

God Is Restoring His People

(A study in the book of Nehemiah)

It is the heart of God to restore. That's the good news. The other news is that Israel had made a mess of things and, as a result, they had lost all the marvelous privileges God had lavished upon them. Constant, unremitting disobedience to God had brought about Israel's loss of nation, city, and heritage.

Characteristically God had met His people with the promise of deliverance even before their captivity. The Prophet Jeremiah had informed them that they would be enslaved for 70 years in order to make up for the neglected Sabbaths; but then God would begin the process of restoring His people.

God is firmly in control of history, of kings, and He works all things together to accomplish "the counsel of His will." (Ephesians 1:11) In fact, this verse declares that God's will is predestined. He will have His children with Him!

Isaiah had predicted that a heathen king by the name of Cyrus would order the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem! (Isaiah 44:28) Imagine the shock waves that must have gone through the demons when King Cyrus actually said, "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem..." (Ezra 1:2)

The book of Ezra tells the incredible story of God rescuing people from their captivity and restoring them to the place of knowing and worshipping God! It illustrates the way God sent His Spirit to restore the doctrine of salvation by faith during the Reformation. But the walls of Jerusalem had not been rebuilt and the city lay in ruins, bringing dishonor upon both God and His people. This is Nehemiah's story, and it illustrates the rebuilding process by which God restores His Bride (His people) to their intended beauty.

In this exciting history, you will see God imparting lessons of: (1) His behind-the-scenes initiatives, (2) His patient faithfulness, (3) the critical role of leaders, (4) the power of vision to mobilize a people, (5) the release of personal destinies through unity and teamwork, (6) the classic attempts of Satan to discredit and discourage God's people, and (7) the remarkable story of what can be done to change the world when a people follow God!

Your personal destiny is linked to a people. God puts the "solitary in families." He sees your life as tied to your brothers and sisters so that what one person does affects the others. Thus, we are "our brother's keeper," as the Bible says.

As you study Nehemiah this month, personalize these passages. You are not only studying what God has done, you are studying the things that God is currently doing. We are all leaving "Babylon" in one way or another, and together we are journeying toward the purposes of God, which then ignite His purpose for your life!

Lesson 1

Meet Nehemiah, a man at the top of his game. He had been the #2 man in the all-powerful Babylon where he was the cupbearer to Artaxerxes. (Nehemiah 1:11) Yet his passion lay in another realm: the glory of God!

As it turned out, Nehemiah was to use all the skill and influence he had gained in the affairs of men to advance the vision God gave him: His people being restored.

How special for God to entrust finances, skills, and status to men and women who prove more loyal to His cause than the pop culture that entertains people while they waste their lives.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah chapter 1. (*15 minutes*)

Focus on Nehemiah 1:2. Considering that Nehemiah may have been the second most powerful man in the known world at that time with all the responsibilities and perks of that office, what is so unusual about his questioning his brother?

What does this question tell you about this man? _____

Is there anything from this that the Lord might be applying to your life?

In relation to all the various interests that tug at your life, how would you describe your zeal for the welfare of the people of God? _____

Focus on Nehemiah 1:3. Try using your words to compare Israel then to the current state of the Church (nationwide) in contrast to the beauty and power God envisions for us. In what sense might we say that God's people are in distress and reproach with the wall broken down, etc.? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Ask Jesus to give you His love for His Church.

Picture the potential beauty of His Church.

Pray that into existence.

Thank God that He is restoring His people.

Lesson 2

The capacity to love what God loves and to hate what He hates is part of what defines your personhood. To lose some or all of this capacity diminishes your wholeness as a person.

When God begins to restore a man or woman, He begins to put what He loves on your heart.

If you love His Church, the Bride of His Son, you are in a position to share the Father's heart and to be used by Him in ways that will count for eternity.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah chapter 1. *(5 minutes)*

Do you have any fresh thoughts about Nehemiah 1:1-3 since these verses have had time to sink into your mind? _____

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 1:4-11. *(10 minutes)*

Examine Nehemiah 1:4. What does this verse tell you about this man who carried so much political influence? _____

Since Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king, and since he was not allowed to be sad in the presence of the king, how do you imagine he handled his times of weeping, mourning, and fasting? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Give your heart afresh to the Lord.

Ask Him to put His loves and hates in your heart.

Pray for the display of His glory in His Church!

Pray for the leaders of your local Church.

Lesson 3

Your prayer life is the heartbeat of your connection with God. Your ability to love God comes from being with Him.

Your relationship to God is your link to life. There can be no wellness that does not come from Him, and you receive it as you come to Him and trust Him.

Before vision, before daring deeds that bring out the best in you, is prayer. Might we not wonder who inspired Nehemiah to turn to God the way he did?

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 1:4-11. *(15 minutes)*

What do you think was Nehemiah's view of God? _____

Do you think Nehemiah was personally guilty of the sins he confessed when he said, "I and my father's house"? _____

How could Nehemiah identify with the whole of Israel in this manner?

How deeply do you identify with your Church so that you see yourself as united and bound to one another? In other words, are you linking yourself to your Church the way Nehemiah is linking himself to Israel? Comment. _____

Respond to this statement: "The more you have God's people on your heart, the more He will use you." Do you believe this? _____ How does this statement affect you?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

See your Church as the Body of Jesus Christ!

Pray for the restoration of His glory in His people.

Remember some of His promises over His people.

Thank God for putting you into His Body.

Lesson 4

What gives you confidence to bring seemingly impossible things to God? Is it not the fact that He cut a covenant with His Son who then represents you? Yes, this is your utter confidence. Christ is your Advocate, and through Him you have access to the very throne of God!

The word, “lovingkindness” is a special Hebrew word that means the committed love that is bound up in covenant brotherhood. God’s love for His people is so deep that it is said that we are written upon His hands!

How can we not call upon such a God?

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 1:1-11. (*15 minutes*)

How did Nehemiah’s love for God’s people change his life? _____

Nehemiah had a public life and a private life. What was it about his hidden life that made him a great man? _____

Look at Nehemiah’s prayer. What specifics do you notice that will help you in your own prayers? (1) _____

_____ (2) _____ (3)

_____ (4) _____

_____ (5) _____

Do you sense the Lord encouraging you or instructing you? If so how? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Worship God for His greatness!

Delight yourself in Him this morning.

Receive afresh His love for His people.

Pray for His Kingdom to come!

Lesson 5

For four months Nehemiah prayed and waited upon God. Finally he sensed a release from the Lord that today would be the day he would somehow communicate with the king. (Nehemiah 1:11) Perhaps it was for this reason that he allowed his burden to show in his eyes so that the king was able to see it.

Notice that Nehemiah never calls “the city” by the name of Jerusalem. Artaxerxes had heard many false accusations against Jerusalem, and Nehemiah wanted the king to simply identify with his connection with his fathers.

Notice that Nehemiah, after months of prayer, not only had vision, he had a plan!

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 2:1-6. (*15 minutes*)

Why was Nehemiah afraid? _____

In order to fulfill the vision God has given you to improve the welfare of His people, the Church, what are some of the fears you have to face? _____

Nehemiah risked his relationships, his influence, his retirement, and his status in order to take certain risks for the people of God. Have you ever had to take any risks such as these? _____ Comment on how this might apply to your life.

God intends for you to lead something or someone. In order for this to happen, you have to: (1) receive the burden of the Lord, (2) spend time in prayer working it out with the Lord, (3) receive a vision of what He intends to do, and (4) get a plan to activate. Notice Nehemiah 2:6. What plan has God given you in order to see His glory in His Church?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Recall the greatness of God and worship Him!

Wait upon Him. Let Him minister to you.

Ask Him for His ideas.

Pray for His will in

Lesson 6

Nehemiah presented the king with a plan and a timetable. Probably he was able to appeal to the king that a strengthened Jerusalem would help protect him from Egypt. In any case God gave him favor with the king as he stepped out in faith to accomplish a vision that must have seemed utterly impossible.

Nehemiah had thought through and prayed through all the obstacles and all that he would need in order to see the miracles of God. He had a timetable; however, it would turn out to take much longer than he had anticipated.

It would be twelve years before he would be with the king again. The moral is: it usually takes longer than we think to see our vision become reality. Faith that presses through the challenges glorifies God!

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 2:1-10. (*15 minutes*)

If you had been in Nehemiah's place, what do you think you would have needed and therefore asked for in order to accomplish this mission? _____

Finish this sentence: "Nehemiah was dealing with many different political figures who may have all had their own agendas and prejudices; but he _____

_____."

In Nehemiah 2:10 you met the first of many waves of criticism and opposition. What voices are you hearing that would discourage you from having faith for the Church even when she might not be looking her best? _____

God may be supplying you with a "Nehemiah" who spells out the Large Vision, but then God will give you a portion of that to accomplish, which is a vision within a vision. You can always expect spiritual enemies to come to tell you that you cannot arise and lead your portion.

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Resubmit your vision to the Lord.

Wait on Him for His timing.

Praise Him as the All-Powerful One!

Pray over your vision for God's people.

Lesson 7

Sanballat and Tobiah probably acknowledged Yahweh at some level. Their opposition wasn't religious; it was political. Judah was probably considered part of Samaria, and Sanballat was its governor. Both men were governors who felt their influence would be diminished if Jerusalem were to become a strong and prosperous city.

The worst thing possible occurs when God's people become divided over issues that hinder the welfare of the Church. Never allow yourself to become one who divides God's people unless heresy or immorality are the issues.

If God gives you a Nehemiah, buy into the vision. Your life needs the leadership and the vision in order to bring your potential into full operation.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 2:11-20. (*15 minutes*)

Why do you think Nehemiah first gathered only a few men with whom he shared his heart?

Why do you think Nehemiah went by himself at night to inspect the situation before he tried to appeal to the larger group in Nehemiah 2:16-17? _____

The walls had been in ruins for 140 years. What resistance might Nehemiah have had to face in the minds of God's people as he proposed rising up and rebuilding the walls?

There are disappointments that people experience in the Church. What would you say to skeptics who prefer to distance themselves from the risk of commitment while they criticize God's people? _____

What two things happened as the result of Nehemiah's vision that he presented to the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest? (1) _____

_____ (2) _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

If God has sent you a Nehemiah, embrace his vision and pray for him.

Pray for God to restore His beauty in His people, the Church.

Present to the Lord your portion of the vision.

Thank Him for giving you purpose.

Lesson 8

“Without a vision the people perish.” Without a vision of what God proposes for a future that looks far better than our present, people wander, and their lives lack the focus and purpose so needed in order to achieve great things for God.

People who are failing at life lack vision. They have either not been privileged to have a Nehemiah or they have refused to commit themselves to the band who rises up to own the vision. They settle for life on some lesser level.

The opposite happens to men and women whose hearts are stirred by a Nehemiah who shares a vision for changing the world on their watch, and they go for it!

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 2:1-20. (*15 minutes*)

To what extent does a vision of restoration for the Church burn in your heart?

Have you had to wrestle with skepticism concerning the Church? _____

Are you a visionary or a cynic? _____

What changed in the lives of the people living in Jerusalem after Nehemiah imparted vision to them? _____

Discuss this question: Are you ready for vision, or are you already carrying vision, or are you in a place spiritually where you do not want fresh vision?

If you need fresh vision, whom might God be sending into your life to supply it?

Do not cheat yourself and live without passion for what God intends to do. He places His people in situations that need faith and commitment in order to see great things happen for God.

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Come to your Lord.

Wait on Him this morning.

Ask Him to show you how to pray.

Worship Him for His worthiness.

Lesson 9

You did not choose your destiny. The gifts you wish you had but do not: these were withheld by a sovereign God who likes the way He chose to design you.

Our culture honors some gifts more than others, but they are rarely on God's lists of favorites. In fact, heaven will be filled with stories of so-called "little people" who are big in heaven.

Success comes to those who give themselves away to Christ and to a particular vision with a particular group of imperfect people. They release themselves into what God is doing, and God multiplies the impact of their lives. Marvelous! Beautiful!

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 3:1-32 rather quickly just to grasp the overall sense of it. Don't get bogged down in the details. (*15 minutes*)

Name the gates you notice. _____

Each gate represented some special function, and without the gate being restored the sections of the wall that were closest to each family could not be repaired. Think about the names of the gates and see if any ideas come to you in regard to repairing key ministries, which then allow the gifts of others an opportunity to come forth.

What would have happened to the wall if certain ones had not arisen to rebuild one or more of the gates? _____

Nehemiah is the overall leader whom God sent with the burden, vision, plan, and faith; but what other examples of leadership do you see in this chapter?

Good leaders are also good followers. They appreciate leadership. They value it, for they know the difference it makes in the lives of others. They don't always have to be the leader; but they are zealous for the welfare of God's people, and the result is that they eventually take responsibility for something and therefore become leaders.

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Submit yourself afresh to Jesus as your Chief Shepherd.

Pray for the leaders God has given you.

Pray for the vision of your Church to be accomplished.

Ask God to raise up many types of leaders in your Church.

Lesson 10

Excellent leadership is a gift from God. No matter how many things God offers His people they will not be able to fully possess their full inheritance without a high level of leadership.

God gives vision of a beautiful future, which requires enormous changes, even impossibilities. Such vision always means taking ground that has been occupied by the devil, and what can we say except, "Let the games begin!"

God tests His people. He allows the devil to trigger the fears of His people, yet when they choose to trust God and work together, great victories result.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 4:1-23. (15 minutes)

In Nehemiah 4:1, what provoked Sanballat? _____

What are some of the accomplishments in a Church that provoke the anger of the devil?

The burned stones of Nehemiah 4:2 were pieces of limestone which, when burned, tend to crack and crumble. Many of God's people are like burned stones, because they have been hurt or disappointed or disillusioned. The question is, how can wounded Christians build together and see God's vision come to pass?

Notice Nehemiah 4:4-5. Nehemiah prays judgment on those who intend to destroy the work of God. How is Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 in keeping with Nehemiah's prayer? _____

Criticism can be constructive or destructive. When you see lacks in God's Church, how should you respond in order to be constructive? _____

What do you think caused the powerful results revealed in Nehemiah 4:6? _____

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Praise God for His faithfulness.

Pray against His Church's spiritual enemies.

Ask God for fresh passion to come into His people.

Pray for God to advance His Kingdom through the Church.

Lesson 11

Paul warns us in Ephesians 6 that demons are constantly devising plans to discourage and divide the Church. It seems that Nehemiah was well aware of such schemes.

Interestingly enough, Paul also realized that defeating our enemies required prayer. In fact, he seemed to indicate that we use the truths of God as powerful weapons to break Satan's attacks through the act of praying.

Fear is the opposite of faith. Satan uses whisper campaigns to trigger our fears and if he is allowed to get away with this, we can be intimidated and discouraged.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 4:7-23. (*15 minutes*)

When the devil makes plans against the Church, what does he hope to see happen?

The enemies created a whisper campaign which is recorded in Nehemiah 4:10. Read this verse carefully and answer this question: What do you think the effects were on God's people? _____

This campaign heated up in Nehemiah 4:11-12. The Jews who had not come to help rebuild the walls picked up the threats of enemies, and they echoed these fears to further discourage the workers. Have you ever seen something like this duplicated in the Church? Comment.

God stopped the enemies through Nehemiah's leadership in Nehemiah 4:13-14. What did Nehemiah do that broke the force of these attacks? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Choose faith over fear this morning.

Glorify God for His power over the enemy.

Pray for God's interests in His Church.

Wait quietly upon the Lord and listen.

Lesson 12

As you study the book of Nehemiah, you will notice that the many differing types of attacks against the accomplishment of God's vision were attempting the same thing: to create disunity among God's people.

Perhaps the devil understands the power of unity better than God's people.

When God supplies an excellent leader and the people are willing to follow him into the vision, no strategy of Satan can stop them.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 4:16-23. (*15 minutes*)

How can you promote this quality of teamwork in your Church? _____

What is required for this level of teamwork to function? _____

How important was Nehemiah's leadership in this phase? _____

What do you see that speaks of the importance of communication during this testing time?

How could you help improve communication in your Church? _____

Are you excited about being part of a vision that will glorify God and change the Church and your community? Comment. _____

Prayer Time: (*15 - 30 minutes*)

Present yourself as a living sacrifice to the Lord.

Listen to Him.

Pray for unity in your Church.

Pray for the leaders in your Church.

Lesson 13

Stress has a way of revealing underlying suspicions, fears, and cracks in relationships which Satan targets to divide people.

God allows many different pressures to be placed upon us. We saw discouraging rumors in the last chapter, but now we will see economic pressures threaten to disrupt the entire fabric of God's community.

Where there is vision and leadership, there will be tests that allow weaknesses to be revealed. The test is always about how we will respond. Will we fear God?

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 5:1-19. (*15 minutes*)

The situation is summed up in Nehemiah 5:1. What is happening? _____

Why this is happening is described in Nehemiah 5:2-8. What are the various groups of Jews experiencing that is creating this degree of panic? _____

Look at Nehemiah 5:6. Why was the leader angry? _____

Did the leader's anger lead him to sin or to take action? _____

In Nehemiah 5:7, it says that the leader "consulted with himself." What do you think this means? _____

In Nehemiah 5:8-9 what is the force of Nehemiah's appeal that changed the minds of those who were the most wealthy? _____

What effect do you think Nehemiah's fear of God had in bringing unity out of chaos? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Ask God to give you His love for His people.

Do you need to forgive someone today?

Ask God to use you as a peacemaker.

Pray for the testimony of Christ to be lived out in your Church.

Lesson 14

Fathers and mothers are leaders. Older children become leaders of the younger. Many lead in their jobs. In fact, everyone's life impacts others by example, which is one form of leadership.

Nehemiah feared God and he took the high moral road, which then became the source of his spiritual influence on others.

Your decision to use all your resources to further God's interests will cause you to become an effective leader in God's army.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 5:9-19. (*15 minutes*)

What did Nehemiah ask them to do? _____

What was the force of his appeal? _____

Why did Nehemiah demand an oath from the priests and shake out his garments in a public fashion? _____

If Nehemiah had not led at this level at this crisis, what would have happened to the restoration process? _____

How did Nehemiah use his personal resources to accomplish the restoration of God's honor in His people? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Surrender your resources to God for His glory.

Worship the Lord this morning.

Ask God to fill His people with His vision.

Pray for the witness of Christ to go into your community.

Lesson 15

Confidence that you are doing a great work that God has given to you is a powerful thing. People rise to their best that carry a sense of being on a God-appointed mission.

Stay single-minded. Stay focused. Fragmentation is the enemy of achieving those things God has been putting in our hearts.

There are so many things to which we might give ourselves that are not evil; but the question is: do they distract?

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 6:1-14. *(15 minutes)*

How reasonable did Sanballat's appeals seem? _____

What do you think enabled Nehemiah to see through Sanballat's real motives?

If someone had disagreed with Nehemiah's assessment of Sanballat's appeals and had stirred up dissension among the people, what would have happened?

What did Nehemiah have to overcome in order to succeed in this situation?

What emotions do you imagine Nehemiah experienced during this test?

What are the secrets to Nehemiah's success during these attacks? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Ask God for more understanding of the fear of the Lord.

Surrender your fears to the Lord this morning.

Wait on Him. Let Him minister to you.

Pray for His people to pass their tests.

Lesson 16

It is not easy to be a leader, but neither is it easy to be a follower; for both there are tests. Much is required in order for a people to live out God's call into His desired future!

The ability to commit to a vision, to trust the leader, to resist gossip that attempts to divide: all of these are standard tests that a follower must pass in order for the vision to succeed.

It is the vision that threatens the devil, and for this reason he uses his strategies to frighten and discourage. The old saying on the playing field, "keep your eye on the ball," applies to fulfilling a vision.

Scripture Study: Search Nehemiah 6:1-14 for ways in which those who were following Nehemiah might have been tested. List them and apply your insights to your own life situations. *(10 minutes)*

Journal: Write what the Lord seems to be saying to you. *(5 minutes)* _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Count it a joy to serve God in your present circumstances.

Ask God for the wisdom He has promised.

Pray for the leaders God has placed in your life.

Aggressively resist the devil's schemes.

Lesson 17

A vision must be pursued in stages. Fierce resistance goes hand in hand with each phase, but then there is victory and rejoicing as God provides the breakthroughs!

It is the victory that positions the whole community for the next stage, for there will be new opportunities to advance the Kingdom. Then more resistance, too!

Jesus warned His disciples that He would be placing them among wolves while they would feel rather like sheep, defenseless and vulnerable. Vision always includes the “wolf factor.”

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 6:15-19. *(15 minutes)*

The walls had been in ruins for 140 years. What do you think the Jerusalem Jews were thinking and feeling as they realized that they had actually been rebuilt?

In Nehemiah 6:16, why do you think Nehemiah mentioned that the nations were watching?

What is the connection between a God-given vision and the glory of God?

What was the next scheme that Satan orchestrated against God’s people?

Why do you think this particular problem is difficult for leaders to overcome?

How can a Church member help advance God’s interests in the midst of rumors and accusations? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Thank God for some of the wonderful things He has done in your Church!

Worship Him as the God who does miracles!

Use your authority to bind demonic forces that are attacking your Church family.

Declare some of God’s promises over His people!

Lesson 18

Here in Nehemiah 7:1 the gatekeepers, singers and Levites were normally used only within the temple, except for unusual circumstances. Sometimes we have to pitch in and serve even where we aren't particularly gifted. Some things just have to be done!

In Nehemiah 7:2, we can't be sure if one or two men are being described. I prefer to think that Nehemiah is only speaking of his brother with a slight variation of his name.

He was a "faithful man" or "truthful man" or "man of integrity," because he feared God more than most. You can trust the man who truly fears God.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 7:1-3. (15 minutes)

"It's everybody's job to protect the welfare of the worshipping community." How do you see yourself protecting the welfare of your Church family? _____

What do you think it means to fear God? _____

Why do you think the Bible says that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord?

How do you think you can tell if you fear the Lord? _____

When you do not fear the Lord, what types of things tend to happen to you?

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Ask the Holy Spirit to grant you the fear of the Lord.

Recognize the greatness of God vis-à-vis your problems.

Pray for the protection of your Church family!

Thank God for His blessings in your life!

Lesson 19

By Nehemiah 7:4, Jerusalem has leadership, vision, worship, and protection. Now it needs an expanded population, because God's future plans for this strategic city are grand! There is a destiny waiting for the people of God!

In Nehemiah 7:5, there is a phrase that explains how godly leaders know what to do: "Then my God put it into my heart to..." Note that God didn't put this idea into everyone's heart.

In Nehemiah 7:64-65, the Urim and Thummim were special stones used by the high priest to determine the will of God, thus Nehemiah refused to allow this group to function as priests until he had the specific approval from the Lord.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 7:4-73, but obviously you can skim over the extensive genealogies. (*15 minutes*)

It might be said that Nehemiah was concerned with "Church" growth in Nehemiah 7:4, and that God then began to put into his mind a plan. How important to you is the growth of your Church? _____

How might you assist your Church to grow? _____

Nehemiah wanted to be sure that those who would live in Jerusalem were pure in their religious heritage. Why do you think this was important? _____

How might you apply Nehemiah's carefulness to today's Church? _____

In this passage, what do you see in Nehemiah that speaks of discernment, being led by the Spirit and prophecy in today's Church? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Get still before the Lord.

Wait. Listen.

Pray for Jesus to build your local Church.

Ask the Holy Spirit to lead your Church into reaching the lost.

Lesson 20

Nehemiah 7:73b should begin chapter 8. It was the 7th month, the celebration of the Atonement, the festival of the Tabernacles, and the Jewish New Year. Remember that Nehemiah was a political leader and not a priest. Ezra was a priest, and he read the law while the people stood for five or more hours.

Ezra stood on a platform and read a portion. Then the Levites were spread out among the huge crowd, and they would probably both translate the Hebrew into the Aramaic and then apply the meaning to the lives of the people.

Here is a beautiful picture of Old Testament worship!

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 7:73b-8:8. (*15 minutes*)

What role did Scripture play in the life of God's people then, and how does this apply to the Church today? _____

What do you see in the public worship here that might apply to today's Church?

What are your thoughts as you read these fascinating verses? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank God for speaking to you through His written word!

Lift up your hands and bless the Lord this morning!

Bow down and worship the Lord just as the ancient Israelites did.

Ask the Holy Spirit to apply the words of God to your life.

Lesson 21

Nehemiah 8:9 denotes a powerful combination of differing leaders that has important application for today. Nehemiah's leadership gift opened up the ministry of the more pastoral Ezra, and the Levites may be compared to district pastors or cell leaders.

Renewal involves the Spirit anointing the ministry of men who apply the words of God to the people.

Tasting the joy of God's goodness has a way of also making us sensitive to what grieves Him: i.e. our sin. Revival brings both.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 8:9-12. *(15 minutes)*

Paul says that, "the kindness of the Lord leads you to repentance." (Romans 2:4) How has God's goodness led you into the process of repentance? _____

How has Scripture been changing your mind (what repentance is) recently?

Is your relationship with God personal enough that you experience sorrow when you recognize your sins? Can you compare it to hurting your best friend? Comment.

Are you frequently experiencing the joy of the Lord? Comment. _____

Examine John 15:11. What do you think are some of "these things" which cause you to experience the Savior's joy? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Use your faith to identify with Christ as your vine: i.e. your life support.

Draw from Him what you need most today.

Let Him love you this morning.

Thank Him for giving you His joy.

Lesson 22

What a beautiful picture we have in Nehemiah 8:13. We see that a deep hunger for understanding the word of God has been ignited in the heads of the fathers' households, so they are daily meeting with Ezra and the priests and Levites in order to learn!

Revival had surely come to this "Church"! When the heads of households are hungry for God, when the fathers can't get enough of the word of God, things change!

The people were experiencing the joy of the Lord, and obedience to God was coming from men who were excited about God Himself!

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 8:13-18. (*15 minutes*)

What happens to a Church when the men are not hungry for God? _____

Is something comparable to Nehemiah 8:13 happening in your Church? _____

Are there things you could do that might stimulate hunger for the word of God among the heads of fathers' households in your Church? _____

In Nehemiah 8:17, probably what is meant is that the people were celebrating in such joy and passion for God as had not been seen since Joshua's day. How would you evaluate the level of hunger and passion in your Church? _____

Finish this sentence: When people see obedience to the word of God as a source of joy, then _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank God for giving you the ability to trust Him.

Ask Him to bring you into the joy of obedience.

Worship Him as the source of all that you need.

Pray for the men in your Church.

Lesson 23

In Nehemiah 9:1-2 there was a special gathering of repentance, which can be associated with revival. Why would the people grieve now after experiencing such joy? Those who know the goodness of the Lord are most sensitive to offending Him.

Americans know little of identifying with their forefathers; but in Nehemiah, Psalms, and Daniel we see the solidarity of a people in God's eyes. In Exodus 20:5-6 God made it clear that the sins of the fathers would affect the children for generations, in contrast to what happens to the children of those who love God and keep His commandments.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 9:1-5 carefully, and then skim read the rest of the chapter to see the nature of the prayer. (*15 minutes*)

What do you think was the motive of the leadership in this chapter? What did they want to see happen? _____

Use your pen to mark this prayer into segments: (1) praising God as Creator, (2) the covenant with Abraham, (3) the great acts of God in Egypt, (4) the care of God in the desert, (5) Mount Sinai and the desert wandering, (6) the conquering of the Holy Land, (7) the unfaithfulness of Israel and God's patience, and (8) confession of sin.

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Present Christ as your sin offering.

Exchange your guilt for His cleansing.

Thank Him for His faithfulness to you.

Pray for the forgiveness of sin in your Church.

Lesson 24

Your experience of the goodness of God is directly related to your sense of having hurt and offended your God and Father! The Bible calls this godly sorrow that leads us to repentance, and this brings about a personal, fresh taste of being lovingly forgiven by God Himself!

Too often sins are “explained” which aborts the whole experience of repentance and cleansing.

Those who love God with fresh intensity have recently tasted the forgiveness of sin. Don’t “explain” your sins and miss the joy!

Scripture Study: Reread Nehemiah 9. (*15 minutes*)

Why do you think this event was important to Nehemiah in terms of his overall purpose?

What do you think is the connection between revival and realizing that our sins have grieved God? _____

Do you tend to “explain” so that everybody will understand or do you repent to God and experience the power of Christ’s blood atoning for you? Comment.

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Bring your sins to the Savior!

Receive His love for you.

Worship Him for His faithfulness!

Pray for revival of love for God in your Church.

Lesson 25

The gospel of the Kingdom is the most powerful thing on earth. This King suffered the wrath of God in our place, and every time we experience His righteousness being freshly infused into us, we are changed to be more like Him!

In the Old Testament God's people offered lambs to express their need for His cleansing forgiveness, but finally in the New Testament God provided His Lamb: Jesus Christ!

The reason a new Christian is often so joyful is that he has just experienced forgiveness! The reason a mature Christian lives mainly in joy is: he is continuing to experience the power of the gospel through repentance and faith!

Scripture Study: Read Romans 1:16-17. (*10 minutes*)

The word, "salvation," means deliverance or freedom. "Righteousness" means the character of God. Using this understanding, rewrite these two verses in your own words.

Read 1 John 1:9. How can God be considered faithful and righteous or just when He forgives your sin? _____

Why would you not rush to God to receive His love through cleansing on a near daily basis? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Draw close to your Savior this morning.

Become aware of His love for you.

Experience His righteousness as your own.

Ask God to reveal His power in your Church.

Lesson 26

Nehemiah 10 should begin with Nehemiah 9:38 and does so in the Hebrew Bible. The reason Jerusalem had been in ruins was simple: the people were unfaithful to their covenant with God. They were reaping what they sowed.

In Nehemiah 9:38, “making” is actually, “cutting.” Covenants were cut, and blood was shed. It is a covenant renewal that they were signing. In other words, the people were coming back into fellowship with God.

Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls, but protection was, in his mind, only important in-as-much as it helped the people to know God and walk with Him.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 9:38 through chapter 10. (*15 minutes*)

What causes a curse to come? _____

Why was it important that the Jews not give their daughters in marriage to non-Jews? _____

Why was it important for the Jews to not conduct business on the Sabbath? _____

Why was it important that the Jews contribute a set amount to support the actual working of the place of worship? _____

Why was it important that they bring their tithes to the Levites? _____

Comment on how any of these prescriptions might apply to us today. _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Confess that you are in Christ, and that He has kept the covenant for you.

Believe in your heart that He was raised from the dead for you.

Rebuke every spirit of condemnation from your life.

Worship God for His great salvation!

Lesson 27

Nehemiah needed a population in Jerusalem to supply the temple on a daily basis and to guard the gates whereas it was probably better financially to live on the land where they could farm. You can see Nehemiah's wisdom. First, he guarded the food supply so he determined that 9/10 would live on the land. Secondly, he let God choose who would move to the city by having the people cast lots. Good leadership!

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 11. (*15 minutes*)

What specific ministries do you see in the chapter? Name them. _____

It takes good leadership and a people with vision to work together as a team to bring about the transformation of a city. What ministries can you name that help a Church fulfill its vision? _____

What ministries can you think of that take place outside the Church "walls" that are important for changing the city? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Surrender your life afresh for service to the Lord.

Ask the Holy Spirit to anoint you to help fulfill the vision.

Pray for your Church to touch the people of your city.

Pray for the welfare of your Church.

Lesson 28

In Nehemiah 12:24, you see that Nehemiah referenced previous revelation about worship which God established through David as he attempted to adapt to the needs of his own day.

It is our privilege to bring God's revelations into our changing circumstances. Thus change never threatens us; it only energizes creativity. God's principles do not change, but how they are expressed must change.

In Nehemiah 12:44b you will see that the people were proud of their spiritual leaders. This means two things: (1) the spiritual leaders were doing a good job, and (2) the people were placing a high value upon knowing and worshipping God. They wanted to be led!

Scripture Study: Quickly scan the genealogies, but read the verses in Nehemiah 12 that tell the story. *(15 minutes)*

What are some of the aspects of worship that we use today that are seen in this chapter?

Notice that the leader was not the worship leader, yet he had a heart for the all-out, no-holds-barred worship of the Most High God!

What did this type of leadership do for all the talented singers and musicians who had not been used in years? _____

Why do you think it was important to dedicate things such as the wall, the priests, the Levites, and the people to the Lord in an actual ceremony? _____

How do you imagine that this new joy changed Jerusalem? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Thank God for His vision and His call upon your life.

Trust yourself to your Shepherd's leading.

Pray for His vision to bring your Church family into unity and joy.

Worship God because He is so worthy!

Lesson 29

“Blessed are the pure in heart,” declared the Lord Jesus. It is the Father’s desire to bless us with the best, and that means a freedom from compromise.

“Everybody is doing it,” is the plea of children to their parents. There can be pressure to be “practical” which often softens the idea that it might just be compromise.

A leader of anything derives his anointing and his courage from his passion for the glory of God. Leadership is about helping people to refuse to compromise.

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 13:1-14. *(15 minutes)*

What examples of compromise do you see in this passage? _____

What effects do you imagine these compromises had upon the next generation: i.e. the children? _____

What does this passage teach you about the importance of leadership? _____

How do you think leadership affects your life? _____

How might you encourage good leadership where you are? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Ask the Lord to show you if compromise is harming your life.

Submit yourself afresh to Jesus’ leadership.

Submit yourself to the leaders He has given you.

Pray for your leaders that they will fear God.

Lesson 30

Remember that Nehemiah left his position of influence and wealth in the king's court to take on the difficult and dangerous job of leading the people of God into their intended destiny.

After 12 years of work, during which Nehemiah took no salary but instead generously supplied others as a means of restoring a city, a people, and a nation, he returned to Persia.

We do not know how long he was absent, but apparently some years. When he came back, he was shocked to see how unfaithful the people had been; and he took on the unappreciated task of leading God's people out of sin. Let us learn from Nehemiah, for God intends to restore His glory in His Church!

Scripture Study: Read Nehemiah 13:15-31. (*15 minutes*)

What grieved Nehemiah and what did he do to correct the problems? _____

What was Nehemiah's vision? _____

How does Nehemiah's vision speak to you about the vision of your Church to restore God's honor and change your city? _____

What are the obstacles that your Church must overcome in order to fulfill the vision to represent Jesus Christ to your city? _____

How can God use you to help your Church carry out the vision? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Ask God to fill your heart with His vision.

Worship Him as the God of the impossible!

Identify with the sins of your people and repent.

By faith receive God's grace for His people.

Sunday July 31, 2005

Your participating in something God is doing is what gives your life eternal meaning.

What God puts before you to accomplish usually seems impossible. So you need Him. You need Him a lot! And so you, like Nehemiah, turn to Him in prayer.

Nehemiah knew he needed God for wisdom, for favor with people, for God's timing, for courage; and no doubt, he needed God to comfort him and encourage him as well.

Scripture Study: Let's read several passages of Nehemiah praying. *(15 minutes)*

Read Nehemiah 1:3-11. What impresses you about this prayer? _____

Is there something here that could help you to pray? Comment. _____

Read Nehemiah 2:4. How does Nehemiah's quickie prayer apply to your life?

Read Nehemiah 4:4. How might this warfare prayer be useful in your own life?

Read Nehemiah 4:9. Apply this picture of using both prayer and action in fulfilling the vision, to your life situation. _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Wait on the Lord this morning.

Delight yourself in Him.

By faith receive His thoughts into your thoughts.

Ask God to bless the prayer lives of your people.