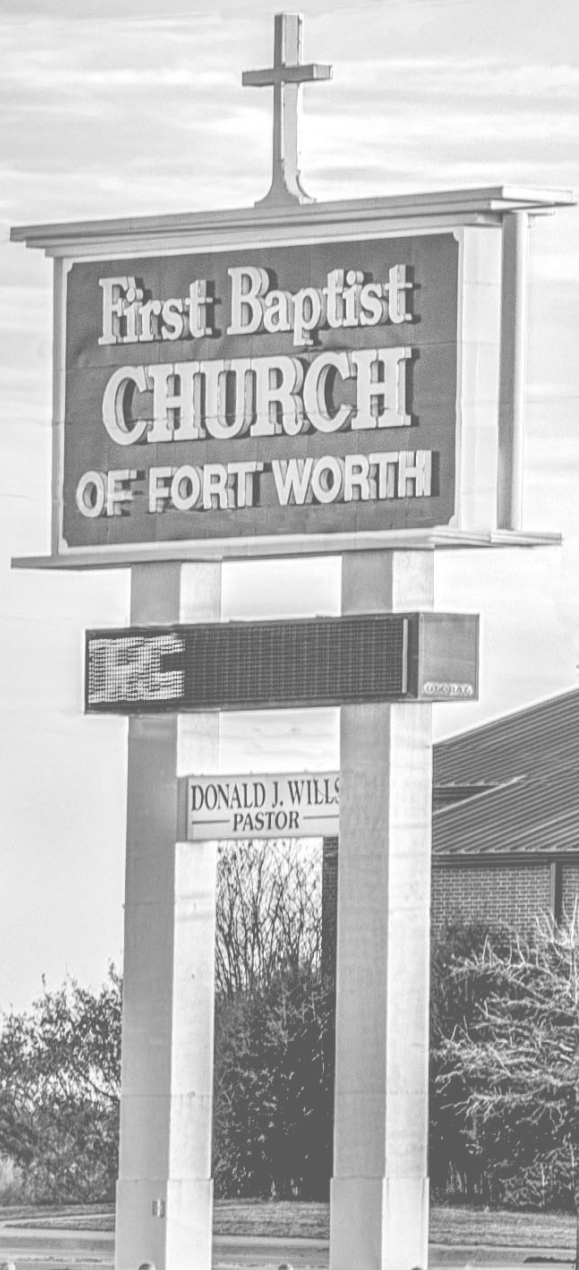
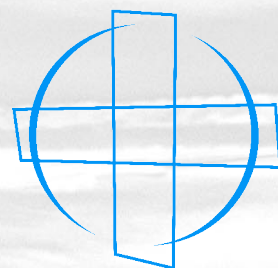


SEPTEMBER  
2024

Donald J. Wills  
*Senior Pastor*

# CONQUER



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

## A Note From Our Pastor

There is a saying, “Conquer or be Conquered.” Certainly, the enemy throws many challenging events at us in life to which we could succumb if it were not for our faith in Whom we have believed. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:8: “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” The pre-text to this statement is that there is a treasure in these earthen vessels that we reside in; that treasure is the indwelling power of God. Through His power at work in us, we are His dwelling presence and, no matter what life may hold for us, we are not destroyed. We are not conquered by the enemy, but we are “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God’s Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

As we dive into this study of Daniel, we find that he was faced with all types of adversity. Yet, through it all, he remained faithful and committed to his faith in God. He believed at every challenge God is faithful and will see him through. Our comfort is in knowing He will do the same for us and that we are truly more than conquerors.

Blessings,

Pastor Don Wills



## *Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively*

### *Introduce*

**Day 1:** Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Instruct*

**Day 2:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

**Day 3:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Inspire*

**Day 4:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Incorporate*

**Day 5:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

**Day 6:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

**Day 7:** Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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*September 1, 2024*



*Conquering  
Collectively*  
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Focal Verse:

“Beyond the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house.”

Nehemiah 3:28

## Introduce

For the most part, our society has a fascination with sports. If that's not you, please indulge this illustration for a moment. Most of the more popular sports are team-oriented rather than individually-focused: football, baseball, basketball, ice hockey, and soccer. As a society, however, we tend to focus on just one or two star athletes with gifted skills and the knack for dominating a game. Even when a team makes it to the finals and wins a championship, we still focus our attention on the team's "most valuable player." The crowd will cheer wildly for that player with chants of M-V-P. News and social media outlets will feature that player almost to the exclusion of anyone else on the team. That single player becomes the face of the franchise. While that player does have exceptional talent and unparalleled skill, it takes *every* member of the team doing his or her part to win.

Regardless of the type of sport or even the exceptional abilities of the athletes, they will not succeed if they do not work together as a team. Since football is king here in Texas, think of the former talent that we had at running back, quarterback, and wide receiver in Dallas during the mid 90s. As talented as some of



these individuals were, it took all eleven men on the field working together to win. Imagine for example, if the offensive line did not effectively block defensive players from penetrating what would happen. While by sheer luck, the ball might advance down the field at times, defensive players running free could sack the quarterback and stop the rush (run) with ease. Certainly, the quarterback must have a strong arm and be able to throw accurately and the running back must possess speed and be able to maneuver, but working with a good offensive line made them even better. Without a good offensive line, even the best athlete would struggle.

But even then, having a good offense is still not enough to win although it may help. They must also be able to stop the other team from scoring! Therefore, teams need another eleven players to play good defense. Although the old moniker states

## Introduce

that “defense wins championships,” a team still requires a proficient offense. If they can’t score, a team won’t win; if they can’t keep the other team from scoring, a team won’t win. They can’t have one without the other. They need both! All twenty-two players must work together fulfilling their role and doing their individual part to propel the team to victory collectively. Even though a single star player may significantly increase the odds of a team winning, he can’t do it by himself. It requires every player on the roster to do his part!

When it finally came time to start building the wall during Nehemiah’s day, everyone needed to do his or her part. To be successful, it required everyone to contribute. The builders included people from all occupations, all economic backgrounds, and all social standings. Nehemiah needed everyone to conquer this test collectively as the people of God. Today, God has called us to do the same as His church. He has called us to conquer collectively—to work together as His people to advance His kingdom through the gospel. It takes us all to accomplish this ambitious goal! God wants us all working together in unity for the purpose of glorifying Him.

Key  
Question

How effectively do you do your part in working collectively through the church to advance the gospel?



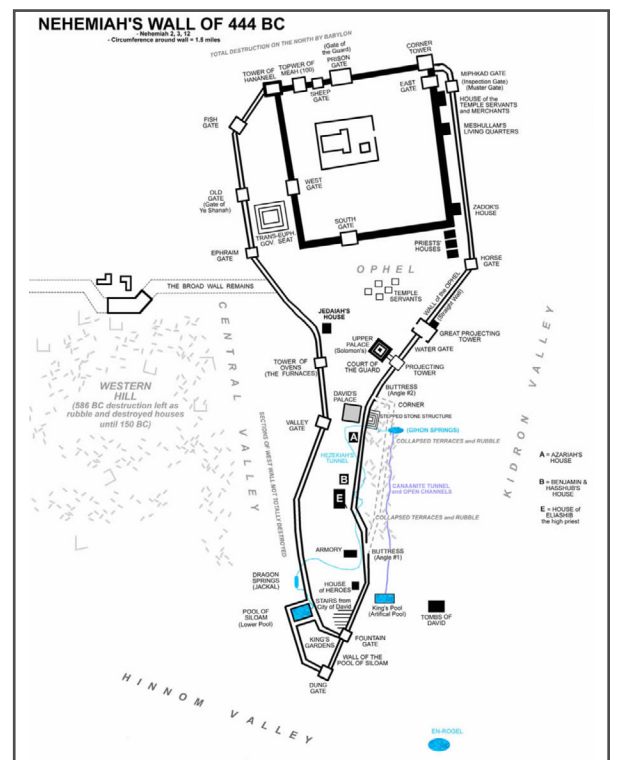
Nehemiah 3:1

**DEDICATE YOURSELF TO SERVICE:**

After Nehemiah formulated a plan and presented it to the people who enthusiastically agreed to participate, the work on the wall appears to have commenced almost immediately despite the public opposition expressed by Sanballat and Tobiah ([Neh 2:20](#)). Chapter 3, therefore, contains a historical account of how the community united to complete this massive project. Dividing the work into approximately forty segments, Nehemiah delegated the responsibility for building each section to a different group from within the Jewish community. This chapter lists the names of the group leaders and identifies the specific segment on which each labored.

Archaeologically and historically, we may have little information as to the exact location of many of the landmarks mentioned along the wall or even the identity of some of the people who contributed to its construction, but it nonetheless still shows us how God worked through His people to accomplish such a monumental feat. Consequently, it remains prudent for us to study historical chapters such as these which we may have the tendency to overlook; from them, we can still find principles applicable for us today as we serve the Lord collectively as His church in the twenty-first century.

Nehemiah assigned the first segment of the wall to **the high priest, Eliashib**—the grandson of Jeshua whom God had utilized in the rebuilding of the temple during the time of Ezra ([Ezra 5:2](#)). Along with **the priests** directly under his charge, they constructed the portion of the wall from **the Sheep Gate to the Tower of the Hundred** and **the Tower of Hananel**. While we don't know the exact location of these two towers from archaeology, we do know **the Sheep Gate** was located on the northeast side of the city near the Pool of Bethesda in the temple area (see [John 5:2](#)). The two aforementioned towers would have provided additional protection for an area not naturally defended by a hillside while



the **gate** would have given access to import animals into the temple for sacrifice. Thus, the **gate** received its name because a market for sacrificial lambs would have been located there. In all, the group rebuilt **the gate** (i.e., **hung the doors**) along with the walls and its fortifications.

Not only did this group led by **the high priest** rebuild this portion, but they also **consecrated** or dedicated it upon its completion. They **hung the gate** and **consecrated** it; they built their section of the wall and then subsequently **consecrated** it. In biblical terms, to consecrate means to dedicate or set something apart for God's use and glory. Normally, in antiquity just like today, such dedication ceremonies occur upon the completion of the project. Today, we hold ribbon-cutting ceremonies where officials give speeches outlining the purposes and goals of the new facility as well as thanking those who participated in the construction. At the conclusion of the project, Nehemiah once again led the nation to dedicate the wall to the glory of the Lord and give Him thanks for allowing its expeditious completion ([Neh 12:27-43](#)).

Breaking from the norm, however, **the high priest** dedicated this portion of the wall before any of the others had completed theirs. This was an intentional act—not done out of ambition or arrogance—but to inspire the people and remind them of the divine origin of their task. God had called them to rebuild the wall for His glory. This dedication ceremony would indeed remind the people to look to the Lord for their source of strength to endure any challenge that may arise, for opposition and obstacles would inevitably come. We still do something similar to this today where people dedicate themselves and their work to the Lord as a project begins.

During the Youth Mission Trip to Oklahoma City, we assisted a local church plant with renovating part of its facility by painting a second-floor meeting space. Before work began, the pastor invited us to write a Scripture or encouraging message on the wall to commemorate our participation. Obviously, the paint covered the words, but it still beautifully pictured why we had come by highlighting our service to the Lord and our partnership with His people—for we all worked together on this task for God's glory. Consequently, it also reminded us that we had a larger purpose than just painting—something some many consider menial work; we dedicated ourselves to honor the Lord and reach the world with the gospel.

**The high priest** and **priests** working together on their portion of the wall also provided an example for the people to follow. Certainly, God had tasked **the priests**

to teach Scripture and perform the required religious duties, but He also called them to lead by example. They weren't just to bark orders about the commandments; they were also to follow them as an example for the people. As a result, they should obey whatever God had called them to do without hesitation or complaint. If God had truly called them, they should see no task as too menial. In the twenty-first century, we tend to categorize our work into two broad types: blue-collar jobs (i.e., manual labor) and white-collar jobs (i.e., executive or overseer). Often, those in white-collar positions regard certain tasks as too menial for them to do, so they refuse or even more likely assign them to one of their subordinates. Here in Nehemiah, however, God asked all people regardless of their stature in the community, their education level, their economic standing, or their career choice to work together to build the wall.



The joint-effort to build the wall provides a good example of servant-leadership. God has specifically placed us in the church to work together irrespective of our backgrounds and positions. Although we do have different roles and gifts ([Eph 4:7-16](#)), we participate in the same task having the same purpose and goals ([Eph 4:1-6](#)). We must put anything aside that would hinder working together collectively and be willing to do even the little things to ensure success. We must work in the trenches united together as one people. Certainly, we need supervisors to oversee the work, make decisions, and delegate responsibility to others. But like **the high priest**, leaders also work alongside everyone else—not just barking orders or making demands. Therefore, servant-leaders must also be willing to do what they ask others to do. They must set an example for others to follow!

Unfortunately, many in the church have given themselves over to the same mindset that affects our culture. Many will say, "It's not *my* job. It's not *my* responsibility." They pass the buck rather than take the initiative, so work progresses slowly or even grinds to a halt. The tasks to which God has called us may be behind-the-scenes;

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they may not be “glorious” or “exciting.” We may not receive recognition or thanks. But nonetheless God still expects us to do them for His glory. We must remind ourselves that everything we do should serve the purpose of honoring Him and reaching people with the gospel.

As a church, we must do whatever it takes to minister—whether leader or laity. Rather than pointing out or complaining about something being untidy in the church or trash on the ground, take the initiative to clean it. Rather than pointing out or complaining about the perceived lack of visitation or outreach, take the initiative to visit and share the gospel yourself. Rather than pointing out or complaining about a particular area lacking people to serve, volunteer to serve and work together. If God brings something to your attention, perhaps He wants you to notice so that you can participate in doing something about it. Yet, we must remember, that such an invitation to participate does not mean we can venture out on our own and do whatever we want. We must still work within the structure which God has ordained in His local church so that we maintain focus on the purpose to which He has called us. Even though each group worked on their own assignment to rebuild the wall, they still did so under the direction of Nehemiah. While we need to work together as a church, we need to do so under the direction of the leadership that God has put into place.

Question  
# 1

How are you working together with others in this church to ensure that we fulfill the ministry which God has given us?

### *Nehemiah 3:2-8*

#### **DETERMINE TO WORK COLLECTIVELY:**

The next few verses continue giving the specific assignments for the groups collectively rebuilding the wall. In a way, this chapter functions like a modern cornerstone on a building. Generally, more elaborate cornerstones list more than just the name of the organization and date of construction. They commemorate those involved throughout the entire process; this often includes the name of donors who financed the project, architects, contractors, and the leaders who envisioned the project and brought it to fruition. Here, in Nehemiah 3, we find a record of all the groups involved in the construction along with the names of the individual leaders who oversaw the rebuilding of the wall.

As years separate us from the period of construction, however, we may begin to forget these individuals especially when we don't have any direct connection to them. Names on a plaque somewhere on the corner of a building simply don't have much significance to us. Most of us wouldn't even take time to read through such a list of names on a cornerstone; we would just use the facility—the fruit of their labor—without giving it a second thought. Yet, these groups and names of individuals serve a greater purpose than we may realize—particularly when it comes to kingdom work which God has ordained. These names remind us of the work that God has done through His people at a specific time in history, overcoming numerous obstacles and challenges to accomplish something grand! Therefore, it should inspire us to serve the Lord wholeheartedly and allow Him to accomplish something grand through us as He so chooses. But this obviously requires that every one of us join in His work together!

"having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,"

Ephesians 2 :20-21

Question  
# 2

If future generations saw your name on a plaque somewhere, for what would you want them to remember you? What would your inspirational message to them be?

In 3:1-15, Nehemiah primarily subdivided these sections of wall by using the various gates as reference points rather than the buildings or structures close to them as he did after verse 16. As such, it seems that this portion of the wall closely followed its original path. Similar to the survey that he had conducted at night, Nehemiah proceeded counterclockwise in listing the assignments, but this time starting in the north and moving from east to west before turning south. Having already mentioned **the priests** who served as an example for the citizens to emulate, Nehemiah now noted that the citizens **of Jericho** worked next to **Eliashib** and next to them **Zaccur the son of Imri** (v. 2; see [Neh 10:12](#)). Unfortunately, we know very little about many of

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the individuals in this list because their names are common to the period, like Bob, Ann, or John today, and we have no other biblical references citing them.

Interestingly from this grouping, however, we see people coming from considerable distances to participate in the project. **Jericho** was around eighteen miles east of Jerusalem. This would be like the citizens of Arlington coming to help with a public works project in Fort Worth! When people collectively join together in God's work, the need becomes greater than the distance. Moreover, the people of **Jericho** didn't benefit directly from this project either—or at least not as much as the citizens of Jerusalem—except to have their capital repaired. Even though they did not reside in or near the city, they still endured many challenges, including intense opposition from local leadership; yet, they set aside any potential cost to them in order to help their struggling brethren.

Throughout Scripture, we see the people of God as a whole partnering together to help one another no matter the distance and often at a great cost to them. In the New Testament era, for example, Paul collected an offering from areas near modern-day Greece to provide famine relief for the church in Jerusalem ([1 Cor 16:1-4](#); [2 Cor 8:1-9:15](#)). In fact, Paul described how these churches gave generously despite “a great trial of affliction” and from “their deep poverty” ([2 Cor 8:2](#)). As a church, we too have a track record of partnering with others since 1867 to do the work of the Lord. Since we have a long biblical history of partnership amongst God's people, we as a church ought to continue to partner with others of like faith to accomplish God's comprehensive plan to reach the world with the gospel.

Question  
# 3

In what specific ways can we partner with like-minded fellow believers, regardless of distance?

Proceeding further west, **the sons of Hassenaah** reconstructed **the Fish Gate** which formerly accommodated a seafood market (v. 3). In antiquity, gates served a multi-purpose role besides just offering protection. At the gates, city leaders conducted civic business, the judicial system held trials, and merchants had their markets. Gates, therefore, played a crucial role in city life. In addition to the family headed by **Hassenaah**, we find three other individual families tasked with working together to make **repairs** on this portion of the wall; Nehemiah identifies these families by the names of their respective patriarchs: **Meremoth**, **Meshullam**, and **Zadok** (v. 4). The

word translated **made repairs** literally means to make firm or strong. In our modern understanding, we could say they “shored up” the foundation of the walls—that is they **made structural repairs**. Instead of building a completely new structure, they repaired or strengthened the existing foundation in addition to repairing any holes.

Once again, we know very little about these individuals. **Meremoth**, for example, served as a priest and treasurer under Ezra during the reconstruction of the temple ([Ezra 8:33-34](#)). Both **Meshullam** and **Zadok**, however, have common names not only in this period, but throughout the Old Testament as a whole, so we cannot know their background with certainty. In fact, we find two men sharing the name **Meshullam** (vv. 4, 6, 30) and another two the name **Zadok** (vv. 4, 29) in this same chapter! What significance do these names have for us then? These men, and many others like them, represent their families who worked together on their section of the wall. This demonstrates that God designed His people to function as a family serving together in unity to achieve His collective purpose.



In verse 3, for example, we learned Hassenah's **sons** rebuilt **the Fish Gate** while in verse 12 that **Shallum** and **his daughters made repairs** on their assigned portion. Everyone participated as God gave them opportunity! Although we don't know the exact ages or even the names of the individual family members who worked on the wall, it still indicates how God wants us to work together as a family to serve Him. God wants the church to function in this same way today. We should serve together as a family to accomplish God's purpose through the church! Having segregated activities according to age and life-stage has tremendous benefit, but from time to time we need service projects in which the whole family can participate together to worship the Lord. Unfortunately, we frequently see ourselves as “too busy” to serve outside of our normal routine and often use “family,” especially children, to excuse our lack of involvement.

However, families serving together strengthen the church! Certainly, we ought to

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design age-appropriate service-oriented tasks, but it is never too early to start teaching children to serve and modeling service for them. Rather than using children as an excuse not to serve or participate, bring them with you no matter the “inconvenience” it may seem. Above anything else, it sets an example for them to follow and teaches them the value of serving the Lord. If appropriate, allow them to participate in the activity at some level. They may make mistakes. They may seem underfoot, burdensome, or distracting. They may have a short attention span and quickly lose interest. But they need the experience of serving together with their family! It will impact their lives by laying a good foundation for their future.

Question  
# 4

What do you do together as a family to serve the Lord?

People from **Tekoa**, a pastoral region known for its shepherds about twelve miles south of Jerusalem, rebuilt the next portion of the wall (v. 5). The eighth century prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Amos, hailed from this region ([Amos 1:1](#)). Although the people worked diligently, their **nobles** refused. Literally, the text reads that they **did not put their** necks under **the work of the Lord**. The reference to necks, or **shoulders** as some versions translate it, pictures a yoke or harness used on oxen. Like a raging bull or wild horse refusing to put on a harness to pull a plow, these nobles refused to surrender themselves under the Lord’s authority who had called all His people to share in the task of rebuilding this wall! The text does not reveal why they refused to work. Perhaps, they thought it beneath them to perform manual labor, but perhaps even more likely they feared “Geshem the Arab” who had his oppressive thumb on that region ([Neh 2:19](#)). No matter the reason, they still dishonored the Lord by refusing to work.

Even though we cannot say with certainty why these **nobles**



refused to serve alongside everyone else, it does demonstrate the need for us to have



the right perspective about serving. First, we should serve because we love the Lord and want to show our devotion to Him. When we have this perspective, no obstacle will stand in the way; we won't base our participation on what others may think or even what they might do. We will then rise to meet any challenge, whether physical or mental, as God gives us strength. Second, we should also serve because we want to glorify the Lord who has so richly blessed us with life. Whether we serve should never be based on any perceived advantage or disadvantage in social standing or any other tangible benefit that we might seek. We should never consider any task to which God has called us as too menial or beneath us nor should we serve simply to gain honor in the eyes of the community for doing a good deed. We should obediently serve our heavenly Father because He has called us to do so!

*"whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."*

2 Corinthians 4:4

Question  
# 5

How does the world generally view "serving" from a self-centered perspective? How do you honestly view your service?

**Jehoiada** and another man by the name of **Meshullam repaired** the portion of the wall around **the Old Gate** on the northwest side of the city (v. 6). At this point, Nehemiah breaks from discussing the repair of the wall and turns his attention toward the repair of the governor's **residence**—perhaps the very **residence** he himself used while visiting the region and for which he had also requested lumber to rebuild (v. 7; see [Neh 2:8](#)). Nehemiah assigned this task to **the men of Gibeon and Mizpah** under the direction of **Melatiah**. During the time of Joshua, the people of **Gibeon** tricked Israel's leadership into making a treaty with them rather than expelling them from the land as God had specified ([Josh 9-11](#)). However, by the end of the conquest in Joshua, both **Gibeon** ([Josh 18:25; 21:17](#)) and **Mizpah** ([Josh 18:26](#)) had become Israelite cities where members of the tribe of Benjamin had settled. On the face of it, this project to

repair the governor's residence appears unconnected and, perhaps, even unnecessary since it affords no protection to the citizens. Yet, it serves to remind us that as God's people we must be willing to take on any project to which God has called us—even if we might not see how it fits into the bigger picture with what He is doing at the moment. Although what God might ask us to do at times might seem out of place and unrelated to the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we must continue to trust in His plan and to do our part by fulfilling the specific task to which He has called us. Once we complete the task and we begin to look back, however, we will often see how God was working among His people, connecting both projects to an even bigger purpose for His glory.

Question  
# 6

At what times in your life have you wondered why God has called you to do a specific task only to find out after completing it how it fit into His bigger plan?

After this brief interlude, Nehemiah returns to the work on the wall. Instead of focusing on the lineage of the two men who worked on this section, he specifically mentions their occupations! **Uzziel** was a **goldsmith** and **Hananiah** made and sold perfumes (v. 8). Together, they **fortified** the wall around the western side of the city down to **the Broad Wall** in the southwest corner. Later, in verses 31-32, Nehemiah again mentions another **goldsmith** by the name of **Malchijah** who repaired the wall around the temple complex, completing the entire circumference back to the **Sheep Gate** where construction began. Malchijah's work spanned from the housing of the temple servants (i.e., **Nethinim**) and **merchants** to the Inspection (i.e., **Miphkad**) **Gate** where the temple guard would have assembled for official review. The **merchants** also joined the goldsmiths to help revitalize this portion of the wall (v. 32)!

We may gloss over a seemingly insignificant detail such as their occupations because we have no personal connection to these men, but really it has importance for the church today. People from diverse backgrounds and careers came together to work on this ambitious project. Everyone contributed according to the skills he or she had! Likewise, each one of us has a place of service in the church. Everyone has a God-ordained purpose. Each one of us must use our abilities, skills, knowledge, talents, and gifts that God has given us to supplement His work through the church. Irrespective of our background or skills, we can utilize any career to serve the Lord and spread

the gospel whether we are in manufacturing, service-related industries, education, finance, technology, or career it may be. For God to use us, we must humbly make ourselves available; our availability and willingness matter to the Lord—not our occupations!

Question  
# 7

How do you use your career, especially the talents and abilities that God has given you, to serve the Lord through the local church?

### *Nehemiah 3:9-32*

#### **DECIDE TO DO YOUR PART:**

To divide the text at verse 9 may seem like an arbitrary distinction and truly it is, but it will help us get through this vast list of names more efficiently because we can generally group them into two broad categories after this verse: 1) political leaders working side by side with their constituents (vv. 9, 12, 14-19) and 2) individual families making repairs in front of their own houses (vv. 10, 23-24, 28-30). Verses 9 and 12, for instance, introduce us respectively to **Rephaiah** and his counterpart **Shallum** who each oversaw half the district of Jerusalem. Unlike the nobles from Tekoa, these two prominent political figures willingly joined the work! These politicians could have merely given the order to those under their authority to work on the wall on their behalf. But they didn't shirk their own personal responsibility. They did their own part! To borrow a modern expression, these two bureaucrats rolled up their sleeves and worked alongside everyone else—perhaps an unusual sight then just as much as it would be now!

**Rephaiah** and **Shallum** stand in a long line of political leaders who worked along with their constituents on this southwestern section. **Malchijah**,

**leader of Beth Hacrem**—a district unknown by archaeology—**repaired the Refuse Gate** on the southern side of the city giving access to the Valley of Hinnom (v. 14).



**Shallun, leader of the district of Mizpah** to the northwest of Jerusalem, **repaired the Fountain Gate** on the southwest side of the city along with the section of wall from the Pool of Siloam (**Shelah**) to **the King's Garden** around to the stairs that led down the eastern slope into the old **city** during the time of David (v. 15). A second man by the name **Nehemiah**—not the author of this book, but a **leader of the district Beth Zur** to the south—repaired the wall from a **man-made pool** to a barracks called the **House of the Mighty** (v. 16).

Additionally, two leaders from the **Keilah district** southwest of Jerusalem—a Levite by the name of **Hashabiah** and **Binnui**—also worked on this portion of wall (vv. 17b, 18). Another **leader** from Mizpah named **Ezer** rebuilt the section from the **armory** up to a sharp **corner** that served as a distinct boundary marker (v. 19). Here, the text explicitly states that they “**repaired another section.**” In Hebrew, this can imply that once the group finished with their section of the wall that they began repairing another. In other words, they worked until the job was done! They didn't just do their part, clock out, and go home. They continued to work on the next section of the wall until they finished.

However, many today don't see the big picture when it comes to working together. They have their “job description” and once they perceive they have done their “duty” they clock out and go home. God has not called us to serve together in this way in the church! We must do whatever it takes; we must stay until the job is done. Although we must have balance between ministry and caring for ourselves by getting the proper rest, our service to the Lord requires that we devote ourselves to Him. When we devote ourselves to Him, we will do whatever it takes to complete the project. Rather than standing around and waiting, we will find a new way to help. This may mean we begin something totally new in line with the mission and scope of the project or help those who need assistance with their portion.



For example, envision having activities in a park that serve as both fellowship and an opportunity for outreach. Like Nehemiah, we generally delegate different tasks to people to ensure both the set-up and the activity go smoothly. One group might set up tables and chairs. Another group might cook or organize refreshments and snacks. Another group may set up audio-visual equipment and so forth. Once we do our part, what do we have the tendency to do? Some may ask what else needs to be done. Others, however, will stand and talk without ever looking around to see what comes next. While building community through fellowship is important, we cannot become so consumed with just our part that we miss the bigger picture to which God has called us to fulfill in the Great Commission. If everything appears “done” with set up and organization, find ways to engage people in the park. Move on to the next task to complete the mission that God has given us. Don’t just do your “job,” check out, and become disengaged! Continually look around to see what God would have you do next!

Question  
# 8

How motivated are you to look around and see what you could do next?

In addition to these political leaders, individual families also worked on sections of wall near or in front of their homes. In fact, verse 28 specifies that **each one made repairs in front of his own house**. The other verses that we will address in this section may use slightly different wording than this, but with the same meaning. **Jedaiah** worked on the portion of the wall near the area where some **ovens** or kilns were located, perhaps for either baking or pottery, but it was **near his house** (vv. 10-11). **Hattush**, another man by the name **Malchijah**, and **Hashub**, perhaps also neighbors, joined **Jedaiah** in the repairs. In verses 23-24 and again in verses 28-30, these families also repaired the section of the walls directly in front of their homes: **Benjamin**, **Hasshub**, **Azariah**, **Zadok**, and **Meshullam**. Collectively, the priests also made repairs in front of their own homes as well. Each family did their own part to contribute.

Even though these families would benefit directly from the protection the wall would afford them, they still had to participate collectively. It wouldn’t work if even just one family decided not to take responsibility for their section. It would leave a gaping hole in the wall through which enemy combatants could easily pass. Today, some might try excusing a family’s lack of participation by arguing they don’t have the

resources or manpower that other families have. They might excuse it by claiming to be going through a difficult time, so they just don't have the time and energy to take on such a project. Or they may simply state that they are too busy. They may reasonably try to justify these excuses by saying that others will pick up the slack. Even during these tenuous and challenging times in the fifth century BC, these people didn't make excuses—though they could have plausibly had many. They each did their own part individually, but at the same time they still worked collectively for the greater purpose of the Lord.

In the same way, God expects us to work collectively today as a community to accomplish the greater purpose for which He has called us. He has given every individual in the church who has a relationship with Him a spiritual gift to use in service for Him. Just as when Israel rebuilt this wall, God has supplied us with everything—both physical and human resources—we would ever need to accomplish His will. We must simply take the initiative and join together in His mighty work. If everyone does his or her own part, together we can do great things for the Lord as He enables us. If even one person fails to take responsibility and does not do his or her own part, however, it leaves a great void and puts enormous strain upon the others serving collectively. Yet, if one person or group fails, like the Tekoan nobles, it doesn't mean that God's plan will fail. Rather, it will continue undaunted and these individuals will miss out on the joy and freedom that working together collectively as God's people brings for those who participate. Let us, therefore, learn from the people rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem here in the fifth century BC and devote ourselves to fulfilling God's plan collectively as His people in the church today.



Question  
# 9

In what ways has participating in a service project collectively as God's people in the church brought you joy?

In the introduction, we saw how a team must work together to achieve victory. While star players draw much of the attention, it really requires every member of the team working collectively to have success. This principle applies to every area of life; however, many people still find it difficult to work together cohesively as a group. Some, even perhaps with good intentions, dominate the group. They do all the work themselves; they don't delegate to others and allow them to contribute. Although we need leaders to oversee a project, good leaders, like Nehemiah, will delegate tasks and involve others. In contrast to the ones who take over the group, some will refuse to lift a finger to help. They will sit back, goof off, and let others do all the work—and then take credit for the final outcome. Neither one of these actions or attitudes constitutes an effective way to work together as a group! Although the job may somehow get done, perhaps even satisfactorily according to the specifications, each member did not contribute equally. Each person should do his or her own part. God wants us to share in the responsibility, working together as His church to glorify Him and accomplish the purpose for which He has called us.

## *Incorporate*

How would you describe the purpose for which God has called this church specifically?  
How would you honestly evaluate your participation in that purpose or mission?

Do you find it easy or difficult to serve with others in the church? Why?

What responsibility or role has God given you in this church to accomplish His purpose? How well are you fulfilling that role collectively with others? What fruit do you see in that area of service?



*September 8, 2024*



# *Conquering Conflict*

## *Nehemiah 4:1-23*

Focal Verse:

"Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

Nehemiah 4:20

In January 1938 as the threat of war on the British isle became increasingly more likely, their Parliament established the Auxiliary Fire Service (henceforth AFS) to supplement the nation's local, but loosely connected fire brigades. Initially, they sought 28,000 reservists who would serve at a moment's notice to support those in full-time firefighting work nation-wide; however, this number would balloon to many more thousands by the end of the war. With the prospect of war imminent, the UK had conscripted nearly all their fighting-age young men to serve in their armed forces. So, many women along with men considered either too young or too old to fight nobly and dutifully volunteered for this daunting task. The AFS then stationed these volunteers throughout the country in brigades strategically located in key industrial areas, neighborhoods, and schools.

At that time, because London had a large number of buildings with a timber-framed construction and its many industrial areas housed highly flammable materials, the city was highly susceptible to fire. The Germans used this fact to their advantage when the Blitz began on September 7, 1940. Before dropping their initial payload of bombs during their nightly air raids, the *Luftwaffe* would drop hundreds of incendiary devices to start fires in nearly every district of the city. These fires would not only illuminate the targets they intended to bomb, but they also served to inflict major damage on the city and divert precious resources as the fires raged out of control destroying block after block. In all, the London Blitz continued fifty-seven straight nights and ignited over 10,000 fires in the first three weeks alone.

These volunteer firefighters for the AFS worked side-by-side with full-time firefighters throughout metropolitan London in extremely challenging conditions. Not only did they have to deal with the intense heat of chemical fires and collapsing structures, but they also had to dodge bombs from the *Luftwaffe*. Accounts from volunteers describe a chaotic scene, recalling how police and ambulance workers also moved frantically throughout the rubble-strewn streets attending to their duties when they all would momentarily pause to find whatever cover they could as they heard the distinct whistle of a bomb approaching. After the explosion, they would immediately refocus on the task at hand and return to business. In addition to the physical danger posed by war, the AFS also had to overcome hurdles with their equipment because no standard hoses or nozzles existed since each brigade was organized and controlled locally. As the war progressed, materials became scarcer so

## Introduce

they began outfitting many ordinary vehicles to aid in fighting the fires.

By December 1940, the situation had become so dire that Britain needed to organize nightly patrols in every commercial and industrial district to watch for fires so that they could squelch them immediately. So, it became compulsory that every citizen between the ages of sixteen and sixty serve forty-eight hours a month. As the Nazis became more desperate to make headway in the Blitz, they wanted to send a message to the British people by destroying famed landmarks like St. Paul's Cathedral. However, fearless volunteers worked night after night to extinguish hundreds of fires started in the wooden rafters supporting its massive dome as these incendiary bombs showered the area. By attempting to cause so much devastation and heartache, the Germans hoped that it would break the people's spirit. Instead of discouraging the British people, however, it gave them all the more resolve to fight and defend their homeland from invasion!

With work on Jerusalem's wall proceeding, Nehemiah and the people experienced a blitz of their own. Sanballat organized a coalition to break their spirit and put a stop to their project. At first, he tried to dissuade them with mockery and veiled threats, but then it seemingly escalated to force. Along with the surrounding nations, Sanballat would do whatever it took to stop this project. Although this caused angst amongst some of the Jewish people, it did not distract Nehemiah who knew this calling had come from the Lord who would see this project to its completion. Boldly and wisely, Nehemiah outfitted the workers with weapons, formed a patrol, and prepared the community for battle. Under God's direction, this savvy leader had a plan to conquer conflict. Like Nehemiah, we also need a plan to conquer conflict and keep focused on the Lord.

Key  
Question

When conflict has arisen in your life, what plan did you have to conquer it?

## In Reference



For more information on the Auxiliary Fire Service, see "Fire Fighters of the Second World War," available from [london-fire.gov.uk](http://london-fire.gov.uk) (accessed August 1, 2024); and "Fact File: Fire Duty," available from [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) (accessed August 1, 2024).

## Nehemiah 4:1-6

### **THE SUPPLICATION MADE:**

With workers making substantial progress on the wall, opposition now began to intensify as news spread throughout the region. To the degree that the people served the Lord with fervor, enthusiasm, and joy, the secular leaders surrounding Jerusalem grew even angrier and more frustrated that the Jewish people would dare to rebuild **the wall** (v. 1). **Sanballat** led this charge as the text reports that he became **furious and very indignant and mocked the Jews** when he **heard** about the project. In 2:10, Nehemiah previously referred to **Sanballat** as the Horonite—likely indicating that he lived in Beth-horon northwest of Jerusalem where he served as governor over Samaria as secular records also confirm. In Akkadian, the name Sanballat means “Sin (a Babylonian god) gave life.” Nonetheless, we cannot tell much about Sanballat’s actual heritage since some Jews, like Daniel and his friends, received Babylonian names too ([Dan 1:7](#)).

Likely, **Sanballat** would have had at least some Jewish ancestry through intermarriage since some of the Jews who remained in the land married people from surrounding secular cultures—a practice that later created animosity between the Jews and Samaritans. Although God had forbidden such intermarriage at the time He gave the law to Moses because it would lead to idolatry ([Deut 7:1-5](#)), it became an even greater issue during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah ([Ezra 9](#); [Neh 13:23-31](#)). Even if **Sanballat** had some Jewish heritage and claimed to worship Yahweh in some fashion, he certainly did not worship Him exclusively and, by his own actions, engaged in blasphemy directly against Him. Thus, he had no personal relationship with the Lord whatsoever, leading Nehemiah rightly to exclaim that he has “no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem” ([Neh 2:20](#)).



In his rage, **Sanballat** spewed a torrent of rhetorical questions designed to both

threaten and discourage the people of Jerusalem against proceeding with their project. He intended the first two questions to plant a seed of doubt in the people's mind that they even had the strength to undertake such a task. Speaking before a group of his fellow citizens from Samaria in addition to members of the local militia who had assembled as a show of force before the Jews, **Sanballat** posed two related questions: 1) **What are these feeble Jews doing?** and 2) **Will they fortify themselves** (v. 2)? Using the derogatory epithet "**these Jews**," he depicted them as a **feeble** people who lacked the size, skill, and strength to complete the project. The second question, therefore, actually then casts doubt that they would even be able to rebuild (i.e., **fortify**) the wall given all their inadequacies as a people!

Question  
# 1

In what ways does our enemy plant doubt in our minds to distract our service to the Lord?

Because of their perceived lack of population size and military strength as compared to the other nations at the time, the children of Israel often lived in self-doubt. Rather than seeing what an all-powerful God could do through them despite their small numbers, they looked only at what seemed possible through their own human capabilities; thus, they often recoiled in fear when facing "impossible" challenges. For instance, as the people stood on the doorstep to the Promised Land during the time of Moses, they allowed fear of the land's powerful inhabitants and well-fortified cities to dissuade them from trusting the Lord and receiving their long-awaited inheritance ([Num 13:31-33](#)). Moses, therefore, reminded them later that "the Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you" ([Deut 7:7-8a](#)).

"The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you"

Deuteronomy 7:7-8a

These first two questions from **Sanballat** have two important lessons from which

we should learn. First, the enemy does his research; he knows our weaknesses. He knows exactly what buttons to push in order to distract us in our pursuit of the Lord and discourage us from trusting in His plan. He often employs other people to subtly plant doubt in our mind about our own ability and the viability of God's plan. This frequently occurs through mockery and ridicule intended to pressure us to follow the culture rather than the Lord. How we deal with this tactic from the enemy leads us to the second point we must learn. We must remind ourselves that God has not chosen us because of who we are, what we have done, or anything that we possess: our abilities, talents, knowledge, wisdom, resources, personalities, or anything else. God has chosen us and invited us to join in His work solely because He loves us and wants a relationship with us—and not for any other reason! As a result of His love and care for us, He will supply us with all the things we need to accomplish His will if we would only trust Him.

Question  
# 2

How do Moses' words to Israel in Deuteronomy 7:7-8 impact the way you view your service? In what tangible ways do you see that impact?

Although intended to continue deriding the people, the third rhetorical question in this series actually ends up mocking the Lord: **Will they offer sacrifices?** Through this question, Sanballat implied that Yahweh could not help them rebuild the wall even if they offered Him **sacrifices**. With intense sarcasm, Sanballat asks in our terms, "Why **offer sacrifices** at all? What's the use? He can't help you." He meant this as an attack on Israel's faith to demonstrate their foolishness for depending upon and trusting in a "weak" God. But rather than just insulting Israel's faith, this impugns God's character by posing a direct challenge to His power and authority.

The world still does something similar to this today when they mock Christians for believing in "fairy tales" or ridicule believers for praying to an "imaginary" being who cannot respond or help. They chide Christians as "weak-minded" individuals who use God as a coping mechanism because they cannot navigate the complexities of life. To them, God only serves as a "crutch" providing security for a people who cannot make it through life on their own. Although directed at believers, these derogatory tropes actually insult the character of a holy God who has provided the only way for us to have an abundant life. The world hurls these foolish accusations because they refuse to admit they have sinned and need a Savior. If the people who utter such statements are

truly as open-minded as they claim, they could look at the created order and see evidence of the mighty hand of God at work ([Rom 1:20](#)). Then, they would realize that none of us can successfully navigate life on our own. We need the Lord. Life without Him is truly futile—or “vanity” as the Preacher who penned Ecclesiastes wrote ([Ecc 1:2-3](#)).

### Question # 3

In what ways specifically have you seen the world mock God through their questioning of His power and authority?

Sanballat’s final two rhetorical questions center on the futility and foolishness of their project: 1) **Will they complete it in a day?** and 2) **Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish?** The first question taunts the resolve of the people to complete the project. Although they had begun with gusto and were working feverishly, Sanballat supposed that they would never finish. They would recognize the futility of their work and abandon it. They’d give up. The second question in this grouping, therefore, describes why this project would never work. According to Sanballat, they were using subpar materials. He claimed that they were taking the worthless rubble from the original walls which had been compromised by fire to make the repairs! But this falsely presupposed that they didn’t inspect the materials before using them and indiscriminately used compromised stones along with the good ones. Today, it would be like someone claiming that a person is using severely damaged and structurally unsound charred wood without inspecting it to rebuild the frame of their house after it caught fire.

Sanballat intended these two questions to mock the intelligence of the Jewish people. In essence, he charged them with being ignorant and not knowing what they are doing. Similarly, the world insults the intelligence of believers today by calling us unenlightened, backwards, narrow-minded, and old-fashioned.



Online media, movies, and television shows portray Christians as ignorant, even going as far as to identify us as inept and deceived. As believers, we should study God's Word, apply it, and be able to defend it intelligently to avoid such criticism. May we not give the world any room to criticize our intelligence. But just like in Nehemiah's day, many of these charges that the world makes are wholly unfounded. For example, some people berate Christians for not "believing" in science because we question the concept of macro-evolution and the secular hypotheses of how the world came into existence. Yet, some of these same people who call us ignorant can't define the difference between a man and woman biologically and propose an absurd number of genders. Does this not show ignorance of science on their part or, even worse, a willful denial of substantiated facts?

Question  
# 4

In what specific ways do you see the world portraying Christians as ignorant or mocking our intelligence?

**Tobiah the Ammonite** who stood next to Sanballat also joined in mocking the people of Jerusalem for rebuilding the wall. The name **Tobiah** means "Yahweh is good" and may indicate that he was Jewish or, at least, claimed to worship the Lord. Perhaps, he descended from the same lineage as the Tobiah mentioned in Ezra 6:20 who could not prove his family's Jewish heritage and so was eventually excluded from the community even though he himself maintained that connection. Regardless, his family had still retained deep ties to the Jewish people through marriage. Not only had he married the daughter of Shecaniah, one of the first Jewish families to return to Judah from exile ([Ezra 8:3](#)), but his son, Jehohanan also married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah whose family played a prominent role in constructing the wall ([Neh 3:4; 6:17-18](#)).

Even if **Tobiah** himself claimed these connections to the Jewish people and alleged he worshiped the Lord, in reality he had disenfranchised himself because he stood vehemently opposed to God's work among His people! In the New Testament, Jesus directly warned against such frauds saying, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" ([Matt 7:15](#)). He continued to instruct His disciples that they would recognize these people by the fruit they bear ([Matt 7:16](#)). In Nehemiah, it quickly became evident that **Tobiah** bore

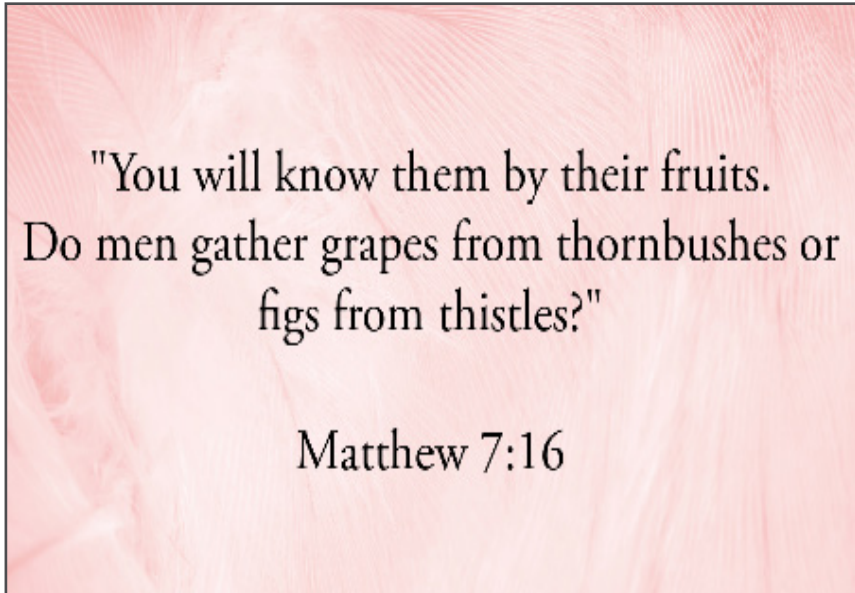


## Instruct

rotten fruit because he positioned himself against the work God wanted to do. He reviled their construction saying, “**Whatever they build, a fox** could easily knock down” (v. 3)! A person who truly has a relationship with the Lord will not stand opposed to the principles He has declared in Scripture and what He desires to do through His people; they will not continually align themselves with the opposition without ever being convicted or corrected by God and eventually learning from their mistakes. A true believer will participate in what God wants to do!

Some people today follow in Tobiah’s footsteps; they may claim to have a “Christian” heritage or they may even attend “church” at times, but they stand opposed to the things of the Lord which He has clearly delineated in Scripture. They follow secular culture, becoming irate and sometimes

even antagonistic against people who stand firmly on the truth of God’s Word. These modern Sanballat’s promote abortion and crusade against the right to life for babies in the womb, they defend sexual perversions of all kinds, including homosexuality, bisexuality, pre-marital relations, and living together before marriage, they affirm transgender ideology and practices, they promote godless socialism and communism, they pervert the holiness and justness of the Lord by attempting to redefine who He truly is, and the like. They mock people who live out their biblical values and principles as “holy rollers” or “Bible thumpers.” They may even try to prevent people from speaking truth directly from Scripture by labeling it as “hate speech,” by physically shouting over them, or by verbally berating them in an online forum. Instead of joining God in His work, they stand in opposition!




"You will know them by their fruits.  
Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or  
figs from thistles?"

Matthew 7:16

Question  
# 5

In what ways have you seen the world and even some who call themselves “Christians,” stand in opposition to the work that God wants to do in the world?

When faced with external opposition, Nehemiah turned to prayer first as his source of strength and guidance. He didn't respond to Sanballat and Tobiah in kind with name-calling, threats, public challenges, or debates. He didn't take matters into his own hands, plotting a dangerous course of never-ending retaliation and personal revenge, but instead he invited God to act on their behalf! Nehemiah sought justice. So, he asked God to defend His people along with His own honor. Therefore, he requested that



Do not say, "I will recompense evil";  
Wait for the Lord, and He will save you.

Proverbs 20:22

God **turn their reproach on their own heads** and send them into **captivity** (v. 5). Furthermore, Nehemiah implored God **not to cover their iniquity** or blot **out their sin** because they have **provoked Him to anger** (v. 5). In other words, Nehemiah pleaded with the Lord to act and not let them get away with this insurrection and **sin** against Him.

At first, it may seem as if Nehemiah's prayer is unloving and vindictive—filled with animosity and fueled by revenge. We may struggle to square it with Jesus' teaching that we "pray for those who spitefully use you" ([Luke 6:27](#)). To understand this prayer properly, we must first understand what Nehemiah is *not* saying. He is *not* requesting that God refuse to forgive them or save them if they repent of **their sin** in the way Jonah became angry when God pardoned the Ninevites when they repented ([Jonah 4:1-11](#)). On the contrary, Nehemiah wanted God to act justly according to His character so that the building of the wall could proceed. In fact, God always stands ready to forgive and restore if only people would repent ([2 Peter 3:9](#)); He also commands us to do the same ([Eph 4:32](#)).

Although Nehemiah plainly seeks justice, it does not reflect the world's concept of what justice should look like to them. If we look closely at this prayer, we can see the concepts of forgiveness and repentance inherently interwoven. The plea to give them as **plunder to a land of captivity** may outwardly appear heartless to us, but in reality it shows God's desire to lead people to repentance! Sometimes only extreme measures

will cause people to become aware of their errors. God, for example, used the exile to help Israel understand the need to repent of her sin and return to Him. Thus, the exile ultimately served as a means of restoration!

Herein lies the key to Nehemiah's prayer. He knows that justice belongs to the Lord who will dispense it according to His righteousness and holiness ([Deut 32:35](#); [Prov 20:22](#); [Rom 12:19](#)). We can pray for justice, but we must wait upon the Lord to act and not try to take matters into our own hands. After all, people have ultimately sinned against God even though we may be the recipients of their bad intentions here on earth. When we pray, therefore, we must remember that God will always act according to His character to accomplish His will. If people repent, He will forgive and restore them. If they persist in **their sin**, He will judge and condemn them—and only He alone can rightly exercise such authority.

Question  
# 6

How difficult, at times, do you find it to forgive people and wait upon the Lord to bring about justice? Why must we remember to wait upon the Lord during these times?

Consequently, we must accept whatever outcome may occur. Let us not harden our hearts like Jonah who responded with bitterness and anger when the people of Nineveh repented. Rather, let us rejoice when the opposition repents. If they don't repent and God does not immediately judge the opposition as in Nehemiah's day or in the way that we think He should, let us continue resolutely to do the work to which He has called us, continually praying for renewed strength to endure as God leads. Nehemiah and the people did this in the fifth century! They continued building **the wall to half its original height** because **the people had a mind to work** (v. 6). At first, they didn't let the opposition discourage them. They found their hope in the Lord and saw the bigger picture of the work that He wanted to do amongst them.

## Nehemiah 4:7-9

### **THE SURPRISE PLANNED:**

When mockery and ridicule failed to deter the people, the surrounding nations **became** even more infuriated as the work progressed and **the gaps in the walls** began to close (v. 7). The Hebrew word used to describe the repairing or restoration of the wall in this verse often referred to the healing of a physical wound and thus bears the meaning “heal” or “restore to soundness.” Literally, this phrase in Hebrew then reads: “the walls of Jerusalem had gone up with healing.” The closing of the gaps in the wall almost becomes emblematic of placing a bandage over a wound to help it heal. The NKJV, therefore, best captures the sense of this word by translating it as “**being restored.**” The choice of this particular word then seems intentional on Nehemiah’s part.

Certainly, the walls were **being restored** in a physical sense by strengthening the foundation and plugging the holes, but it also signified the restoration of the people themselves! From the onset of this book, Nehemiah has led the



nation to repent of their sins ([Neh 1:5-11](#)) and commit themselves to the work of the Lord ([Neh 2:17-18](#)). The people of Jerusalem living amongst the decay in shame have now come together and devoted themselves to the Lord. Consequently, the wall served a much greater purpose than just providing protection and elevating their prestige. It refocused their attention on their relationship with the Lord; in this way, it brought restoration to them as well! God frequently uses circumstances and projects to get our attention so that He can do an even greater work in us, drawing us closer to Him as we serve together as a community.

Question  
# 7

In what way(s) has God used a particular project or area of service to help you grow spiritually as He connected you with His people in the church?

## Instruct

We see a similar phenomenon like this today. People who go on mission trips, participate in service projects, attend conferences, or attend camps for children or youth often come back with renewed sense of excitement, enthusiasm, and anticipation. Many will return from these events with a testimony about how their perspective has changed and how they have become motivated to do more for the Lord. Listen to any report from a mission team returning from the field and this will quickly become evident. Why does this happen? During these times, people focus exclusively on the Lord and dedicate themselves to Him. Their service then becomes an opportunity for Christ to work not only through them, but in them. Obviously, we must have a relationship with Christ based on the repentance of our sins, but our service can provide another conduit that Christ uses to reorient our attention to Him. To have a “healthy” relationship with Christ, therefore, our service to Him will play a critical role.

Above all, we must turn the “experience” of these events into a lifestyle because our excitement and enthusiasm will fade if we don’t. As time advances and things happen in the world around us, many who return from these events lose fervor because they become distracted by life or overwhelmed by their circumstances. We cannot dispute the fact that Christ truly did a work in them during this specific time. So, what changed then? Christ surely didn’t change.



2024 Youth Mission to OKC

Their perspective or focus changed. Even if only briefly, they took their eyes off Christ and placed them squarely upon their circumstances. They allowed the pressures of the world to weigh them down. They returned to their old habits and what seemed most comfortable for them.

This very thing happened to the people of Jerusalem when they began to see trouble on the horizon. The work that had begun with hope, excitement, and a can-do attitude with the Lord now turned into fatigue, worry, and discouragement ([Neh 4:10; 5:1ff](#)). Sanballat and the nations surrounding the city in every cardinal direction

plotted against the people. They formed a coalition to **attack Jerusalem** and **create confusion** (v. 8). The phrase translated **create confusion** in this context connotes causing trouble. The text does not specify exactly how this coalition intended to **attack** or cause trouble for the Jews as it would bring them into direct conflict with the Persians since Nehemiah had official documentation from the king. They could have caused trouble in a number of ways including annihilating them completely in battle, sabotaging the project, or even causing discord among them with disloyal people to the community. Apparently, all options were on the table; based on Nehemiah's response, however, he thought about and prepared for the worst.

Question  
# 8

In what ways does the enemy use our circumstances to distract us? In what ways can we guard against this?

## *Nehemiah 4:10-15*

### **THE STRENGTH THAT LACKED:**

As the verbal taunts began to turn to threats of physical violence, many of the people became weary and disheartened. Collectively referring to the people as **Judah**, Nehemiah described their **strength** as **failing** which caused them to doubt that they could finish the wall because of the tremendous amount of debris they still must remove and repair (v. 10). Their discouragement intensified as rumors began to circulate about what their enemies intended to do to them. Based on reports, they heard that their **adversaries** constantly plotted to spring upon them in a surprise attack to **kill** them and stop **the work** (v. 11). When Jews living near these secular nations arrived in Jerusalem, they confirmed what they had heard about the opposition. They reported that they overheard their enemies repeatedly (i.e., **ten times**) boasting how those working on the wall had nowhere to hide, for they would find them and attack swiftly (v. 12).

Upon hearing this, Nehemiah immediately took action. Equipping **men** with weapons to secure the city, he **positioned** them at the low points along the wall which had not yet been fully built to height and in the places which still had gaps (v. 13). Nehemiah not only prepared them physically with what they would need if a battle should occur, he also prepared them mentally and spiritually, seeking to reassure them.

He reminded them that they had nothing to fear because they served a **great and awesome** God (v. 14). Knowing this, they could valiantly **fight** for their families and possessions even if the secular nations seemed to outnumber them and have all the advantages. God would still provide!

Indeed, Nehemiah quickly pointed out God's provision by noting how He **brought their plot** for a surprise attack to a screeching halt (v. 15). Certainly, losing the element of surprise could have thwarted some nations' plans in attacking, but not this mighty coalition. They could have easily overwhelmed the citizens of Jerusalem. On their own, these nations wouldn't have feared an untrained, rag-tag army stationed along their broken-down walls. In reality, Jerusalem's deliverance and protection came from the Lord! When the opposition **heard** that Nehemiah had become aware of their **plot**, the surrounding nations abandoned their plan and the people in Jerusalem **returned to work** (v. 15).

We can learn two valuable principles from Nehemiah's response to conflict. First, we should never allow rumors or thoughts of hypothetical problems to distract from our service to the Lord. Too often, some people spend all their time addressing every rumor or thinking about hypothetical what-ifs in a situation they may be facing rather than devoting themselves to the mission to which God has called them. While we should evaluate potential pitfalls and problems, we cannot allow ourselves to get stuck in this phase. The more we analyze the what-ifs the more hesitant to act we often become because it causes us to forget that God will help us overcome! He has not left us to our own devices, but rather He will fight our battles for us if only we would surrender control to Him.



Think about an important decision that's kept you awake at night. In all likelihood, you laid there and thought about every potential outcome. You tried to analyze it from every angle, thinking if x happens, then I'll do y or if y happens, then I'll do z. But we simply won't know what may happen until we actually face the situation. So, the list of

options can really become endless and overwhelming if we allow it. It can even bring us to the point of despair where we lament, “I just don’t know what to do” and give up. This doesn’t mean, however, that we should make rash decisions or not evaluate the consequences of our choices, but rather that we should not allow our circumstances to become a deterrent in serving the Lord. We must reasonably prepare ourselves based on what we do know and what we can control ourselves, trusting that God will also help us deal with any unexpected outcomes that may arise along the way. This, therefore, leads directly to the second principle which we can learn from Nehemiah.

Second, we should expect to encounter problems along the way, prepare wisely, and be ready if and when trouble should come. Part of our preparation should always include reminding ourselves about God’s character. Rather than becoming burdened by the potential of something that *could* happen, we should always focus on our **great and awesome** God. He will deliver. He will provide. He will give us strength and grant us wisdom. We have nothing to fear. God wants us to take steps to prepare in tangible ways as He gives us direction, but He also wants us to trust Him to supply everything we need to endure any problem that we may encounter. Nehemiah did just that! He evaluated the rumors, found them credible, and prepared the people by outfitting them with weapons to defend themselves. But as swiftly as he prepared the people for a potential physical battle, he also reoriented their thinking and turned their attention right back to the mission that God had given them! The work on the wall continued at the same time as they prepared for potential battle.

Question  
# 9

How have you seen rumors hinder people from serving the Lord? How does thinking about hypothetical problems hinder them?



### Nehemiah 4:16-23

#### **THE SECURITY PROVIDED:**

With people once again resuming work on the wall, life regained some semblance of normalcy, but Nehemiah did not let his guard down. He remained vigilant, waiting and watching for any potential conflict that may come. From that **time** forward, therefore, **half** the people **worked** on **the wall** and **the other half** were equipped with weapons and stood guard (v. 16). Nehemiah didn't leave those working on **the wall** defenseless, however. They figuratively **worked with one hand** and **held a weapon** in **the other** (v. 17). To clarify, he further explained that each one of the construction workers carried **a sword** in a sheath around their waist ready to spring to action at any given moment (v. 18).

Nehemiah understood the delicate balance between the need to focus on serving the Lord through the mission He had given them and remaining vigilant since they had an enemy lurking about look for the opportune time to



strike. He needed to lead the people to accomplish both of these feats at the same time! If the people didn't concentrate on their work and lost sight of their primary goal for worrying about the plans of their enemy, the wall would have remained unfinished. Or, even worse, had they diverted their attention and tried to multitask, it could have been shoddily and improperly built resulting in an inferior wall that could catastrophically fail at any time. If the people didn't remain vigilant, on the other hand, they might never get the opportunity to finish the wall, for their enemy could have easily attacked and quickly defeated them. Nehemiah recognized the importance of preparing the people to accomplish both! As a leader, he never lost focus on the primary goal and never allowed any circumstance to become a distraction. He led the people to dedicate themselves to the Lord while at the same time preparing them for battle with the secular culture.

Nehemiah realized the physical scope of the project left the community and the

workers vulnerable by spreading them around the circumference of the wall (v. 19). So, he stationed a trumpeter next to him so that at the first sign of trouble he could alert them to take up arms and defend themselves against imminent danger. Once again, he reminds them of God's role saying: **"Our God will fight for us."** This declaration should have served as a tremendous source of motivation and encouragement for the people to know that they weren't fighting this battle alone. God is fighting it for them! Although they must remain vigilant and prepared, they truly had nothing to fear so they could concentrate fully on the task God had assigned them. God had helped them to return from exile, rebuild the temple, and provided everything they needed to live in that land. And, so also would He help them to overcome this one obstacle in rebuilding the wall, too!

Having heard these encouraging words, the people continued working hard (v. 21). Half of them would stand guard during the day while the other half worked on repairing the wall. At night while guards kept watch, all the workers stayed in the city rather than returning to their individual homes as a further measure of security (v. 22). Once again, Nehemiah led by example. He remained at the ready, working and staying alongside the people. He didn't even undress to sleep (v. 23). The last phrase interpreted by the NKJV to mean that Nehemiah took his clothes off to bathe actually refers to the fact that they took their weapons to the water with them—whether to get a drink or bathe. They never let their guard down!



What implications does this have for us today? We must remain vigilant because we have an enemy who seeks to destroy us like a lion devouring its prey ([1 Peter 5:8](#)). We must constantly be on guard. At the same time, however, we cannot let our "vigilance" distract us from our primary goal of glorifying the Lord through our dedicated service. Although we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent or careless, we also cannot allow ourselves to become consumed with thinking that everything or everyone is a trap out to get us. We must

be wise and prudent, but we cannot isolate ourselves. We must participate in the mission that Christ has given us. Therefore, prepare as God directs; do not fear because He will fight the battle for you, but courageously continue doing the work to which He has called you! In this way, we can conquer conflict and continue serving the Lord effectively regardless of what opposition we may face!

Question  
# 10

How do you balance remaining vigilant with your service so that you don't become distracted in ultimately doing the work to which the Lord has called you?

### *Inspire*

Conflict will inevitably come in life. To conquer conflict, we must have a plan; we must anticipate and prepare, but we should never fear. As believers, we need not fear because God has promised to conquer conflict on our behalf if we follow His plan. Therefore, conflict should never distract us in our mission to serve Him. While we must both prepare and remain vigilant, we cannot lose sight of our mission. And we won't lose sight if we keep our eyes focused on the Lord instead of our circumstances.

## *Incorporate*

In what specific ways have you personally seen the world stand in opposition to the truth of Scripture?

When you have faced opposition in the past concerning something you knew to be biblical truth, what perhaps did you fear most about the situation? How did you overcome those fears?

When has God given you strength to take a bold stand for Him? What Scripture did you find most encouraging?

*September 15, 2024*



# *Conquering Complaints*

## *Nehemiah 5:1-19*

Focal Verse:

“Then I said, ‘What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?’”

Nehemiah 5:9

## Introduce

Over the past few years, the basic necessities of life have become more difficult for many to afford. Countless families have found themselves struggling with rising energy prices which have also increased the cost of basic household goods and services—just take a trip to the grocery store or gas station to see the evidence! As wages have stagnated, household budgets have tightened as discretionary income has dwindled, forcing both people and companies to make difficult cost-cutting decisions. Even though many families have trimmed discretionary expenditures from their budgets and have made tremendous sacrifices, it still requires them to find creative ways to pay for staples like groceries.

In a two-year-old publication, the most-recent survey conducted in 2022 by the US Department of Labor and Statistics, the government reports that the average US household spends \$475.25 per month on groceries or \$5,703 per year. Since 2019, the monthly cost of groceries has increased approximately \$88.33.



Although this may not seem like much in the grand scheme of things, coupled with the cost of utilities, insurance, taxes, and every other item over this period, it has put many households in a bind financially. The rise of prices nationwide has even caused some households who don't qualify for any type of assistance to accumulate debt just to provide the basic necessities for their families to survive.

As a result, some people have resorted to charging these basic goods and services on their credit cards and carrying a monthly balance in order to make ends meet. Even though they intended to do this only temporarily until they can somehow increase their income to pay their expenditures, carrying a balance on a credit card actually enslaves people to an endless cycle of debt because of the exorbitant interest rates that these banks charge. Based on a report by the Federal Reserve Bank in New York in May of 2024, credit card lenders charge an average interest rate of 22.76% for their services! To put this into perspective, accruing a balance of just \$1000 and paying

## Introduce

only the minimum to avoid penalties would result in \$227.60 in interest compounded per month!

This same report further notes that all US consumers together carried a credit card balance of \$1.14 trillion. Because of the rise in household expenses along with high interest rates, that balance increased \$27 billion just in the second quarter of 2024 alone. Although we have some bankruptcy protections in this country, it doesn't prevent creditors from attempting to foreclose on homes or seize personal assets, thereby inflicting further financial harm upon families. Such a staggering amount of debt, whether individually or collectively as a nation, is truly unsustainable. While these statistics should never be used to justify reckless spending or living a wanton, lavish lifestyle of excess, they do portray how many ordinary, hard-working families struggle to make ends meet in this economy—something with which Nehemiah and the people of fifth-century Jerusalem could identify.

In Nehemiah, the people set aside their own personal livelihoods to come together as a community to rebuild the wall. Most of the people who worked on the wall made tremendous personal sacrifices in one way or another. Because they concentrated on this project, farmers could not work in their fields and merchants could not conduct their business, so the people did not earn an income during the fifty-two days of construction. To make matters worse, the land also endured a severe famine—greatly adding to their hardship. Therefore, families tried to procure food in any way that they could; they turned to the credit cards of their day so to speak by mortgaging their property and houses to the wealthy landowners. Thus, they went into debt just to buy food to live! In accordance with the practices at the time, many of the people and their families became indentured servants until they could repay the debts they owed their creditors. When Nehemiah heard their complaints, he took action. Nehemiah's leadership during this time, therefore, serves as an example of how we too should conquer complaints in our own day through prayer and godly wisdom.

Key  
Question

How do you respond when you hear a credible or legitimate complaint?

## Nehemiah 5:1-5

### **THE COMPLAINT BY THE PEOPLE:**

In the previous chapter, Nehemiah faced external opposition from Sanballat and Tobiah who led the surrounding nations to form a coalition against Israel to stop progress on the wall for political reasons, but now the threat came from within the community itself in response to a famine that had gripped the land. Wealthy Jewish citizens took advantage of working-class Jewish citizens by making unscrupulous deals with them for food which ultimately left them even more destitute. Therefore, this chapter opens with **a great outcry** from **the people and their wives against their own Jewish brethren** (v. 1). The phrase **the people and their wives**, in this context, collectively refers to working-class citizens who depended upon their daily wages in order to survive. Today, we would say that this group includes those who live from paycheck to paycheck. On the other hand, the phrase **their Jewish brethren** (literally, their brothers, the Jews) collectively refers to the wealthy aristocracy who had abundant resources and could more easily withstand economic downturns.



Under the threat of attack by the surrounding nations, work on the wall continued around the clock. During the day, the people either served on construction crews or guard duty; at night, they took turns on patrol while the rest slept. In order to complete the wall expeditiously and for the safety of the people, everyone stayed in the city; no one returned home during the fifty-two days of construction ([Neh 4:22](#); [6:15](#)). Thus, the tenant farmers who depended upon their daily wages from working in the fields had no way of earning money. Perhaps, like Rosie the Riveter during World War 2, Nehemiah explicitly mentioned the people's **wives** because they took up the slack by working the fields in their husbands' absence in hopes that they would still receive a decent income from a good harvest. But the **famine** made all this impossible. Nonetheless, the whole family reeled from the sacrifices they made in the construction



of the wall only to be exacerbated by the famine that had devastated the land. Therefore, the people ascribed to the old adage that desperate times call for desperate measures; they would do anything to put food on the table so their families wouldn't starve.

When reading verse 2, we can hear the people's cry of desperation as they lament that they have large families for whom they cannot sufficiently provide. Their words paint a heart-wrenching picture of Jewish families starving to death because they have no one to help them. For this reason, they pled with Nehemiah to do something about it so that they **may eat and live**. Today, we would express the request to **let us get** by saying "please give us **grain to eat** so that we **may live**." The people naturally approached Nehemiah as a leader for help with resources, especially since we later learn that he has been appointed governor over the region ([Neh 5:14](#)). If he refused to help them, however, the implication is that they would die. Their words here almost remind us of the widow of Zarephath who told Elijah that she was about to use the last of her water and flour to make bread so that she and her son "may eat it and die" ([1 Kings 17:7-16](#)). But then, God miraculously intervened through the prophet! And so, in this case, God would also intervene by using Nehemiah to address their problem since they had responded in faith to build the wall!

The people were willing to do anything within their power to provide for their families and, as we will learn, they did try everything which ultimately landed them in more trouble. Desperate times don't call for desperate measures for those of us who have a relationship with the Lord; rather, desperate times call for complete dependence upon Him. This doesn't just apply to the needs we see as overwhelming or beyond our control. It applies to our daily needs; we must depend upon Him for everything—after all, He created us to have that dependence. As believers, we shouldn't let things in our lives get to that sense of "desperation" because we must learn to trust the Lord each day for all our needs. Desperation, humanly speaking, will often drive us to do foolish things; it will often lead us to do whatever it takes to alleviate our problems. Dependence upon the Lord, however, will always lead us to act wisely and live faithfully, trusting Him for what we need.

Faced with the choice between starving to death or scrounging together whatever meager resources they could to **buy** even a little food, some families took drastic measures. Who could blame them, really? Some of us would likely do the same

in order to provide for our families. Consequently, they sought an immediate solution to their problem without ever considering the long-term ramifications. Rather than actually solving the problem, however, they merely delayed it. They kicked the can down the road so to speak. To obtain **money** to **buy grain**, some **mortgaged** their **lands, vineyards, and houses** (v. 3). Like one of those reverse home mortgages touted by Tom Sellick today, the people foolishly leveraged the equity in their properties to secure high-risk loans which they ultimately had no way to repay. In addition, others used the **money** that they had saved to pay their taxes to **buy** food, so in turn they had to borrow **money** to pay their taxes (v. 4)! Even today, some people find themselves in the same predicament on April 15 because they used their tax money on an unexpected expenditure, so they rush to find another way to pay what they owe.



If we fail to consider the long-term consequences of a particular action, we can make the problem exponentially worse in the long run. And the people in Jerusalem did just that! When it came time to repay their loans with interest, they defaulted. Although they had made these deals with their own fellow countrymen, the wealthy showed no leniency or compassion even during this time of collectively rebuilding their capital city in the midst of a national emergency in the form of a famine. One would expect that under such circumstances where all the people worked together that these wealthy lenders would have made some concession to help their struggling countrymen. But they didn't. Not only did those who **borrowed money** lose their **lands and vineyards**, some also had to sell their family members into indentured servitude until they could repay the loan (v. 5).

In-Depth Information



The phrase **our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren** simply means that they share a common ethnic background or heritage. When God gave the law, He wisely regulated financial transactions within the Jewish community as a means to protect both parties. God permitted those who owed debts to work as indentured servants as a method of repayment, but every seventh year, known as a Sabbatical Year, any outstanding debt was to be relinquished and the person released from servitude (Lev 25:1-7; Deut 15:1-18). Such a provision sought to curtail borrowers from taking advantage of lenders by never intending to repay loans; it also gave the lender recourse to recover some of their capital. On the other hand, it stopped the wealthy lender from exploiting the borrower with never-ending enslavement, teaching the people to show generosity and compassion in the process.

Question  
# 1

When have you kicked the can down the road in attempting to delay a problem rather than truly resolving it? What did that teach you about your need to depend upon the Lord?

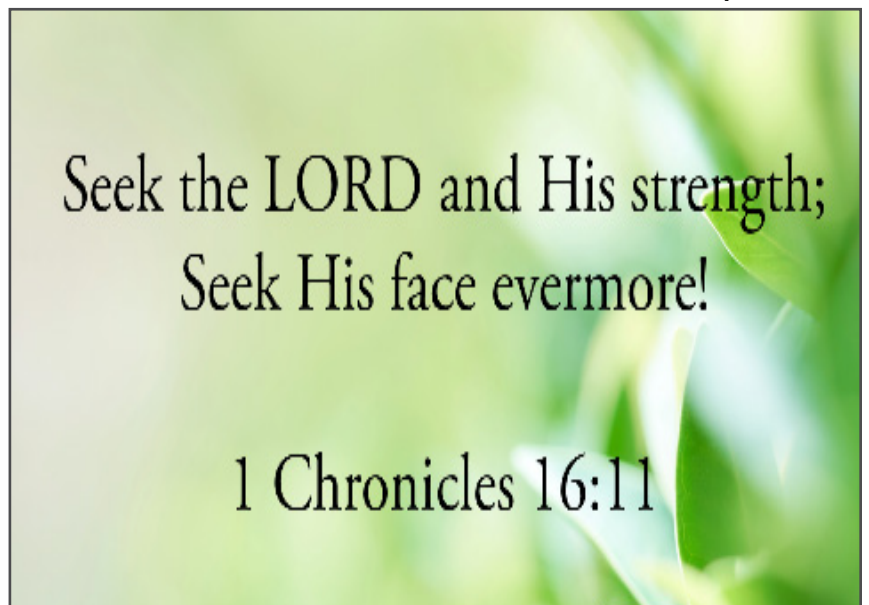
When we compare Nehemiah's response to the problems he encountered with how the people responded here in chapter 5, we can see a notable difference. Whenever Nehemiah found himself in a difficult situation, he prayed! This doesn't mean to imply that he *only* prayed during those tough times in his life, but rather it demonstrates that he always sought wisdom and direction from God before he acted. In fact, after he learned about the deplorable condition of Jerusalem, he prayed for the nation's repentance and asked God to work mightily amongst His people ([Neh 1:5-11](#)). When the king noticed his depression and asked how he could help, Nehemiah paused to pray most likely about how he should respond to this generous offer (Neh 2:4). When physical opposition arose to the construction of the wall in the form of a coalition of nations, he led the people of Jerusalem to pray most likely for strength to endure and finish the job ([Neh 4:9](#)).

As the people faced this economic challenge, however, it did not appear that they

prayed as a community like they had when experiencing the opposition led by Sanballat and Tobiah. At least, the text never mentions they did. While we cannot argue exclusively from silence, by virtue of the nature of the situation it seems likely that the people did not pray before they acted. They tried to resolve the issue using their own ingenuity according to the standard lending practices of the day. When this led to an even greater disaster, they ran to Nehemiah for help. As a righteous man led by God's Spirit, Nehemiah certainly pointed them in the right direction. Yet, all this serves to underscore a crucial point that we must learn. Our first response to any situation should mimic that of Nehemiah. We should pray. We must seek God intentionally. We should never turn to Him only after we have exhausted all our other so-called options. We must start with God; we must pursue Him and give Him priority in every decision we make.

Furthermore, prayer serves as the vehicle through which we can bring our circumstances to God's attention—not as though He needs us to point them out in His omniscience, but because it reminds us from where our deliverance comes and upon

whom we must rely to supply all our needs. In fact, God wants us to declare all our needs to Him so that we know precisely where to turn rather than foolishly venturing on our own ([Matt 6:11](#); [Phil 4:6](#); [Eph 6:18](#)). Consequently, prayer moves us to focus on God rather than our circumstances as we wait expectantly for Him to work things according to His plan. Therefore, we can find comfort and reassurance in prayer during the most difficult circumstances we can imagine because it reminds us God is still sovereignly in control; we have nothing to worry about if we patiently let Him work in our lives according to His will ([1 John 5:14](#))!



Question  
# 2

How has prayer provided comfort and reassurance to you during a difficult period in life?

Even if the people did not spend much time in prayer collectively, God still

## Instruct

responded to their **great outcry** and used Nehemiah to meet their need. Elsewhere, Scripture employs the word translated as **outcry** in verse 1 to describe the cries against the injustice experienced by Israel during their tenure in Egypt ([Exod 3:7, 9](#)). While God also heard the people's **outcry** during the time of the exodus and sent Moses, their **outcry** eventually turned into continual complaints even though they had seen the Lord deliver them time after time! In the fifth century, however, the people responded to God's provision through the leadership of Nehemiah appropriately. As we will see, those who needed to repent and change their practices did, thereby further unifying the community.

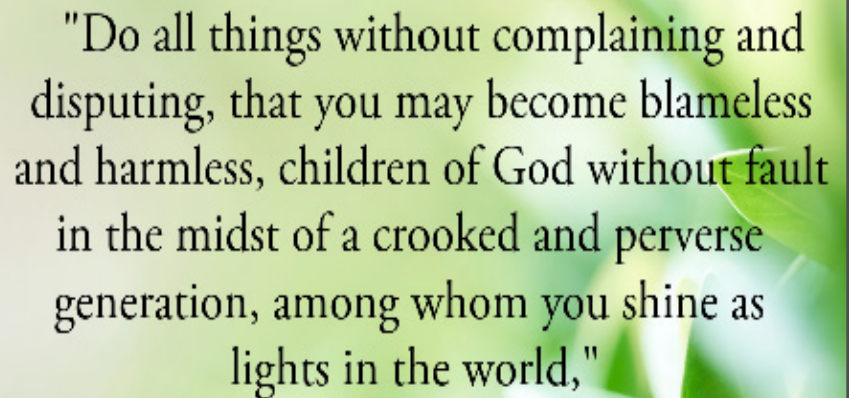
The difference between the people's responses in these two eras highlights a principle that we should practice lest we become overwhelmed by our circumstances, gripped with worry, and consumed with complaining. Although we can bring any circumstance to God's attention and ask Him to meet any need, we must then let go and surrender complete control to Him. If we fail to truly surrender the situation to Him, one of two things will generally happen. Either we will become bitter and despondent, constantly complaining and blaming God, or we will venture on our own to alleviate the problem even if only temporarily. The people in Moses' day took the first approach. They constantly complained about the lack of food and water; they even wanted to return to Egypt because they perceived they had a better life there ([Exod 14:12](#); [16:1-10](#); [Num 21:5-9](#))! Ultimately, the people in the wilderness failed to trust God, so they forfeited being able to enter into the Promised Land for an entire generation ([Num 14:22-23](#)).

Question  
# 3

When have you taken a situation to the Lord in prayer, but then not truly relinquished it to Him? What did you learn from that situation?

The people of Nehemiah's day, however, learned from their mistake. At first, they took matters into their own hands by following culturally acceptable lending practices. But they soon realized their mistake and repented; they committed themselves to working together to overcome this obstacle as God led and gave them the ability. Rather than trying to resolve things their way, they now determined to do it God's way! Therefore, prayer should always lead us to seek how God wants to work through our circumstances for His glory, knowing He desires the best for our lives. It should never

function as a “complaint” session where we bring all our personal gripes, demanding that God act a certain way solely for our benefit. We can certainly discuss any situation with Him and request anything that we need, but we must then listen and wait for Him to respond according to His plan. If all we do is complain and never listen, we will miss what God actually wants to accomplish in our lives. Israel did when they stood on the precipice of entering the Promised Land in Moses’ day!



"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,"

Philippians 2:14-15

In a positive light, members of the community worked side-by-side regardless of their economic status for the purpose of rebuilding the wall. Naturally, some families made much more of a sacrifice based on the portion of income they lost while working than others. Still, the community came together as one body to achieve a common goal. Only a few bad actors among them used the situation to exploit others for their personal gain. In the US, we can equate this with how communities pull together after a natural disaster to rebuild—neighbor helping neighbor. Generally, people come together with the good intension of rebounding from a difficult situation.

But, unfortunately, there are always some who come to prey upon others whether as disreputable contractors or price-gouging merchants. We certainly must protect the vulnerable in our community, but we should also celebrate the spirit of cooperation in which people selflessly come together to help one another! Although we must address the evil practices of a few, we cannot let the bad overshadow the good: God was still at work amongst the people of Jerusalem to accomplish His purpose.

Question  
# 4

How do the negatives we encounter in life have the propensity to overshadow the good and distract us from what God is doing in the world around us?

### Nehemiah 5:6-11

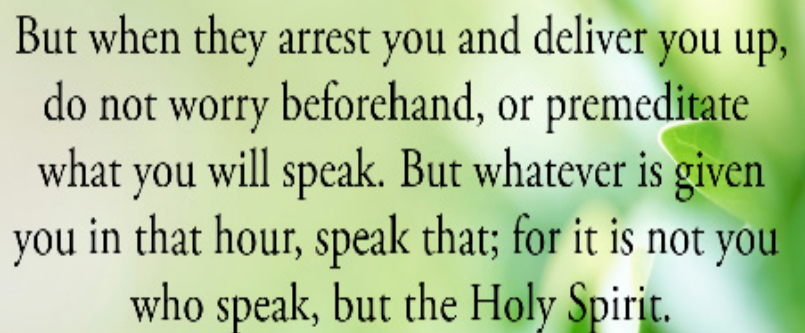
#### **THE CORRUPT PRACTICES OF A FEW:**

When he **heard** what had occurred, Nehemiah became furious (v. 6). Yet, he still took time to give **serious thought** to the matter rather than risk responding hastily in **anger**, making the situation much worse (v. 7). Unrestrained anger tends to cloud our judgment. When dealing with complaints, particularly against immorality and injustice, we must take time to assess the situation rationally before we attempt to respond. We must take our emotions out of the equation and attempt to see things from God's perspective which promotes forgiveness and restoration before wrath ([Jas 1:19-20](#)). Therefore, Nehemiah rightly sought the restoration of the people involved which required him to approach the situation delicately in hopes that they would listen and repent from their mistake rather than become defiant and defensive against an accusation which they could have perceived as antagonistic had he failed to control his emotions.

Our goal should always be to restore people—not to condemn them or alienate them. To achieve this, it requires that we approach the situation in the right mindset and not let **anger** govern our emotions. If our goal truly is restoration, then we must take time to consider what we will say, how we will say it, and what effect our words, tone, body language, and demeanor may have upon the other person.

While we must rely on God to give wisdom and guidance, we must still prepare ourselves for that moment ([Gal 6:1](#)). If we seek God, He will always give us the right approach to take and the right words to say in the moment ([Mark 13:11](#)). Nehemiah offers proof of that!

Even though as the leader he had the "right" to come down on these predatory lenders according to the letter of the law, Nehemiah didn't rush into the situation with 'guns a-blazing' as the old West expression goes. He thought before he spoke. We should never fear speaking the truth and proclaiming God's Word, but we must



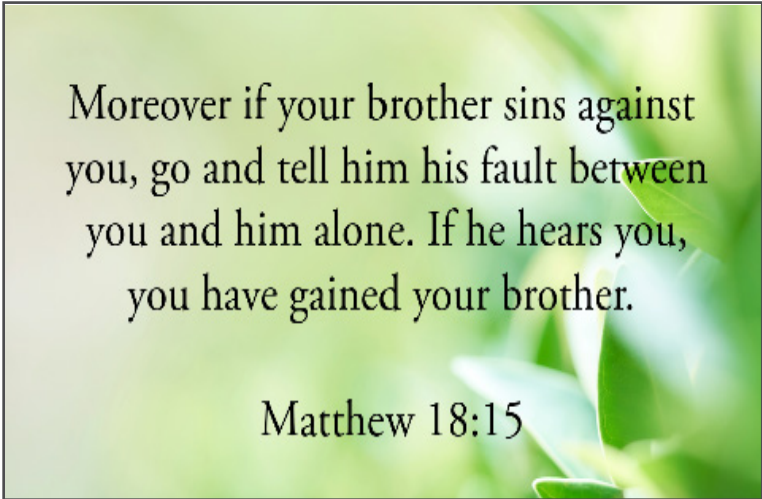
But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

Mark 13:11

always do so in love ([Eph 4:15](#)). Although we should spend time carefully crafting a response in hopes of producing the best results like Nehemiah did, we ultimately can't worry about how others will receive the truth. Some will gladly accept it, repent, and live by it. But not everyone will listen or even respond kindly to his mistakes being pointed out; therefore, we must let God deal with that person.

Fortunately, for Nehemiah, the tact he used and the words he spoke resonated with the people and they responded favorably. In addressing the wealthy lenders before calling a public assembly, Nehemiah began by citing the exact charges against them: **each one of them is exacting usury** from their fellow countrymen. According to the law, the term usury applied in two ways: 1) charging interest on a loan or 2) demanding excessive collateral for a loan. The law prohibited both for transactions involving fellow Jews.

Although the Jews could charge interest on people from other nations according to the standard practice of the day, they could not charge any interest at all on their fellow countrymen—particularly on “money or food” ([Deut 23:19-20](#); [Lev 25:36-37](#)). Moreover, the Jews also could not demand an excessive deposit or collateral to secure a loan. In other words, they couldn't require as collateral or later seize items deemed essential to life, leaving a family completely destitute with no way to survive ([Exod 24:10](#); [22:26-27](#); [Deut 24:12-13](#)). Perhaps, as he spoke to the **nobles and rulers** privately, Nehemiah even read these very passages directly from the law. In any case, the charges were clearly established and this group of wealthy lenders had violated the law on both of these counts! They stood guilty as charged.



Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

Matthew 18:15

Here, Nehemiah showed great wisdom in his approach. He gathered the **nobles and rulers** involved to address the issue privately before bringing it before the public **assembly**. This likely helped to defuse the situation. Rather than put them on the spot and embarrass them before the assembly, he pointed out their fault in private, giving them time to think about the issue. To haul them before a primarily hostile **assembly** of people whom they had exploited would have made the situation far worse. Human



## Instruct

nature teaches us that these **nobles and rulers** would have likely become defensive in order to save face had Nehemiah put them on the spot. Instead of leading to restoration and resolving the problem amicably, it likely would have pit one group against the other, creating further division and animosity in the community.

Question  
# 5

Why is it always good to talk to a group at fault privately before addressing it publicly?

Once the entire **assembly** had gathered, Nehemiah introduced the nature of the problem by explaining the actions that had already been taken. He informed them that **according to their ability** they had **redeemed the Jewish** people **who** had been sold **to the nations** (v. 8). Based on the context, it seems as if Nehemiah and the trusted members of his leadership team (i.e., **we**) had paid the price to free the Jews who had been **sold** into slavery to the surrounding **nations** to cover their debts during this period of famine. Whereas Nehemiah and his team had acted honorably to redeem their fellow countrymen by following the practices God had specified in the law, these wealthy lenders had acted despicably.

For this reason, Nehemiah posed two questions to further his point: would **you even sell your brethren** or **should they be sold to us**? The law required relatives to help free their fellow kinsmen should they become indebted to the Gentiles ([Lev 25:47-52](#)). Yet, when the relative paid the price to redeem his kinsmen, his kinsmen didn't now become indebted to him; rather, he gained his freedom. These wealthy lenders functioned like people today who perform a kind act for someone and then keep expecting favors in return! By taking these two questions together, therefore, it demonstrates how these wealthy lenders had destroyed fellowship in the community. Since they had exploited their fellow countrymen by either selling them to foreigners or enslaving them amongst themselves, they are no better than the Gentile nations around them! As a result of these charges levied against them, they could say **nothing**.

As the **assembly** stood there speechless, Nehemiah exclaimed that what they were **doing** was **not** morally right (i.e., literally **not good**) because it dishonored God and brought **reproach** upon the community from their **enemies** (v. 9). Nehemiah pointed out that he himself had even lent people **money and grain** (v. 10). So, he encouraged the lenders to restore the people's property they had taken along with any earnest money or interest they had collected (v. 11). In all, he implored them to **please**

**stop this usury.** But some debate exists as to what exactly Nehemiah has asked them to do. Was he asking them to return the people's collateral and not collect interest on the loans or was he asking them to forgive the debt entirely? One could make a case for either and biblical laws address both. Yet, at face value, it appears that Nehemiah only asked them to return any property they had seized as collateral (i.e., **lands, vineyards, olive groves, houses**) and any of the interest that they had collected (i.e., **a hundredth of the money and grain**, etc.). In either case, Nehemiah wanted them to function as a community in the way God had intended.



Through Nehemiah's leadership in resolving this problem, we can identify three principles that we should practice today. First, we can observe how he acted with integrity so that he could point to his actions as an example for others to follow. Nehemiah had generously lent his own food and **money** to help those in the community. Although the text doesn't explicitly say, it seems as though he had followed the biblical practice of not demanding collateral or charging interest; Nehemiah did not profit on other people's misfortune, but graciously shared what he had! Because he had lived honorably according to God's instruction, he could in good conscience ask others to do the same. No one could charge him with being a hypocrite or ingenuine. Nehemiah practiced what he believed. To serve Christ effectively, we must do the same, living with integrity as an example for others to follow ([1 Tim 4:12](#)).

Question  
# 6

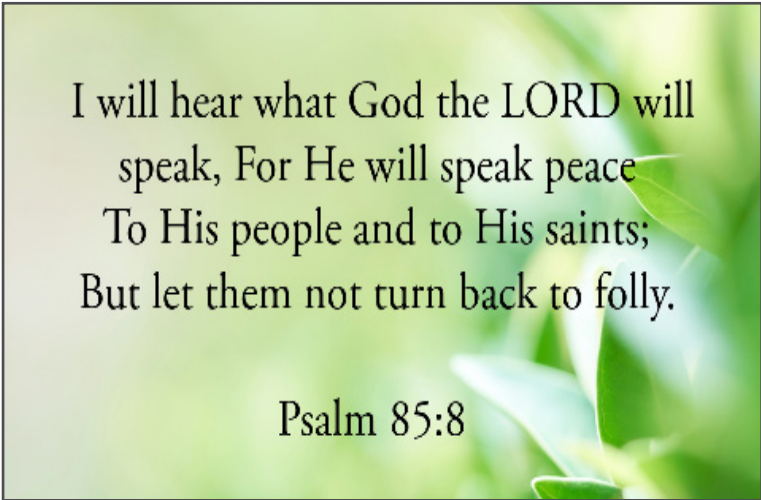
In what way(s) do you serve as an example for others to follow or who has served as an example for you to follow?

Second, Nehemiah appealed directly to Scripture and the biblical precedents governing loans within the Jewish community in order to resolve this problem. He didn't form a committee to study it. He didn't gather a think-tank to exchange ideas. He didn't appeal to expert economists or the popular opinions of the day. He didn't even cite himself as an authority since he indeed had come as an official representative of

## Instruct

the Persian king and would have had the power to make demands. On the contrary, Nehemiah rightly cited God as the ultimate authority. He pointed the people directly to what God had instructed them on the issue! He let them hear God speak from His Word and bring conviction for them to change. In the same way, may we refer others to what Scripture says about an issue no matter the problem we may be facing.

Third, Nehemiah helped the people understand how this issue affected them as a community. Although the community had come together in unity to build the wall as a benefit to all people, some sought to elevate themselves by exploiting others. Through the individualism and greed of a few people, they had brought **reproach** upon the whole community. Even though some may have seemed to have enriched themselves and become more powerful, it actually made them weaker and less effective because it weakened the community as a whole. God has designed us to function within a community—for us this means the church. As a community, we must spur one another to follow Christ, grow together, and serve Him. Although we are personally responsible for our own choices, anytime dysfunction, disunity, and sin infiltrate the community it affects us all ([1 Cor 5:1-8](#))! Therefore, we must help others understand how their personal choices affect the community as a whole so that we can all grow together and glorify the Lord in the way He intended.



I will hear what God the LORD will  
speak, For He will speak peace  
To His people and to His saints;  
But let them not turn back to folly.

Psalm 85:8

Question  
# 7

How aware are you of how your personal choices affect the church as a whole?

## *Nehemiah 5:12-13*

### **THE CONTRACT WITH THE PEOPLE:**

After hearing Nehemiah's proposal, everyone at the assembly enthusiastically agreed to **require nothing from** those who had sought loans (v. 12). To encourage them to keep their word, Nehemiah essentially drew up a contract with the people. Summoning **the priests**, he led them to make **an oath to do** what they had promised. As part of that contract, Nehemiah symbolically **shook out his** robe to illustrate the judgment from God they would incur if they broke their **promise** (v. 13). Although used in a more sinister and negative light concerning extortion today, our modern phrase "shake down" can give us perspective on Nehemiah's symbolical actions. While God would never extort anyone, He would exercise judgment—shake them down in one sense until the very last cent was collected from the people who broke this **promise**. They would now lose their property and their homes! Truly, this shows the seriousness of keeping our commitments. We should never take lightly the things that we **promise**.

## *Nehemiah 5:14-19*

### **THE CHARITY OF NEHEMIAH:**

Above all, we see the charity or generosity of Nehemiah on full display as he continued providing for the people of Jerusalem. Artaxerxes appointed Nehemiah **governor** over the reign in 445 BC; his appointment spanned a total of **twelve years** (v. 14). Unlike the other **governors** who ruled previously, Nehemiah acted with dignity and honor because he feared God (v. 15). Consequently, he did not **burden** the people with heavy taxation, taking their **bread and wine** in addition to **forty shekels of silver**. Unlike the wealthy lenders, he sought to empower the people, not profit from them. During his tenure as governor, **the work on the wall continued** (v. 16). But he didn't just oversee **the work** as a political figurehead, he and **all his servants** joined together with the people to work side-by-side.

As **governor**, he benevolently continued providing for the people out of his own pocket. **At his table**, he fed **150 Jews and rulers**, perhaps the people and officials working on the wall (v. 17). He also entertained Gentiles (i.e., **the nations**), perhaps like a state dinner for visiting dignitaries from around the empire on official business. He provided for these individuals a sumptuous meal which he details in verse 18, but all at his own personal expense. He didn't charge the taxpayers a dime. Nehemiah concluded

## *Instruct*

by humbly asking God to find favor with him **for the good** things which he has done for the **people** (v. 19). Unlike our modern understanding which envisions Nehemiah asking for a reward or some type of blessing, he really humbly states, “May You, O Lord, find my **good** works pleasing.” Far from seeking any type of material blessing or spiritual reward, Nehemiah wants to honor God with His life. May we too share this noble aspiration especially when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances. May we conquer complaints just as Nehemiah did in a way that honors God through the way we conduct our lives.

Question  
# 8

In what ways do you seek to honor God with your life, especially when you hear “complaints?”

## *Inspire*

According to the statistics reported in the introduction, we can clearly see how we live in a society riddle by inflation and we may frequently encounter people struggling to make ends meet. In many ways, some today can identify with Nehemiah and the people of the fifth century who found themselves in never-ending debt with no way of escaping. This lesson isn't intended to address loans, lending, or the economy, for we cannot draw specific financial principles about interest rates, loan forgiveness, and the like without a much deeper study of the context both then and now. However, we can clearly see how Nehemiah effectively dealt with the people's complaints. He pointed them to the Lord and led them to repent of their evil practices. He brought the community together to see truly how God had called them to function. As God's people, the church, we cannot allow ourselves to become mired in complaints, but rather we must come together as His community and serve in the way that He has called us.

## *Incorporate*

When someone comes to you with a complaint, how do you usually respond? In what ways should we use their complaints to point them back to their relationship with the Lord?

Looking back over the promises that you have made in life, how many have you kept? Which ones come to mind most starkly that you broke?

Given the hindsight that you now have, what do you think would have helped at the time to remain more faithful in fulfilling those promises?

*September 22, 2024*



# *Conquering Coercion*

## *Nehemiah 6:1-19*

Focal Verse:

“For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, ‘Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done.’ Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.”

Nehemiah 6:9

## Introduce

Every parent knows the frustration of having a persistent child who desperately wants something. They can probably rattle off story after story of times when their children tested their patience and kept repeatedly asking for the same thing. Whether children know it or not, they are experts in applying the maxim, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” If children don’t get their way, they will indubitably try to approach it from a different angle with a different tactic. Depending on their age, that tactic may or may not become slightly more sophisticated, but in the end their parents usually see right through it anyway!

For parents, this display of persistence and tenacity frequently comes at the most inopportune times—as if there were truly ever a good time for it. Nonetheless, we’ve all seen those parents struggling to do battle



with a persistent child in the middle of a store or, more likely, you may have even been *that* parent at some point. On the other hand, we may have been *that* child. Because of human nature, a child’s quest to get his or her way typically follows the same pattern. It starts with a question, such as “can I have this,” which the child will begin asking repeatedly if a parent says “no.” Eventually, the question will turn into a demand: “But I want it.” If that fails to secure the coveted response, things quickly escalate and the demand turns into a tantrum with crying, yelling, and screaming.

As children grow older, their methods will change, but their intentions remain the same. They will work diligently to get what they want, doing whatever it takes. Instead of throwing a tantrum, however, teens will try to “reason” with their parents. Intelligent teens might even try to present a case to show how it would ultimately “benefit” their parents! For example, they might say something like, “If I can do this, then you wouldn’t have to.” On the other hand, some teens might opt for a more unethical, deceptive approach and lie. They intentionally misrepresent what they want. This might involve the places they want to go or the people with whom they want to associate. Unfortunately, many adults never mature from this mindset and they continue to do



## Introduce

whatever it takes to get their way. They use manipulation and deception. They demand and threaten. Just look at the world to see how it operates!

Nehemiah's opponents in the fifth century BC functioned in this same way when they didn't get what they wanted. In an attempt to stop the wall from being built, they began repeatedly sending letters to request that Nehemiah meet with them. When that failed, they tried to intimidate the people by spreading lies about Nehemiah and his intentions. After exhausting all the methods of which they could think, they ultimately resorted to violence by plotting to assassinate Nehemiah! They would do anything to get their way. Through his godly response, however, Nehemiah stands in stark contrast to his opponents and provides a good example for us to follow concerning how we should conquer coercion. May we conquer coercion from the world in the manner that Nehemiah did!

Key  
Question

How have you seen people trying to use coercion to get what they most want in life?

## Nehemiah 6:1-4

### THE DEMAND TO MEET:

As time advanced and work on the wall progressed, another shift in the source of the opposition confronting Nehemiah occurred. Once again, it has shifted from the internal problems Israel experienced between members of the community who exploited one another for financial gain back to external opposition from the surrounding nations. We see the trio of **Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab** once again leading a coalition of **the rest of Israel's enemies** in an effort to thwart Nehemiah's plans and stop **the wall** from being completed (v. 1). Despite all the setbacks and challenges they had encountered, construction workers had made significant progress on fortifying **the wall**; it no longer had any gaps. The only openings in **the wall** came from **the gates** which they had **not yet hung**.

In order to prevent the work from continuing, **Sanballat and Geshem** sent a letter to Nehemiah requesting him to meet in one of **the villages in the plain of Ono** which was seven miles southeast of the port city Joppa. In Hebrew, the phrase translated **among the villages** can also indicate a proper place name, Kephirim. In any case, Sanballat and Geshem proposed a seemingly semi-neutral site in a town near the border between Judah and Samaria for this proposed conference. But Nehemiah immediately saw through their phony plan; he recognized it as a ploy to get him isolated so **they** could **harm** him.

So, Nehemiah replied and **sent** word via his **messengers** that he was **doing a great work** and couldn't be bothered to **come down** (v. 3). After all, he rhetorically asked, "**Why should the work cease** while he came to speak



with them?" Like a persistent child who we referenced in the introduction, this duo wouldn't take no for an answer. They **sent** the same letter with the same demand **four times** (v. 4)! And, like a good parent, Nehemiah remained consistent in his **answer** always responding the **same**; he didn't grow weary and eventually give in to their demands in

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order to get them to stop. Sometimes people grow weary of being bombarded with the same requests repeatedly; they then set a bad precedent by giving in to the demand in order to get others off their back. In Nehemiah's case, however, this would have jeopardized his life had he met with them because he knew they sought to **do** him **harm**!

From Nehemiah's response to Sanballat and Geshem, we can learn two principles about dealing with coercion by the world. First, we must meet the persistence of the world with the consistency of Christ. Regardless of how much the world may pressure us to give in to its demands, we must always give the **same answer** in Christ. We must continue to do what we know is right based on God's absolute truth in Scripture. Like Nehemiah, if we succumb to the world's demands, it does **harm** to us too. We may not be in imminent physical danger like Nehemiah, but it harms our testimony and makes it easier to concede to the world in other areas. Giving in to the world's demands in order to placate its persistence doesn't just become a distraction; it hinders our spiritual progress and disrupts our fellowship with Christ!

### Question # 1

How does inconsistency in our response to the world actually encourage them to come against us with even more persistence to accept their wicked ways?

Sometimes parents set a bad precedent with their children when they give in to their demands during a tantrum or because of persistent nagging. Parents must continue to be firm with their answers even though giving their children what they want would indeed provide momentary peace. If they suddenly change their original answer to get their children to stop pitching a fit or incessantly nagging them, it teaches the child that these methods work and through them he can get what he wants. So, it actually increases the undesired behavior rather than curtails it! Teaching children the right way to ask and the right response when they don't get what they want requires consistency.

But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and  
your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever  
is more than these is from the  
evil one.

Matthew 5:37

Parents must continually give the same answer no matter how irritating, annoying, and inconvenient it may seem at the time. They may have to endure tantrums, nagging, and other childish acts for a while, but eventually the child will stop because he knows those ways don't work.

In one respect, the world behaves very much like a rebellious child who continually pushes the boundaries to get what he wants. In order to push their agenda, they throw tantrums (riots), they threaten ("cancel" or blacklist), and they indoctrinate with ideas that lack logic and commonsense, standing in complete opposition to Scripture. Designed to desensitize us to their point of view and cause us to grow weary in our walk, their assault on biblical values bombards us from every side. Yet, as followers of Christ, we must remain consistent in both how we answer and how we live no matter how much pressure they exert. If we bow to the demands of the world in one area, they will continue pushing the envelope further and further from the truth. If we ignore, tolerate, or accept even one thing which they demand, it still will not satisfy them. They will continue to grow louder and more aggressive as they have now become emboldened to get what they want. In contrast, we must stand faithfully on what God has said in Scripture and not deviate from it even in the slightest!

Question  
# 2

In what modern cultural movements can you see where compromise (either tolerance or acceptance) has emboldened people to keep pushing the boundaries?

Not only did Nehemiah remain consistent in his response, but he also continued to focus on the task God had given him. Although he asked it in the form of a rhetorical question in his reply to Sanballat and Geshem, Nehemiah essentially told them that he would not abandon his God-given task to confer with them. This leads to the second principle we can learn from Nehemiah: We should focus on the character of Christ and concentrate on our God-given tasks instead of allowing ourselves to become distracted in frivolous activities or debates. Even though God has not called every one of us to full-time ministry or service, He has gifted each one of us and called us for a specific purpose in His church. If we haven't found that specific area of service yet, then we must concentrate on what we know God has called us to do collectively as His people: share the gospel, live by the commands in His Word, and worship Him with complete

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devotion.

The moment we take our eyes off Christ and the task to which He has called us we can easily become distracted and entangled in sin ([Heb 12:1-2](#)). As a society, we often pride ourselves on our ability to multi-task. We juggle many things at once.

Somehow, they might miraculously all get done, but, if we're honest, they don't get done well especially compared to the times when we truly focused on only one task.

Think of all the projects that have gotten delayed or even completely abandoned around our homes, in our offices, or at our schools.

Perhaps some were delayed because of procrastination or mere

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12: 1-2

laziness on our part, but probably most were delayed because something distracted us. We diverted our attention, got busy with something else, and then never returned to the original project! We can never afford to become distracted in our pursuit of Christ because it always has disastrous consequences when we take our eyes off Him.

Question  
# 3

In what ways does the world try to distract us from our God-given tasks? How specifically does the world try to distract you?

Nehemiah didn't allow anything to divert his attention from the Lord. Had he stopped his work on the wall to meet with these leaders even though it might have seemed part of his official duty as governor, it would have turned deadly for him. God gave Nehemiah discernment to understand what was truly important and what was merely a distraction from the world. If we don't exercise good judgment in selecting the things in which we participate, we can easily find ourselves overwhelmed and off course. We can fill our lives with ancillary projects rather than taking on the true task to which God has called us. Moreover, from our perspective, the things in which we participate may seem like a legitimate part of our responsibilities. But, in the end, they turn out to be only distractions which serve to entangle us further; they actually hinder

our productivity and prevent us from having success. Therefore, we need to look at the activities in which we propose to participate from God's perspective to ascertain whether they are truly beneficial or serve as a distraction from the world.

Question  
# 4

What are some events in your life that have seemed "important," but later turned out to be a distraction from the true purpose God had given you?

### *Nehemiah 6:5-9*

#### **THE DISINFORMATION FROM THE WORLD:**

Nehemiah's consistency didn't altogether discourage Sanballat from pursuing the issue, however. Rather, it only caused him to pursue the issue from another angle. This time he **sent an open letter** spreading lies about Nehemiah's intentions in hopes of frightening the people (v. 5). Similar to a modern **open letter** written for publication in newspaper or in online media, Sanballat did not have his **letter** rolled, tied, or stamped with the official wax seal, but rather he left it **open** giving access for any "curious" individual to read it and, therefore, continue to spread its **rumors**. Today, people do very much the same thing when they write an "open letter" or strategically leak "inside" information because it serves as a critical hit piece attempting to disparage and discredit a perceived foe over whom they seek to gain advantage!

This **open letter** contained the false accusation circulating **among the nations** and **Geshem** the Arab, in particular, that Nehemiah and **the Jews** were planning **to rebel** against the Persian Empire (v. 6). It charged Nehemiah with **rebuilding the wall** specifically so that **the Jews** would crown him **their king**. It also claimed that Nehemiah had **appointed prophets** to announce and coronate his coming as **king in Judah**, so they threatened to report all this to King Artaxerxes (v. 7). Before they did, however, they would give him one last chance to meet together under the guise of working these things out. But, once again, Nehemiah recognized their true intentions. So, he promptly and tersely responded that none of the **things** of which they accused him **were being done**, but as his enemies they had invented **these things in their own heart** (v. 8). Today, Nehemiah would have said something like, "None of this is true; you made it all up." He ultimately explained that they **were trying to make** the people

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**afraid** and break their spirit so they would give up working on the wall (v. 9).

As he had done from the beginning, Nehemiah prayed for strength when faced with a challenging situation (v. 9c). Although translators added the words **O God** for emphasis, even without them the Hebrew text is clear that Nehemiah is praying to the Lord—the only One who could **strengthen** his **hands** and give him the power to continue fighting



the opposition. Nehemiah understood his limitations. On his own, he stood no chance against this mighty coalition. His strength and endurance had to come from the Lord if he hoped to remain strong and finish the job.

Question  
# 5

At what times has God given you strength to resist the opposition and continue faithfully serving Him?

Through his prayer, therefore, it allowed Nehemiah to respond appropriately to the charges against him. Although he briefly defended himself against these false charges, he didn't belabor the point! He simply stated that these **rumors** were not true and continued working. Nehemiah never once became distracted by the false charges. Instead, he allowed his actions and the results to speak for themselves—especially as we will later see in verse 16 when the surrounding nations would “perceive that this work was done by our God.” King Artaxerxes and the other leaders could plainly see that Nehemiah had no intention of subverting the Persians and proclaiming himself as king if only they would seek the truth rather than listen to these innuendos and **rumors**.

We should follow Nehemiah's example when people perpetuate lies and disinformation about us. We should simply deny the charges, keep doing the work of the Lord, and continue to live with integrity. Human nature, however, compels us to do whatever it takes to defend ourselves and clear our name often leading us to become

distracted in our endeavors. On the contrary, we shouldn't become embroiled in a frivolous, never-ending debate that truly resolves nothing and only serves to waste time. If indeed the charges have no basis, simply deny them and continue living righteously with integrity. In the end, the charges will prove baseless if they have no validity! Consequently, the burden of proof actually lies with the people making the accusations to prove them rather than with us.

Ultimately, our best defense comes from the Lord Himself. If we live according to what God has commanded in His Word, He will vindicate us and no charge can stand against us! We truly have no need of repeatedly defending ourselves because the truth will eventually come to light—if not here on earth, then certainly in heaven when we stand before our Savior. In 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3, Paul shares a similar outlook when he writes, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one."

Question  
# 6

What is the danger of becoming embroiled in a debate defending your integrity as opposed to denying the charges and moving on?

## *Nehemiah 6:10-14*

### **THE DISCERNMENT FROM THE LORD:**

When this scare tactic of spreading **rumors** failed to produce the desired results, the coalition turned to an inside man to carry out the assassination.

**Shemaiah**, perhaps a priest based on his heritage described here in conjunction with 1 Chronicles 24:18, proposed a private meeting with Nehemiah in **the temple** because they were planning to come and **kill him at night** (v. 10). Shemaiah suggested that they barricade themselves in **the temple** so that he

Moreover David said, "The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"

1 Samuel 17:37



## Instruct

could guard Nehemiah and no harm would come to him. Because of his God-given discernment, Nehemiah knew this deceitful man was nothing more than **a secret informer** or an inside man paid by Sanballat and the coalition.

Nehemiah responded with two rhetorical questions alerting us that he had perceptively picked up on Shemaiah's ruse: **Should such a man as I flee?** and **Who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life** (v. 11). To which he then defiantly answered and declared, **"I will not go in."** While the first question does show that Nehemiah faced the situation with courage, it more importantly demonstrates how he had nothing to fear because he trusted in the Lord to deliver him. If he ran cowardly into the confines of the **temple**, it would indicate that he did not truly trust the Lord. More importantly, Nehemiah through his prayer has already expressed that his strength comes from the Lord. True courage comes from our trust in the Lord rather than our own ability to stand and face opposition ourselves. That type of "courage" without trust in the Lord is the epitome of foolishness because it will ultimately lead to failure.

The second question alerts us to the fact that Nehemiah had now **perceived God had not sent Shemaiah at all**; although he claimed to speak on behalf of the Lord (i.e., **pronounced this prophecy**), in reality, Tobiah and Sanballat **had hired him** (v. 12). Nehemiah knew that Scripture only permitted those with priestly lineage to enter the part of **the temple** containing the altar ([Num 18:7](#)) and only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year ([Lev 16:1-14](#); [Heb 9:7-10](#)). Yet, the directives that Shemaiah had given conflicted with what God clearly specified in Scripture ([Deut 18:20](#)). Elsewhere, Scripture tells us that God will never contradict Himself. He will never say one thing and do another; He will always remain consistent with what He has said in the past ([Isa 8:19-20](#); [Gal 1:8-9](#)). When someone approaches us and says that they have a word from the Lord, we must carefully evaluate it according to Scripture. If it does not fit with what God has said in Scripture, like Shemaiah's prophecy, then we must not believe it and we must run far from it.

### Question # 7

When have you ever heard someone say that they were speaking a word from the Lord, but it did not coincide with what Scripture said?

Shemaiah wanted to scare Nehemiah into breaking the law in order to entrap him

him (v. 12). If he could convince him to defile the inner sanctuary of **the temple** by fleeing there, they would have something with which they could now accuse him and they could actually “justify” putting him to death. Shemaiah never planned to assassinate Nehemiah in the temple himself, for that would bring disorder and chaos and, in turn, defile the temple. Rather, he sought to bring **reproach** upon Nehemiah because he sinned against the law. Then, by the letter of the law, Shemaiah had the legal right to sentence Nehemiah to death! In a sense, it almost functions in the way the Sanhedrin sought to have Pilate and the Romans crucify Jesus in the New Testament. Even though they could have legally put Him to death based on their false claims, they wanted to wash their hands of the situation and force the Romans to do it.

So, Nehemiah asked God to deal with the situation. He prayed for justice asking God literally to **remember Tobiah, Sanballat, the prophetess Noadiah, and the other prophets** for the things they have done (v. 14). Nehemiah wisely didn't try to take matters into his own hands even with the power he held as governor. Had he done so it would have caused great instability in the region further hampering the goal of rebuilding the wall. First, it could have given the perception that Nehemiah really wanted to install himself as king and incite a militaristic coup against the Persians had he gone to battle against these leaders. Second, it would have caused major division amongst the people as well because he was a political outsider by all respects. Many of the people involved in this plan were members of prominent families, related by marriage, and had vast business dealings together. It would have been truly futile for Nehemiah to battle this on his own. Wisely, therefore, he handed it all over to God to let Him deal with it as He saw fit.

In all, this episode in Nehemiah's life demonstrates the importance of always trusting God, never compromising our faith or

cutting corners even if it may seem advantageous at the time, and always acting with integrity according to the righteousness found in God's Word. The solutions the world



Abstain from every form of evil.

1 Thessalonians 5:22

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proposes usually involve sin and fail to show trust in the Lord. Before we act, we must always consider the ethical implications of our decisions—not according to our own morality, but according to the pure and holy standard God established in Scripture. We must not ever have a hint of immorality or compromise in our lives so that people can bring reproach upon us and by extension to the Lord. We must not even give the appearance of evil, but conduct ourselves with the utmost integrity whether we perceive someone watching or not ([1 Thess 5:22](#)). The world continually pressures us to compromise, but we must stand strong in our faith, living righteously for the Lord.

Question  
# 8

When have you taken a shortcut which you thought was a viable solution to a problem that later turned out to be devastating in the long run?

## Nehemiah 6:15-19

### THE DETERMINATION OF THE OPPOSITION:

Despite all these obstacles, the people finished the wall in **fifty-two days** in October of 445 BC (v. 15). When their adversaries learned of its completion, it discouraged them greatly (v. 16). Nothing they had done to stop the work had succeed. As a result, they came to perceive that Israel's (i.e., **our**) **God had done this work!** Even so, this didn't dissuade one adversary from pursuing his foe. Tobiah still sought to cause Nehemiah grief by continuing to message the nobles in Judah to intimidate them (v. 17). He didn't fear the repercussions because he was well connected to the Jewish community through marriage. He himself **was the son-in-law** of **Shecanaiah** and his **son, Jehohanan, had married** the daughter of **Meshullam**—two prominent families in Jerusalem (v. 18). While the people reported good things about both Nehemiah and Tobiah, the latter continued to attempt to wield his power over the former (v. 19). We can never let our guard down; we must always conquer the persistent coercion of the world by serving the Lord faithfully and living with integrity.

As humans, we are no strangers to persistent coercion from others when it comes to getting their way. We even battle such tenacity in our families almost on a daily basis—especially if we have children or teenagers. But many adults never mature from those carnal desires and maintain their strong-willed personalities. Nehemiah found that out in the fifth century BC when the coalition led by Sanballat tried to subvert him at every turn and prevent him from finishing the wall. Yet, Nehemiah met the persistent coercion of the world with the consistency of the Lord in his life—the only way we can truly conquer coercion. To conquer coercion, therefore, we must trust wholly upon the Lord, depend upon Him for discernment, serve Him with complete faithfulness, and live with integrity according to the standard of His Word. Nehemiah did these things and triumphed over the opposition even though some continued to give him difficulty throughout his time as governor in the region. Nonetheless, Nehemiah was able to conquer the coercion of his adversaries and build the wall, doing the work of the Lord in Jerusalem with integrity.

## *Incorporate*

In what ways do you display the consistency of Christ in your life on a daily basis? How does that help you to battle the persistent coercion of the world?

When people spread lies and disinformation about you, how do you respond? How does that compare to the way Nehemiah responded?

When has God given you discernment in your life to prevent you from falling into a trap laid by the world? How can you use that to help encourage people to be more discerning in life?

September 29, 2024



# Conquering With Comprehension

## Nehemiah 8:1-18

Focal Verse:

“Now on the second day the heads of the fathers’ houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.”

Nehemiah 8:13

## Introduce

Born in Ames, Iowa in 1862, William Ashley Sunday had a difficult and turbulent childhood after he and his siblings were ultimately orphaned when his father perished while fighting for the Union Army. During these unsettled early years, Billy fell in love with the game of baseball and, even as a young adult while working odd jobs, he continued pursuing his passion for the sport. In 1883, circumstances would fortuitously lead to an opportunity for an audition with the Major League team in Chicago—the White Stockings at the time or the Cubs today. Over the next seven years, Billy played as a speedy outfielder for three teams in Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. Although only an average professional baseball player at best, his time with the Chicago White Stockings would inevitably change his life forever.

During the 1887 season, Billy and five of his teammates visited a bar in downtown Chicago where they proceeded to get “tanked up” according to his own recollection.\* While sitting on a nearby curb inebriated from their Sunday afternoon escapade, some familiar tunes began to play from a band that had set up in a vacant lot across the street. As he and his teammates sat and listened, a member of the band invited them to the Pacific Garden Rescue Mission where they could hear more testimonies about the lives that Christ had changed. Only Billy accepted the invitation that day to varied responses from his teammates. In his own words, he recalled, “I arose and said to the boys, ‘I’m through. I am going to Jesus Christ. We’ve come to the parting of ways.’”<sup>\*</sup> Once at the mission, he met the wife of the caretaker, Mrs. Clark, who shared the gospel with him, leading him into a relationship with Christ.

Almost immediately, Billy recognized the need for revival in the US where religious ritual had supplanted a true relationship with Christ. Although never formally trained formally in theology, he studied profusely on his own and wanted to bring the gospel to the masses. He most desired that people hear and understand the gospel message so that they could respond and apply it. Rather than using Ivy-league terminology and complicated structure, he spoke plainly in simple terms with clear application. While he did use humor and flamboyant promotion at times, he kept the focus on the gospel. His message was plain and direct! Indeed, Billy Sunday did accept that call to ministry and became one of the most prolific evangelists this country has ever known—perhaps only surpassed by Billy Graham in our lifetimes. In an age prior to any advancement in audio technology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Billy Sunday spoke to over 100 million people in large, outdoor revivals

## Introduce

across the US with hundreds of thousands responding to his invitation to accept Christ as Savior.\*\*

Approximately 2,345 years before Billy Sunday's cry to repent and abide by the Word of God in his revivals, two other men led the nation of Israel in their own revival. After the completion of the wall, Nehemiah and Ezra gathered the people in Jerusalem to read selected passages from the Law. Like Billy Sunday, they wanted people to understand the message so they could live by it. Reading the Law and merely going through religious rituals don't honor the Lord; our relationship expressed through obedience and faithfulness to Him do. So, Ezra took time to explain the Law in detail, helping the people to comprehend it so they could apply it in their lives! With the city now revitalized, it was now time for the people's lives to reflect that same renewal and revitalization. As a people, they must conquer through comprehension by surrendering themselves completely to the Lord!

In his sermon, "Old-Time Religion," Billy Sunday asked the question, "What does converted mean?"\*\*\* He then went on to explain, "It means completely changed. Converted is not synonymous with reformed. Reforms are from without-conversion from within. Conversion is a complete surrender to Jesus. It's a willingness to do what He wants you to do. Unless you have made a complete surrender and are doing His will it will avail you nothing if you've reformed a thousand times and have your name on fifty church records." Nehemiah and Ezra wanted the people to surrender themselves completely to the Lord which would become manifest outwardly in their practice of the Law. When we have totally surrendered ourselves to Christ, therefore, we will want to do what Scripture says. Let us conquer with that comprehension so that we may apply what His Word teaches.

Key  
Question

In your life, who has helped you along in your journey to comprehend Scripture and be able to apply it?

### In Reference



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### Nehemiah 8:1-6

#### **READ THE WORD:**

When work on the wall finished at the end of the sixth month (Elul), the people returned to their homes briefly before the numerous festivities and religious observances of the seventh month (Tishrei) of the year commenced ([Neh 7:73](#)). Early in that month, **all the people** had assembled together to celebrate the Feast of Trumpets which kicked off nearly a month-long period of feasts and festivals, including the observance of the Day of Atonement followed by the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. During this time, Ezra would lead the people to rededicate themselves wholly to the service of the Lord through the public reading of **the Law** (Scripture). In unity, **all the people gathered** in the public **square in front of the water gate** where they asked Ezra to **bring the Book of the Law of Moses** so he could read from it to them (v. 1).

While God required a public reading of **the Law** every seven years at the Feast of Booths to ensure the continued education of future generations ([Deut 31:9-13](#)), here in Nehemiah **the people** took the initiative in asking Ezra who had studied it extensively to teach them ([Ezra 7:10](#)) because they lacked sufficient knowledge and deeply desired to know the Lord more intimately after they had seen Him work among them. In a way, the rebuilding of the wall had achieved its intended purpose far beyond offering mere physical protection; it had begun to rekindle the people's desire to know the Lord and follow His Word. Therefore, knowing God more intimately came as a natural response of **the people** working together as a community to achieve their God-given task. As they served Him, their desire to know Him increased substantially. We can see this dramatic transformation in Ezra-Nehemiah as **the people** move from a hopeless, apathetic, and self-absorbed group of individuals without direction to a community seeking to hear the Word of the Lord!

Question  
#1

How has your service within the church inspired your desire to know the Lord more deeply and intimately?

In a way, **the people** asked Ezra to remind them of the history of how God had worked through them as a nation by reading His Word. In a rudimentary way, we can liken this to a child asking grandparents or parents to tell stories about their lives when they were younger. When I was growing up, children were still somewhat curious about

how life once was for their parents and grandparents, so we would ask them to tell stories about the things we found different from our own time, yet still interesting to us. But, unfortunately, many children have become distracted by technology today or simply don't care to know; so, they rarely make an effort to ask. As a society in general, we don't value history much or at least take it for granted because we have so much information available online. Yet, we lose so much history and personal understanding when we do.

Sometimes, at the end of a person's life, I hear others lament about how they wished they had spent more time talking to parents or grandparents about their life experiences. Not only would it have cemented a stronger bond between the two, but, especially among believers, hearing stories about how God worked in their lives, whether during times of triumphs or trials, would have also helped them to mature in their own faith. As much as hearing these personal stories from our own relatives would edify and benefit us, hearing God speak in Scripture to see how He has worked and continues to work among His people would benefit us many times more! Therefore, may we not ever take reading Scripture—any part of Scripture—lightly or for granted, but seek to know Him intimately through the events of His Word! May we make time to read His Story which ultimately involves each one of us.

Question  
#2

In your own life, how often do you really ask (not complain) about life experiences from those older so you can learn from them?

Ezra gladly consented to the people's request and **brought the Law** so that everyone **could hear it with understanding** (v. 2). So, **on the first day of the month**, he read Scripture to an attentive audience for six hours from **morning** (6:00 am) until noon (v. 3). For the occasion, the people had constructed a wooden **platform** on which he and those assisting him could stand to enable them to speak more effectively to such a large group (v. 4). Thirteen men, about whom we know very little, stood beside Ezra—six on his **right** and seven on his **left**. Whether they were other priests, Levites, or lay leaders, we do not know, but presumably they served in some capacity to help Ezra read from **the Law** over this six-hour period—a difficult feat today even with our modern audio conveniences!

From this historical setting, we can still discern three critical lessons applicable for us today. First, we must make the gospel accessible to **all people**; this doesn't mean that we make it "acceptable" by changing its message, but that we find creative ways to take it to **the people** who desperately need to **hear** it most. While worship still centered around the temple, Ezra **brought** the Scripture to **all the people** so that they could **hear** it! Although we should still meet together collectively as the church each week for worship, prayer, teaching, and fellowship as God expects ([Acts 2:42](#); [Heb 10:25](#)), we must also strategically find ways to still take the gospel to the world outside. Certainly, God has called us to do this individually as we witness in our workplaces and communities, but He has also called us to do this collectively as His people through the church. While it may not look like the tent-revivals, the crusades, or the methods of the last century or even the last decade, we must ensure that the gospel still reaches the people who need to **hear** it, bringing its message in whatever way we can into the public purview!



Question  
#3

In what way(s) do you purposefully participate in taking the gospel into the community to reach the masses?

Second, we must relate the gospel in an understandable way so that people can apply it in their lives. In verse 2, it may seem redundant to say, "**All who could hear with understanding.**" However, it underscores a very important point. Our goal as a witness should always be to help people truly understand the gospel without changing the meaning or watering down the responsibilities we have in Christ. When people understand, they can then actually apply what they learn; application, therefore, serves as the overarching goal God wants to achieve through Scripture. He certainly wants us to know it and commit it to memory, but more importantly He wants us to apply it!

If honest, many of the formal methods of education employed today emphasize

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the memorization of facts (knowledge) over application (how to use the knowledge). Consequently, the predominate line of thought appears to center on the idea that if we give people a bunch of “knowledge” they will intuitively know how to use it. This is why there sometimes seems to be a disconnect between learning and life skills. While understanding the content is an important step, being able to apply or use the knowledge is even much more so. What good would it do for you to have encyclopedic knowledge which you could never use? Many people know many “facts” about the Bible, but they never apply them to their lives! Therefore, we must take the time to help people understand the content and then teach them to apply it. Ezra took this very approach with Scripture. Rather than rush through a lesson plan for the sake of meeting a goal by reading Scripture for six straight hours, he helped the people comprehend the text so they could apply what they had heard!

Third, we must be purposeful and intentional in taking the gospel to **the people**. This requires both commitment and investment on our part. Once **the people** confirmed Ezra would read Scripture, they built a **platform** to enhance the acoustics for the crowd. This took a commitment of time, lumber, and labor in preparation for the event. Although we should never overlook the spontaneous opportunities God gives us to share the gospel, collectively as His people we must ensure that we are intentional, deliberate, and purposeful in all our plans to take the gospel to the world. We must invest time and resources in preparation—never throwing together something at the last minute because we have procrastinated, but seeking to enhance the work of the Lord through the devoted use of our gifts and abilities. We must always put forth our best effort in planning and preparing to make the event effective. Rather than having the attitude that God will “use” whatever we give or bring for His glory as an excuse for doing something half-way, we must do our utmost best while still letting Him work through us.

Question  
# 4

In what way(s) can the church get the gospel effectively into the community to reach the masses?

As Ezra opened the scroll and began to read, **all the people stood** as a sign of reverence and respect for God’s sovereign authority (v. 5; [see Neh 9:3](#)). Ezra then praised (literally **blessed**) **the Lord** to which **the people** shouted “**amen, amen**” in

worship **while** raising **their hands** and respectfully bowing **their heads** (v. 6). We don't know the exact passages of Scripture from which Ezra read because reading the first five books of the Old Testament in their entirety would have lasted well over six hours, so we must assume that he only read from key selections. Thus, the focus here resides not so much on the content, but the attitude of **the people**. They listened intently (v. 3) from a heart of worship (v. 6). They put aside all distractions and devoted themselves for this period to an intensive study of God's Word.

We ought to show such reverence and respect for God's Word that we devote ourselves to studying it as an act of worship. We need to put all distraction aside and focus on it intently, seeking to understand it so we can apply it. Although we can certainly listen to the preaching of God's Word on the radio, television, or podcast while driving, doing chores, exercising, or working, this shouldn't constitute the *primary* time we devote ourselves to the study of Scripture. Surrounding ourselves with Scripture in this way is good, but there must still be a time we put every distraction aside to listen intently. We can't listen intently, however, if we're occupied with other things at the same time.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Joshua 1:8

In addition to their attitude, the people found value in studying Scripture collectively. Although we will address the benefits of corporate Bible study much more in the next section, here we can draw some conclusions based on an apparent lack of enthusiasm for it in our "religious" culture today. Perhaps, most people don't see the relevance or just consider themselves too busy to gather together to study Scripture corporately on a regular basis. Even if we would add all the opportunities we have for corporate Bible Study in a week (Connect Classes, Sunday morning worship, and Wednesday evening Bible study), they would not total the six hours we see here. Yet, a significant number of people today come to Bible study and leave before worship or come to worship and never attend any other Bible study as if they have checked it off their to-do list. Do not take this as a legalistic call to increase attendance based on a

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a demand, but an admonition to evaluate our devotion to the Lord through the serious attention we give to the corporate study of His Word. We have the opportunity to grow together in our faith corporately as a church which is the way that God designed it! Therefore, we must cast off any distraction when we can and devote ourselves to the focused study of Scripture as an act of reverence and worship so we can know our God more intimately as His people.

Question  
# 5

What is the primary reason why many people don't see the value of corporate Bible study today? What does that show about their devotion to the Lord?

## Nehemiah 8:7-12

### RECOGNIZE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY:

In verse 13, we see another group of thirteen men listed, perhaps the patriarchs of their families along with **the Levites** who assisted in conveying the message of **the Law**. Together they **helped** the people to make **sense** of and **understand** what they heard (v. 8). The word interpreted by the NKJV as **gave the sense** can mean "translate" or "explain/clarify." At this time, the people would have spoken Aramaic—a language very similar to Hebrew, but with slight variations. Perhaps, we can compare it to the difference between Spanish and Portuguese which technically are two distinct languages, but still share a number of similarities in which native speakers might be able to understand some phrases in both. Nonetheless, Aramaic had become the primary language of both trade and the government throughout the entire Middle East. Although cultures would have had their native dialects, they would have primarily spoken Aramaic as a common language.

Biblical Hebrew, on the other hand, was not widely spoken and had many outdated words no longer used in the Aramaic that the Jews now spoke. To help us understand, we can look at the pronounced difference between the King James Version and most modern translations, including the New King James Version. While many can still "understand" much of the Elizabethan English in the KJV, especially those who grew up with it, some of the words and phrasing make it more difficult for some to comprehend. So, they need help! These thirteen men along with **the Levites** bridged

the gap between the two languages and really between the cultures to explain to the people they heard. In one sense, then, they translated the Scripture into a language that the people could understand, Aramaic—unlike the Catholic Church which for many years insisted on retaining Latin in its masses even though the people could not understand or churches who insist on using versions with antiquated language difficult for modern audiences to comprehend. God wants His people to understand His Word!

In Hebrew, the word **gave the sense** can also mean “explain/clarify.” So, this could have meant that these leaders also gave the context of the verses which they read. In other words, they further explained the history and cultural differences to their audience just

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

1 John 5:20

like a modern pastor or teacher would today. To us, it may not make sense for them to need the historical or cultural context explained because they lived much closer to that time period than we do. We automatically assume they would have been familiar with it. Even so, depending upon which part of **the Law** they read, it still meant a difference of at least 700 years—and so much can change over seven centuries! Like today, the people also had short-term memories and they quickly forgot **the Law** even though they may have repeatedly heard it recited.

In either case, herein lies the primary benefit of corporate Bible study: it helps every member of the church grow in their understanding of Scripture. Individual Bible study is important, but God has not called us to study entirely on our own! He has placed us in a body where qualified people whom He has gifted and equipped ([Eph 4:11](#)) can explain Scripture and give the appropriate context and background which will help us comprehend so we can apply it. Thus, corporate Bible study provides the opportunity for members to ask questions and seek clarification on topics they find difficult to handle on their own. It allows us to learn from the insight into the text that God has given others and draws upon the collective wisdom that we as God’s people have learned from His Word ([Rom 15:4](#)). Yet, we must caution ourselves not to highjack

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the discussion through superfluous questions, use it as a megaphone to share our personal opinions, or attempt to validate our life experiences through it. The focus should always remain on clarifying and explaining the portion of Scripture being studied so that we as God's people may know how to apply it in our lives.

Question  
# 6

How has corporate Bible study helped you to grow in your knowledge of the Lord? Who do you know that would benefit from being plugged into corporate Bible study?

Once **the people heard** and understood **the Law**, they **wept** (v. 9). Yet, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the other leaders who **taught** them urged them **not to mourn or weep** because **this was a holy day to the Lord God**. Then, either Ezra or Nehemiah (literally "**he**"), instructed them to return to their homes and prepare a good meal to eat and invite those who had **nothing** to share in it with them, reminding them all that **the Lord is their source of strength** (v. 10). The people obeyed and they began to **rejoice greatly because they** had **understood** what they had heard from **the Law** (v. 12). To understand all this ourselves, we must first understand why the people **wept**. They **wept** because the Word of God convicted them; when they actually understood it, they realized how unholy they were because they had failed to practice it. The hearing of God's Word convicted them and moved them to repentance! And we can see that repentance on display here in the rest of this chapter because the people started to practice what God outlined in His Word.

But then, the leaders immediately told **the people** to go home and celebrate for they should stop mourning and start rejoicing! Why such a contrast? Should we not express grief and sorrow over our sin? Indeed, sin should cause us to **mourn** because we have rebelled against the One who loves us most. Yet, when we truly repent, it should immediately lead to joy, for God has forgiven

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness,  
forbearance, and longsuffering, not  
knowing that the goodness of God leads  
you to repentance?

Romans 2:4



and restored us! We no longer need to **mourn**; we no longer need to walk around like many individuals today constantly “broken” over sin as if they have no hope of forgiveness and restoration. On the contrary, God does not leave us broken; He does not want us forevermore sullen and sad when we repent. He wants us to express joy over the reconciliation He has provided! Once we understand, we should rejoice in the commands God has given us and live by them.

To illustrate, consider the first two Beatitudes Jesus mentions in His Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are those who mourn” ([Matt 5:3-4](#)). As a reference to salvation, these two Beatitudes describe those people who recognize their sinful condition (i.e., poor = morally bankrupt, empty) and mourn (i.e., grief over sin which leads to repentance). Yet, in both instances, Jesus still calls these people “blessed.” While “happy” is often proposed as a synonym for blessed, joyful or joyous serves as a much better description. These people to whom Jesus refers in these first two Beatitudes are joyful because of the transforming work God has done within them! Despite their moral failures, God has given them life when they repented of their sins! The mourning, therefore, only lasted temporarily until it led the people to conviction and repentance through which God did His work of salvation! This same thing happened during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah! Rather than mourn over their past failures, the people should celebrate the powerful, transforming work of the Lord in their lives!

Question  
# 7

How do you rejoice in and celebrate the salvation the Lord has graciously provided you?

### Nehemiah 8:13-18

#### **REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE:**

The revival continued that next day as **all the people** returned to the square to learn more from **the Law** (v. 13). At that time, they discovered that God had commanded Israel to build **booths** or temporary shelters in which they would live as they celebrated **the feast during that seventh month**—the aptly named Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. The Feast of Booths thus commemorated the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness during the exodus and sought to remind the people of God's gracious deliverance and provision for their ancestors—the same thing He offered them if they would continue serving Him alone (v. 14)!

As they continued to read from **the Law**, they also subsequently found instruction to



scour the countryside for all types of **branches** with which to construct these dwellings (v. 15). Upon hearing this command, it motivated the people to act—a sign of true repentance and commitment to the Lord as they followed His Word! Immediately, everyone left to find the materials and begin building these temporary shelters on the flat **roofs of their houses**, in **their courtyards**, or in public spaces throughout the city (v. 16). All the people joyfully (i.e., **great gladness**) participated in this celebration this together. Yet, we also startlingly learn that no one had celebrated this feast since the days of Joshua—not even the reformers in Israel like Josiah or King David (v. 17)! Nevertheless, as revival swept the land, the people read from the Book of the **Law of God** daily and practiced what it said!

Over the years in Babylon, the people had become comfortable and complacent in their lives. From a human point of view, the subsequent empires (Babylon and Persia) afforded them with protection and stability which allowed them to prosper and build a relatively good life for their families. During that time, they developed a routine

through which they could navigate obstacles to raise their families, conduct business, and participate in the leisure activities of the culture around them. Sometimes such a laid-back attitude filled with routine, stability, and prosperity causes some people to forget their true source of blessing comes from the Lord. Yet, this attitude didn't just surface amongst the people during the exile; it happened in both Israel and Judah prior to the exile and it even continues to happen to us today.

As Americans, for the most part, we enjoy the peace and stability of a great country. While we may have individual concerns at times and concerns for the ever-changing world around us, we don't live in daily "fear"; we have the freedom to live our lives peacefully in the way we see best even though from time to time we might face obstacles and hardships. Yet, leisure and entertainment options are plentiful, giving us the ability to disconnect from the fast-paced work-culture of our age. In all this, many people have become comfortable and complacent. They have become so wrapped up in life that God has merely become part of their "routine" rather than the focus of their life.

This last chapter in our study of the book of Nehemiah truly highlights the importance of knowing our God intimately through the in-depth study of His Word. God wants all His people to study His Word intently with purpose. Studying Scripture,

therefore, is not just for the college professor or the pastor, but the entire congregation because it reveals the character of God and His plan for our lives. God wants us to understand His Word so that we can apply it in our lives—not as a bunch of rules and regulations we check off a to-do list, but as the key to having a successful and abundant life ([John 10:10](#)).

As we study God's Word both corporately and individually, we will begin to comprehend it and see His divine purpose for our lives. When we see God's true intention, it should then inspire us to practice what we have read in His Word. After all, John reminds us, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

John 10:10

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commandments are not burdensome” ([1 John 5:3](#)). Therefore, may we conquer with comprehension by seeking to study God’s Word so that we might apply it in our lives daily.

### Question # 5

Pray and ask the Lord to help you honestly evaluate your life when it comes to how you study and apply His Word—not as an academic exercise, but as a relationship in which you seek to know Him more. What did He show you?

## Inspire

In every period of human history, we’ve needed revivals to remind us of the importance of cultivating an intimate relationship with Christ after we have become complacent, comfortable, and consumed with the temporal things of life. Life often presents us with many distractions whereby we often choose to place Christ on the backburner. Although He is still part of our life and we may continue going to church, having a quiet time, and other things we consider religious, we haven’t truly made Him the priority. During these times, we can read and study His Word; however, we treat it like a good novel that is enjoyable to read, but doesn’t really have any application or impact upon our life. We need to conquer this propensity to become complacent and consumed with our own lives by seeking to know the Lord intimately through His Word. We need to conquer by comprehending it so we can apply scripture in our lives. As we study Scripture intently and purposefully—when we hear it read and proclaimed—may we ask ourselves this question developed from one of Billy Sunday’s revival meetings last century mentioned in the introduction: “Am I willing to do what He wants me to do?”

## *Incorporate*

When has God helped you in understanding something in His Word more clearly so you could apply it to your life? What passage was it, what did you learn from it, and how can you use that experience to help teach others the value of studying God's Word in-depth?

Like Philip with the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8), who has God used to help you more clearly understand the difficult parts of His Word? What methods did they use to help you understand?

Do you know anyone who ever says, "I don't read Scripture because it's too difficult to understand?" What should your response be to that statement?

September 29, 2024

Written and Published by  
First Baptist Church of Fort Worth

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