doing or thinking that was arrogant? How did your thoughts and actions impact other people?**

God struck Uzziah with a skin disease that required him to be secluded from everyone else. He lived the rest of his life excluded and afflicted because he brashly entered the temple against God’s commands. As we see with Uzziah, reverence for God and his laws is important, but this passage also points to a deeper issue—the condition of our hearts. If we want to properly revere God, we need to be humble. **What does it look like to come to God with humility? What can prevent us from being humble before God?**

The temple was where God lived among his people in ancient Israel. As followers of Christ today, we now have the power of God’s holy presence in our lives and have access to him because of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross. Even though the location of God’s presence has changed, we should still approach him with reverence and humility. **In what ways can you approach God reverently this week?**

3. Nehemiah 7 Reading Plan

This week, use this reading guide to break up Nehemiah 7. As you read this section, consider that each person and family listed is seen and used by God in his redemptive plan to bring restoration to the world.

Day 1: Nehemiah Delegates and Finds the Genealogical Record (Nehemiah 7:1–5)

Day 2: Record of the Number of Israelite Men who Returned from Exile (Nehemiah 7:6–38)

Day 3: Record of the Priests and Temple Servants who Returned (Nehemiah 7:39–56)

Day 4: Record of Solomon’s Servants who Returned and Genealogical Disqualifications (Nehemiah 7:57–65)

Day 5: Summary of the Assembly and their Contributions (Nehemiah 7:66–73)



SESSION 7: NEHEMIAH 7:1-8:18

OPEN

Describe a time you experienced joy when you were surrounded by other people (maybe at a family gathering, a church service, or an event). What made it joyful?

We can experience joy alone but being with others causes our happiness to multiply. Parties become more vibrant, mutual experiences more memorable, and worship more powerful. God has called us into community so that, as we gather, we can experience the joy of knowing him.

In Nehemiah 7–8, we will see God’s people gather to hear from God through Scripture. After they hear the Scriptures read aloud—some of them for the first time—they collectively celebrate, rejoicing in learning more about God and his ways. We can experience that same joy today when we give our attention to God’s Word.

READ

Read Nehemiah 7:73–8:18.

*Note: We have made a daily reading guide for Nehemiah 8 so that you can re-read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 4**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What is the one essential tool we need in our churches?

How should we respond to the reading of God’s Word?

What can we learn about reverence for the Bible from the people in Nehemiah 8?

Show Session 7: *Nehemiah 7–8* (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

By the end of Nehemiah 7, the wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and the people were settling in their homes. For the first time in a long time, there was peace in God’s city. But, as Dr. Mason said, the wall was just a tool—the people needed something more, something greater, to establish their relationship with God. Read Nehemiah 7:73–8:3.

Eric said the completed wall provided God’s people an opportunity to live in peace and be a light to surrounding nations. But the wall was not their source of peace and light—only God could truly protect and provide for them. **What tools or blessings are we tempted to trust for peace and provision instead of God?**

When our lives are going well, we may not feel like we need God—at least not as strongly as we do in times of suffering. But despite how we feel, we always need God. **What could we do to remind ourselves of our constant need for God’s guidance, provision, and protection?**

In verse 1, the people ask Ezra to bring the Word of God to them. Eric emphasized the crowd’s desire to hear the Torah spoken over them. **In what ways do you think our churches would be different today if the people longed to hear God’s Word? In what ways is your life different when you desire to hear God’s Word?**

*[Note: To learn more about the importance of congregational worship, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.]*

Ezra spent the entire morning, from sunrise to noon, reading the books of the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy) out loud. As he read, the people attentively listened so that they could learn about God and his requirements for them. Read Nehemiah 8:2–8.

The crowd stood, attentively listening to Ezra for hours. It can be incredible to imagine that many people quietly listening to the Bible, especially with our shortened attention spans and busy lives. For some of us, it can be difficult to listen to a full sermon without feeling a desire to look at our phones. Even so, it is worthwhile to discipline ourselves to pay attention to the public reading and teaching of the Bible. **What could you do to minimize distractions so that you might be more attentive to what God wants to teach you in his Word?**

As Eric said, it is not enough to just read God’s Word. We must respond to it. Read Nehemiah 8:9–12.

Eric shared, “Worship isn’t just when you lift your hands in worship. It’s also your disposition.” We are called to honor God through our attitudes and actions while participating in worship services. It is possible to sing worship songs or even feel encouraged by a Sunday service without a posture of reverence toward God. **What do you hope to get out of worship services? What attitude, engagement, and posture do you try to give to God during worship?**

*[Note: To learn more about the posture of worship, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this guide.]*

When the people heard the Law, they were overwhelmed with sorrow. The Law describes sin in detail and God’s requirements for his people. Those who were listening to Ezra, who understood all that was being read to them, clearly saw their sin and failure to live up to God’s standard. Like the Israelites, we grieve when we recognize our sin. **In what ways was the sorrow of the Israelites the correct response to their sin? What should our response be toward our sin when we recognize it?**

Ezra and the Levites instructed the people to not grieve because “the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Their conviction under the Law was meant to drive them to God. As with Israel, we also do not have the strength to save ourselves—our sin is proof of that. But we do know the one who can and has saved us. Conviction should always push us toward our loving God. **How do you typically respond to conviction? Why do you respond that way?**

The joy of God welcoming his people despite their sinfulness led the people of Jerusalem to break out in celebration. God has also made a way for us to be his people. Because of what Jesus has done, we can be forgiven and welcomed into a relationship with God. That is good news worth celebrating. **Is celebration a part of your regular worship? What would it look like for you and your community to celebrate the salvation we have in Jesus together?**

After the public reading of the Word, the people committed themselves to understanding and obeying the Law. Read Nehemiah 8:13–18.

When the family leaders investigated the Law, they discovered a festival the Law commanded them to celebrate called Succoth or the Festival of Booths. When we think of God’s Law, we tend to think of a list of boring rules to follow. But God’s Law leads us into full, abundant life, which includes feasts and celebrations. **When you think of God’s Laws and commands, what do you think of? In what ways does the Law’s inclusion of festivals change the way you think about obedience to God?**

*[Note: To learn more about the Festival of Booths, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.]*

What would it look like for you to commit to knowing the fullness of God’s Word so you might obey it?

In verse 17, we see that obedience brought Israel tremendous joy. We don’t always connect obedience with joy, but God will give us joy when we follow him. He is our good Father.

When has obedience given you joy?

The joy Israel experienced began when they gathered to hear the Scriptures. Like Israel, the joy of our relationship with God starts with our desire to hear from him. His Word teaches us who he is and the right way to live, and it leads us into joy. **When do you read the Bible? When do you read it with others?**

What would it look like for you and your community to give more attention to reading, understanding, and obeying the Bible together?

LAST WORD

Following God is not about living a boring, sad life. When we investigate God's Word, we find the path to tremendous joy. And when we obey God's Word, we find a life of communal celebration and peace.

It will take focus and discipline for us to commit ourselves to the Scriptures. But every ounce of effort we give to knowing and obeying God will be worth the joy of knowing him.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. The Importance of Congregational Worship

There is a common sentiment today that Sunday worship is an optional, but unnecessary event. Some people would argue that their group of friends is their church or that congregational worship is unnecessary to faithfully follow Jesus. But, as we see in Nehemiah 8, congregational worship is an essential part of our spiritual life. **What's your attitude toward congregational worship? Why?**

When the people of God were in slavery in Egypt, God rescued them so that they could be a community that worshipped him and reflected his goodness to the world. Read Exodus 3:12, 18; 19:3–6; 29:44–46. **What did God require of his rescued people? What did he want them to be and do?**

Like Israel, the church is called a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9). And God dwells with us just as he dwelt with Israel (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). As Israel was, we are called to regularly worship him with his people. **Write down what you learn about corporate worship from the following verses:**

John 4:24, Acts 2:42, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, Ephesians 5:18–19, Colossians 3:16, 1 Timothy 4:13, Hebrews 10:24–25

According to these passages, what are the blessings of being a part of God's community? Why can't we detach ourselves from one another?

You are a necessary part of the church. The church needs you just as much as you need the church. Isolation from the full body of Christ deprives God's people of your gifts and deprives you of the blessing of being a part of God's people. We need to hear his Word together. We need to worship together. And, importantly, we need to reflect his goodness to the world together. **Consider your pattern of worship—in what ways could a commitment to God's people help you know and serve him better?**

2. The Grace of Conviction

Conviction is an uncomfortable and often unwanted feeling. We don't like knowing we have failed or let someone down, especially God. So, for many of us, we avoid sermons that call us out, people that point out where we can grow, and Scriptures that highlight our pet sins. **Do you think of conviction as a good or bad thing? Why?**

Even though conviction is uncomfortable, it comes from our loving, present God. Read John 16:7–8. **What do you think it means for the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin?**

Conviction reveals our guilt of sin. But it does not end with guilt. As we saw in Nehemiah 8, conviction should move us toward union with God. If we respond to conviction with guilt or shame, we might miss the goodness of the gospel: that God has made a way for us to be fully forgiven and set free from the penalty of sin. Conviction is the first step in finding redemption. Read Ephesians 2:4–10. **How has God responded to our sinful state? How should we respond to him?**

As Christians, conviction is an ongoing gift that pushes us to become more like Jesus (Philippians 1:6). Every sin is an opportunity for repentance, to grow closer to God, and align our behavior more closely to his. **In what ways is God convicting you today? What would it look like to respond to that conviction with joy and a desire to be more like Jesus?**

3. The Feast of Booths

The Israelites had not celebrated the Festival of Booths since roughly a thousand years before the events of Nehemiah. What is this festival, and how was it supposed to be celebrated?

Read Leviticus 23:39–43.

The Festival of Booths was a celebration meant to remind Israel of their days wandering in the wilderness during the Exodus. God wanted his people to reflect on his past provision so that they could celebrate his faithfulness and ongoing provision. **In what ways has God protected and provided for you? How could reminding yourself about his past provision help you respond to your current circumstances?**

During the festival, all of God's people would build temporary shelters adorned with fruit branches. The flowering branches and fruit reminded worshippers of the blessings God faithfully gives his people, even in the wilderness. **What blessings currently adorn your life? What do you have to be thankful for?**

The celebration was also marked with sacrifices. As the people lived in temporary shelters, they were commanded to make burnt, grain, and drink offerings alongside sacrifices. The gifts God had given his people—their food, wine, and livestock—were all offered back to God. While we don't make ritual offerings to God today, everything God has given should be offered back to him. Our careers, income, gifts, resources, and relationships should all be offered to God for his use and glory. **What do you think it looks like to offer your career to God, to serve him with your work? Your time? Energy? Finances?**

SESSION 8: NEHEMIAH 9:1-38

OPEN

Share about a time when you fixed something that was broken. What effort or resources did you have to spend to fix the damage?

When something is broken, we often think of replacing it. Rolling up our sleeves to repair something takes time, energy, and often money. But the effort of repairing our belongings or something in our community can be deeply satisfying.

Before Jesus, our lives were broken, but God did not discard us. He is in the process of refining us by calling us to habits of confession and repentance. But repairing the damage of our sin is not an easy task. In this session, Eric will teach us about the practices of confession and repentance. Repairing the damage of sin is not easy, but it is eternally significant.

READ

Read Nehemiah 9:1-38. If you are running short on time, you can restrict your reading to verses 1-6 and 32-37.

*Note: We will not have time to walk through every verse of Nehemiah 9 as a small group. We have made a daily reading guide so that you can read this whole chapter throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this guide in **Go Deeper Section 3**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What does repentance look like?

How does redemptive history inform our relationship with God and others?

Why do we need to communally repent?

Show Session 8: *Nehemiah 9* (14 minutes).

DISCUSS

When the Israelites heard the Word of God in Nehemiah 8, they responded with remorse because they realized they were not following God's commands. But the Levites told them not to mourn when they celebrated the Feast of Booths. Now that the festival had ended, the Israelites had to confront their sin, which caused them both sorrow and repentance.

Read Nehemiah 9:1-3.

For Israel to move forward in their relationship with God, they had to deal with their past. To mourn their sin, the Israelites covered their heads in dust, wore sackcloth, and fasted. Even though we have full forgiveness in Christ, like Israel, we should mourn our sin and the effect it has had on our lives and the lives of those around us. **What makes grief the correct response to sin? What do you think it looks like to mourn sin today?**

Eric defined lament as acknowledging what has happened to and through you. But lament is not a simple task to be checked off our to-do list. It takes time to grieve the effects of sin. **Why do you think we tend to rush past mourning our sin?**

Consider your life and, if you want to, share your answer to this question: **What sin in your life do you need to mourn?**

*[Note: To learn more about the role of sorrow in repentance, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.]*

In verse 2, the Israelites confessed both their sins and the sins of their ancestors. The idea of communal repentance is often foreign to us—we would rather point to specific people who have sinned rather than accepting that we, as a community, have been in error.

Why do you think we would rather take individual responsibility for sin than accept communal responsibility? When do you think it is appropriate to communally mourn and repent?

The Israelites stood to confess and repent of their sin. But their confession began in an unusual way. Read Nehemiah 9:4–6.

Israel began to mourn by praising God. He is the subject of every sentence in verses 6–15. We may not think of praise as a proper confession, but to truly confess, we must know who God is and approach him rightly. **In what ways could praising God affect the way we confess our sin?**

Repentance is not just an agreement with God about our sin but, as Eric taught, an act of turning away from sin and embracing the life God calls us into. Think about when someone has apologized to you. It is one thing for them to say they are sorry, but something altogether different for them to change their behavior. **What are some ways we can help one another turn from our sin toward God's ways?**

*[Note: To walk through a communal prayer of repentance, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.]*

Israel's confession continued by retelling their redemptive history. Their prayer walks through the repeated faithlessness of their ancestors and the ongoing faithfulness of God. Read Nehemiah 9:7–31.

Eric shared that reflecting on God's track record gave Israel a foundation for the future. When they recognized God's consistent faithfulness, they could be confident in their future with him. Verse 28 says, talking about God, "When they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven and rescued them many times in your compassion." God cared for Israel, despite their rebellion—and he does the same for us. **In what ways has God been faithful to you when you have gone astray?**

Israel was not just mourning the effect their sin had on others, but the effect their sin had on their relationship with God. **In what ways can the sins we've not repented of affect our relationship with God?**

It can be easy to look down our noses at Israel—they failed God so often! But, when we consider our own track record, our lives are not so different from theirs. We fail God every day. But we also see God’s love through his faithfulness to us. Even when his people acted like his enemies, he loved them as his children. **How could we remind ourselves of God’s unending faithfulness when we think about our past sin?**

The confession concludes with the Israelites reflecting on their current situation. Read Nehemiah 9:32–37.

Israel knew they needed God’s help to fix their current situation. Sin damages our relationships and ruins families, neighborhoods, and cities. Only God can fix our personal and communal problems. **What personal problems do you need God’s help with? What communal problems do we need God to redeem?**

How has sin created or intensified these problems? What could it look like for God to redeem those problems?

Eric shared that, though Israel was already in a covenant relationship with God, they needed to rededicate themselves to their covenant. We, as the church, also need to rededicate ourselves to God, reminding ourselves of our covenant with him and our purpose in him. **Is God leading you or your church to repent of anything in particular? If so, what is the next step of rededication (mourning, confession, and repentance) you need to take?**

LAST WORD

Despite our consistent failures, God is faithful to his people. We, individually and corporately, are prone to wander from him. We need his conviction and to be struck by the sorrow of our sin. But we do not need to stay in sorrow. When we come together and rededicate ourselves to Jesus, we can begin to heal and repair the damage sin has done.

Our sin will cloud the world’s image of God. If we want to redeem our communities, live as witnesses to God’s goodness, and fulfill his purposes for our lives, we will need to start with repentance.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We’ve highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. The Role of Sorrow in Repentance

When we see the sorrow of the Israelites in Nehemiah, we might wonder if we need to react to our sin as they did. In Christ, we are fully forgiven, so we should not think of sorrow as an ongoing state. But it does play an instrumental role in turning our hearts back to God. The apostle Paul shares how sorrow can lead us to rededication to God in 2 Corinthians 7.

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-11.

Paul begins by reflecting on his first letter to the church at Corinth—it was a convicting and challenging correction of their behavior. He is not sorry that this letter might have caused them temporary sadness because of what it led to. Truth can be painful because it forces us to see our flaws, errors, and even the damage we have caused. **Why do you think we try to avoid difficult truths that expose our flaws?**

Do you think it is right to be sad over our error? Why, or why not?

While God does not desire for us to live in guilt or shame, he will cause us sorrow that will turn us away from our sinful habits. **When have you felt sorrow over a sin?**

Paul shares in verse 10 that godly sorrow leads to repentance. Grief over our sin does not just lead to regret, it also drives us to mend our relationship and seek unity with God. **In what ways has your sorrow over sin compelled you to change?**

Not all sorrow is godly, however, as worldly sorrow “brings death” (v. 10). Worldly sorrow is a sadness that does not lead to repentance or unity. Instead, it is grief that leads us to anger, bitterness, self-righteousness, and deeper division. **When has worldly sorrow damaged your relationship between you and God? You and others?**

Grief and pain do not need to be avoided, especially when it comes from correcting truth. God’s desire is to lead us to repentance so that we can be in a right relationship with him and be his ambassadors on earth. Though the pain is temporary, the joy of unity with God will last forever. **What would it look like to allow God to use sorrow over your sin to draw you closer to him?**

2. Communal Repentance

If you have never communally repented, it may be difficult to know where to start. This guide can help you begin to confess and lament the sins with others. But, as Eric pointed out, communal repentance is a process. Use this prayer adapted from The Book of Common Prayer as a starting point and allow God to lead you to his next steps.

Note to the Leader: You can either read this prayer aloud over your small group, or you can all read the prayer out loud together. If you have time, you can follow the model of Nehemiah 9 by beginning your prayer with praise, reading from Psalm 95:1-7a.

O Father, we are gathered before you, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, whose chosen dwelling place is with the broken and contrite, to confess that we have sinned in thought and word and deed. We have not loved you with all our heart and soul. We have not loved you with all our mind and strength. We have not even loved our neighbor as ourselves. Purge us from selfishness, the fear of man, and the love of praise. In your mercy, deepen our sorrow for the wrong we have done and for the good we have left undone, so that we may hate our sin with a holy hatred. But, please Father, do not leave us in sorrow. With you, O Lord, there is forgiveness. In your mercy, restore the joy of our salvation; so that we may love you with a holy love. Amen.

3. Nehemiah 9 Reading Plan

This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entire book of Nehemiah so you can dig deeper into God's Word.

This week, use this reading guide to break up Nehemiah 9. As you read this section, consider how God's steadfast love carries us even when we are rebellious toward him.

Day 1: The Levites Lead the People to Praise God (Nehemiah 9:1-8)

Day 2: God Saves Israel and Gives Them the Law (Nehemiah 9:9-15)

Day 3: God Provides for Israel despite Their Rebellion (Nehemiah 9:16-25)

Day 4: The Continuous Cycle of Sin, Discipline, Appeal, and Rescue (Nehemiah 9:26-31)

Day 5: The People Appeal to be Rescued Again and Renew the Covenant (Nehemiah 9:32-38)

SESSION 9: NEHEMIAH 10:1-12:43

OPEN

What are some of your bucket-list dreams or goals? What are you currently doing to reach those goals?

Many of us have big aspirations for our lives, but to reach those goals we must change our behavior today. We can only get to our desired future by working toward it. God also has a purpose for our lives. But if we are not wholly committed to him and his ways, we will be unable to go where he wants to take us.

In this session, Eric will share the importance of communal dedication to God and the goodness our commitment to God can bring into the world.

READ

Read Nehemiah 10:28–39; 11:1–2; 12:27–43.

*Note: We will not be able to cover all of Nehemiah 10–12 in this small group time. We have made a daily reading guide so that you can read this whole section throughout your week. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

Why do we, as a community, need to dedicate ourselves to God?

What does it mean to have a biblical worldview?

What should our relationship to the world be like?

Show Session 9: *Nehemiah 10:1-12:43* (10 minutes).

DISCUSS

In Nehemiah 10–12, we continue to see Israel's spiritual renewal. God had been faithful to Israel through their sin and exile. Now, God asks Israel to commit to being faithful to him. In chapter 10, the leaders of Israel gather to make a formal commitment to God. Read Nehemiah 10:28–39.

We often think of formal agreements as something for individuals—contracts are only binding for those who sign them, marriage vows for those who agree to them, and promises for the individuals who make them. But here, the entire people enter into a formal agreement with God. **Do you feel like your commitment to God is more individual or communal? How so?**

What could be the benefit of committing to God as a community?

The church is more effective as a community than it is as a disconnected group of individuals. We need one another for support, encouragement, correction, and wisdom. We need all of us, with our gifts, to work together to be effective in our community. **In what ways can the work of the church be damaged if we think of our commitment to God as only individual?**

Eric pointed out that the leaders of the community were the first to rededicate themselves to the Law. Where leaders go, the people will follow. **What do you appreciate about your church leadership? Where are they leading you?**

Verse 28 says the Israelites separated themselves from the surrounding cultures that did not commit to obeying God. While, as Eric said, we should not let our culture dictate our pursuit of God, in many instances we have allowed our culture to shape the way we practice our faith. **In what ways do you see the church being swayed by cultural influences?**

How might outside influences that do not honor God be impacting your faith?

Eric encouraged us to have a biblical worldview—to see and think about our world the way God does. **When you have a decision to make or a circumstance that you do not know how to navigate, where do you go for answers?**

What would it take for us to go to God for answers before anywhere else?

In Nehemiah 10, the people spend a lot of time recommitting to temple worship. Today, we do not have to travel to Jerusalem to worship in God's temple because God is with us through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, everything we do should be done as an act of worship. Every area of our lives should be committed to God. **What does it look like to worship God with your relationships? While running errands? At work?**

*[Note: To learn more about what it means to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.]*

Eric corrected a common misunderstanding in the church. While we are called to be different from our culture, we were never meant to be separated from it. God's people are to be insulated from culture, but not isolated from the world. **In your mind, what does it mean to be insulated from the world?**

How can we balance the tension of being uninfluenced by the world while being involved with those who do not know Jesus?

We are all influenced by the media we consume and the people around us. Part of being insulated from the culture is knowing how and by what we're being influenced. **What media or people have the most influence in your life and the way you see the world? What could you do to evaluate what you watch and hear using a biblical worldview?**

In verses 32–39, the Israelites commit their resources to worship in the house of God. The Mosaic Law mandated setting aside a certain amount of money or goods to contribute to the temple for the proper animal sacrifices to be made and to help support the priests who led the people in worship. Our worship looks different today, but we are still called to commit to holiness by sacrificing our time and material items to contribute to the worship of our God. **What does it look like for you to honor God by setting aside resources to help contribute to worship?**

*[Note: To learn more about giving our resources to contribute to worship, see **Go Deeper Section 2.**]*

After they committed themselves to God, the people of Israel settled in their own cities. Read Nehemiah 11:1–2.

Eric mentioned a pattern of life at the end of the video. “[After] we get on the same page with God . . . now we scatter into the world, throughout the culture.” Ninety percent of Israel did not live within the walls of Jerusalem. God providentially placed his people throughout Israel, among those who did not know him. We may not think of our placement as a part of God’s greater mission, but your neighborhood and workplace are providential placements. **Where has God placed you? Who in your neighborhood and workplace could you influence to know God?**

Your sphere of influence is where God wants you to shine for him. He is strategically using you to build his kingdom. Whether it is a barista at your favorite coffee shop, your mail carrier, or your CEO, God loves the people he has put you around. **What would it look like for you to reflect God’s goodness to those around you? How might you be intentional about sharing God’s love with them?**

Despite having scattered throughout the land, the people gathered back in Jerusalem to celebrate the work God had done. Read Nehemiah 12:27–43.

The Israelites gathered to worship and celebrate what God had done among them. In the same way, we regularly gather as the church to remind ourselves of God’s Word, worship, and celebrate what God has done among us. However, many of us see Sunday worship as a to-do list item rather than a celebration. **How might seeing worship as a celebration of God’s communal work change the way you view Sunday services? How might it change the way you worship during Sunday services?**

God calls all of us to be a light for him in our culture. But that work begins with us dedicating ourselves to God’s Word and ways. **What is one thing our group could do today to be more committed to God?**

LAST WORD

God has called his people to be a light to the world through a lifestyle of holiness, service, and celebration. Imagine what our world would look like if our lifestyle of celebrating what God has done for us would be evident to those who are “far off.”

No matter where you are in your relationship with God, dedicate yourself to him today. Allow his Word to set you apart so that you can be his ambassador wherever he has placed you. Go be a light to the world by walking in holiness, intentionally serving where God has placed you, and celebrating what he has done.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. Temple of the Holy Spirit

Many of us think of worship as something that we do at church. We sing some songs, bow our heads to pray, listen to the pastor, then head on our way. But we don't cease worshipping when we leave our church buildings. Every Christian is a temple—a living, breathing place of worship.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

In this passage, Paul is specifically commanding the Corinthian church to avoid sexual sin. He encourages them to not be led by their appetites—sexual or otherwise—because what we do with our bodies matters to God. **According to this passage, in what ways do our bodies belong to God?**

As a temple of the Holy Spirit, everything you do is an expression of worship. In the Old Testament, God's people would have to travel to the tabernacle or the temple to be in God's presence. But in Christ, God's presence stays with you, everywhere you go. **What could you do to remind yourself that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit, even in the mundane areas of your life?**

What specific work might God be calling you to do today? What opportunities has he given you to serve him?

We worship God when we sing songs at church, but we also glorify God in the way we interact with our friends and family, treat the waiter after church, and do our work. Your body belongs to God, therefore everything you do should glorify, or point people, to him. **In what ways do your actions reveal God to the people around you? What areas of your life might you need to commit to God?**

2. Contributing to Worship

In Nehemiah 10, the Israelites committed themselves to prioritizing worship through tithing. To worship God correctly, the people had to communally agree to contribute their resources to his temple. The church today is also reliant on people contributing their time, skills, and money to help facilitate worship. Read Nehemiah 10:35–38.

The Israelites made a promise to bring the firstfruits—or best—of their harvest and firstborn from among their livestock to be used in temple ceremonies. Like Israel, God desires us to give our best to contribute to the worship and ministry of the church. **What energy, time, or resources do you offer the church? Is it your best or what is left over?**

Where does your best energy and time usually go?

Verse 37 tells us that a portion of the Israelites source of income belonged to the Levites. The Levites were dedicated by God to serve at the temple and were not able to earn income as a farmer, carpenter, or other tradesman might. While we are all called to contribute to the ministry of the church, God has called specific people to give their careers to ministry. **How might you go about supporting your church leaders as they encourage you in your faith? In what ways can you encourage them in their faith?**

While God does call us to contribute to the work of ministry, he asks us to do so joyfully, not from compulsion. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6–8.

The way we give is important. If we are able to give, but grumble in our giving, we may need to examine why it is difficult for us to be generous. **What feelings or thoughts do you have when you give money to the church?**

In verse 9, Paul says that God takes care of our needs so that we might take care of the needs of others. If you have any excess, God may be giving you an opportunity to generously and joyfully care for someone else. **What needs might you be able to meet in your church and community?**

Tithing is not only an opportunity to contribute to ministry, but an opportunity to worship God. We can cheerfully give because we know that everything we have is a gift from him. **What would it look like for you to worship God through generosity this week?**

3. Nehemiah 10–11 Reading Plan

This week, use this reading guide to break up Nehemiah 10–11. As you read this section, consider how God moved the people collectively to commit to holiness and cultivate Jerusalem.

Day 1: Those Who Signed the Covenant Renewal (Nehemiah 10:1–29)

Day 2: The Vow of Purity in Marriage and Sabbath (Nehemiah 10:30–31)

Day 3: The Vow of Upholding the Temple Tax (Nehemiah 10:32–39)

Day 4: Resettling Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:1–21)

Day 5: The Levites who Settled in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:22–36)



SESSION 10: NEHEMIAH 12:44-13:31

OPEN

What is the biggest mess you have ever had to clean up?

Messes are a part of life. When something small is wrong—a loose cap on a gallon of milk, a frozen pipe, or a slick spot on the floor—it can lead to serious problems. The same is true for our spiritual lives. Small compromises or cracks in our faithfulness can lead to big problems in our relationship with God.

In the last session of Nehemiah, Eric will explain how small decisions damaged the witness, worship, and work of God. Ultimately, sin is not a problem we can clean up on our own. We all need a savior.

READ

Read Nehemiah 13. If you are running short on time, you can shorten your reading to verses 6–11, 15–18, 28–31.

*Note: We have made a daily reading guide of Nehemiah so that you can read the whole book throughout your study. You can find the reading plan at the end of this study in **Go Deeper Section 3**.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Eric Mason's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What three steps can we take to get back on the path of holiness?

What does the abrupt ending of Nehemiah ultimately point us to?

Show Session 10: *Nehemiah 13* (13 minutes).

DISCUSS

After all the vows and redemptive work that has taken place in the book of Nehemiah, we might expect this book to end on a happy note. Instead, we see God's people make a series of small compromises that lead to disastrous problems. Nehemiah had left Jerusalem to return to his role in the Persian court, but in his absence Israel strayed from God's commands. Read Nehemiah 13:1–10.

Eric warned us that micro-compromises in our faith lead to massive diversions from God's purpose and mission. We are all tempted to make small compromises in our individual pursuits of holiness. We may not even notice our little compromises until they have led us far from God. **When, if ever, has a compromise led you to unexpected or unwanted places in your faith?**

At some point, the people began to value an outside voice over God's, inviting Tobiah, who opposed the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, to live in God's temple. Eric said letting outside voices guide God's people can be cancerous to our ability to serve God. **What voices or ideas have we allowed into our church? In what ways might their influence be diverting us from God's mission?**

When Nehemiah learned about the desecration of the temple, he removed Tobiah and all his belongings. The first step of recommitting to God is getting rid of outside influences that damage the witness and work of the church. **Is there anything in your life God may be calling you to remove that doesn't honor him? What podcasts, media personalities, or influences might you need to remove from or diminish in your life?**

Removing the bad influence from the temple was not enough for Nehemiah. In verse 9, we see him purifying the storehouse. Eric described purification as "restoring it to be viewed in the proper way." After we remove the outside influences or habits from our lives, we must reorient our minds to see ourselves the way God sees us. **Think about the habits that need to be removed from your life—what better purpose does God have for that area of your life? If you are unsure, what could you do to seek answers in God's Word or from God in prayer?**

After Nehemiah removed Tobiah from the temple and purified the storeroom, he started using the storehouse for its intended purpose. He also reinstated the Levites and put them back to work in the temple. Read Nehemiah 13:11-14.

After removing the desecration and refocusing our vision to match God's, we have to recommit to God's mission. Like the Israelites, it is not enough to have a verbal commitment to God—we need to actively obey him. **What areas of your life do you feel are not committed to God? What could it look like to recommit those areas of your life to God?**

Nehemiah turned to God in verse 14, asking to be remembered for his faithfulness. Despite all his work rebuilding the wall and the rededication of the people, Jerusalem had still fallen into sin and apathy. There are times when standing for God can feel exhausting or even fruitless. But God does not forget the good work we have done in his name, even when we cannot see tangible results from our work. **How do you react when your faithfulness feels unrewarded, unnoticed, or unimpactful?**

What could you do to remind yourself that God sees and remembers you?

The remainder of Nehemiah 13 addresses more compromises Israel made in Nehemiah's absence. It may be easy to think of their compromises as simple changes in behavior, but their actions revealed their hearts. Instead of honoring God, they ignored God and his commands. Read Nehemiah 13:15-31.

The Israelites broke their vow to keep the Sabbath by opening their gates to outside merchants. What God ordained as a holy day had become just another day of business. Our circumstances today may be different from the Israelites', but like them, we can be easily distracted from worshipping God. **What commitments, activities, or interests absorb most of your time? What compromises can these priorities ask us to make in our faith?**

In verses 20 and 22, Nehemiah set up guards at the gates of Jerusalem to prevent the bustle of commerce from interrupting the Sabbath. There is wisdom in setting up safeguards to help us keep our priorities on Jesus. **What preventative measures could help keep you focused on worshipping God rather than the things of this world?**

*[Note: To learn more about the theme of remembrance in Nehemiah, see **Go Deeper Section 1.**]*

The final compromise Nehemiah found was intermarriage between God's people and those who worshipped other gods. When the Israelites married people from different cultures, their families wandered from the faith. In verse 24, we see that many of the families in Jerusalem did not even speak Hebrew. The children had no way to understand God's Word, much less obey it. **In what ways can families be tempted to wander from the faith today?**

How can we, as a community, share the responsibility to raise children according to God's Word?

*[Note: To learn more about God's mission for parents, see **Go Deeper Section 2.**]*

The book abruptly ends with the ongoing work in Jerusalem. It seems like Nehemiah's work will never be done. It may feel like an unsatisfying ending, but Eric shared that the unresolved nature of sin is the point of the book. We cannot fix our true problem. Nehemiah ultimately shows us our need for a savior, who we know is Christ. **What habits or sins point to our need for Jesus?**

Eric ended the series by summing up the book of Nehemiah. He believes Jesus is using this book to call the church back to him and charging us to rededicate ourselves to him so that we can represent him in the world. **As you think back on this series, in what specific ways is God calling us to represent him in our community?**

LAST WORD

We are surrounded by cultural influences that ask us to make small compromises that take our attention off God. But even a small step away from faithfulness can lead to a big distance between our way of living and the lifestyle God calls us to. Like Nehemiah, we must be diligent, ridding ourselves of unholy influences, seeing our world the way God sees it, and rededicating ourselves to God.

The story of Nehemiah is a testament to God's plan for restoration. God is calling us back to himself so that we can be restored and represent him to the world. God's mission is too important to compromise—he calls us to nothing less than complete faithfulness. Let's seek him together and see him restore us and the world around us.

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your study of the book of Nehemiah.

1. Remember Me, O God

The Hebrew word *zakar*, meaning “to remember or mark,” is used four times in Nehemiah 13 (vv. 14, 22, 29, and 31). Each time, Nehemiah is pleading for God to remember him, which seems like a strange request from Nehemiah. Why would Nehemiah ask God to remember him? Could God really forget him? And, if God could forget Nehemiah, why would he remember us?

Nehemiah 13 does not teach us that God forgets his people or their good works. We know from other places in Scripture that God does not forget his promises (Deut. 4:29–31), that all his promises are sure (Heb 6:17–18), and that even when we are faithless, he remains faithful to us (2 Tim 2:13). God does not even forget the sparrows and their needs (Luke 12:6). Read Isaiah 49:14–16. **What promise can we hold on to from these verses?**

In Isaiah 49:15, God says that even if everyone else were to forget his people, he would not. He could no more forget us than a mother could forget her child. Nehemiah called upon God to remember him while all his hard work was unraveling before his eyes. The people forgot Nehemiah. Who would remember all his commitment and work? Did any of it matter? **When you feel ineffective or unimportant, where do you turn?**

God had not forgotten Nehemiah, and he cannot forget us. But when we feel ineffective, especially in kingdom work, it can feel like God is not paying attention to us. Our legacies may fade and our work may disappear because of the sin of others, but no work for God is ever ineffective or unnoticed. **Do you feel like God sees and is taking care of you? Explain your answer.**

Take a moment to read and pray over Hebrews 6:10. What could you do to remind yourself that God sees you and will not forget you?

2. Holy Parenting

Note to Leader: This Go Deeper is specifically geared toward parents, but the conversation could apply to anyone who invests in children or younger generations. Consider the people in your group and their life stages before diving into this section.

In Nehemiah 13:23–27, Nehemiah finds that the compromises of God’s people have extended into their homes. Instead of being dedicated to God, many of the families assimilated into foreign cultures. That may not seem like a big problem to us because the church crosses both cultural and language barriers. But for Israel, to marry a foreigner was to bring their gods into your home. And as Nehemiah found, many of the children in Jerusalem could not even speak Hebrew, the language of God’s Law.

God cares deeply about families, particularly in how they raise the next generation. Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 20–25.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is known as the Shema, meaning “hear” or “listen,” and is considered one of the most important declarations of Old Testament faith. God’s first command is for us to know him (v. 4) and love him with our entire person (v. 5). His next command is to teach our children to do the same. But teaching is far more than a morning devotional or sending our children to Sunday school. **According to these verses, when should we teach our children to know and love God?**

How do these verses change your conception of discipling your children?

Children see far more than we often realize. They are sponges, soaking up what they observe and overhear. They see us when we lie down, when we get up, as we run errands, and sit around the house. There is no moment they are unplugged from learning. **Is it encouraging or worrying that your children watch and learn from you?**

Do you feel prepared or unprepared to teach them about God?

Our relationship with God should consume our thoughts, actions, and passions. But we often fail. There will be times when our children pick up things we don’t want to impart to them. However, God gives us grace when we mess up. As a result, we can model repentance when we fail. **What would it look like for you to own your failures and repent in front of your children?**

While we are far removed from the culture of ancient Israel, we still struggle to protect our families from negative cultural influences. **What outside voices or media most affect your children? Would you say those influences are positive, negative, or neutral? In what ways do these influences push them toward or pull them from God?**

This section is only a starting point for thinking about how you can intentionally disciple the next generation. Parenting is not easy, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution to leading families. By including more families in this conversation, you can find communal support to help raise the next generation to know and love God. **Who are some families you could open this conversation with? How might you link arms with them to create a thriving spiritual community for your children?**

