

A Walk Through Nehemiah

Nehemiah Chapter 1 – Living Comfortably

Please read Nehemiah chapter 1.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 1:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

It so happened... Nehemiah's a man, comfortable in his job, doing what he does, making his money, working for his living. Kind of living middle class normal kind of life. It's the twentieth year of the king's reign. So life's been pretty "normal", fairly consistent. And Nehemiah's just going with the flow.

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Next, Nehemiah is approached by relatives. They have a problem, a concern. And now they are coming in a group, to him. Why bother him now? Well, they came to him because he is in power. He is in a position to do something.

And life was comfortable, maybe too comfortable? How's my life? How about yours?

Nehemiah asks about his relatives. It's the right thing to do when they show up for a visit. What's going on with them? And then they tell him. He comes to understand a true need, been there a long time. Have you ever discovered a need, been there a long time? What do you do?

Well, Nehemiah was facing this, because he asked the question. The remnant is facing adversity, they're under reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is breached, and the gates have burnt down. Isn't Jerusalem a special city? What makes it so? Are burnt gates a normal occurrence? How must life be for the people in Jerusalem? How big is this problem?

How did Nehemiah cope? Did he fix it quickly? Did he do what you would have done? What should he have done? Did you notice, he agonizes over the problem for several days. He fasted, prayed, did his share of mourning. Do you think he has an answer yet?

Finally, he recognizes the true nature of the issue. It's all about God and His faithfulness to His promises. What he does next is crucial. He brings the problem to the throne of grace, and places it front and center before the Lord. He deals with the real nature of the problem, with sin, with behavior, with disobedience, and eventually with repentance. And then he asks the Lord for a solution.

Next, he begins making plans, and asking the Lord to work, asking the Lord to give success.

Then he looks at his position - "Now I was cupbearer for the king." Nehemiah took stock of the situation, the power of God and His faithfulness, and then began working from his current location.

What about me? Am I facing problems bigger than me, or worse, incredibly far bigger than me? How am I approaching the real problem? Am I willing to do what Nehemiah did, and lay it all out before the Lord? And finally, when I am done understanding the problem, am I willing to get busy, make plans and ask the Lord for success?

Yeah, I should do the same!

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Nehemiah Chapter 2 – Bad News

Please read Nehemiah chapter 2.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 2:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

In Chapter one, Nehemiah had learned, agonized, prayed, and awaited the Lord's working. Now, four months later (November to March), he is before the King, and he's still agonizing....

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Why do I act as if the saints of old were godly, perfect in their faith, trusted all the way through, and that I am nothing in comparison. Well, it's not true!

Nehemiah had correctly brought the situation before the Lord, and had recognized the issue was truly about God's faithfulness... Yet four months later, he's faltering in his trust, anxious and still with no solution. Worse, the King sees that Nehemiah is not ill, and yet is downcast in his presence.

I am like this too, I place my concern before the Lord, seek a quick fix, and four months later am back in the same place. Is God not listening? Doesn't He care? ... Or maybe I am supposed to learn something about sovereignty and timing? Oh, and more, that He doesn't always come quickly to my rescue.

Apparently, my comfort is not His greatest concern. Nevertheless, His perfect timing does demonstrate His love for me. But it demands that I wait in faith...

Worse than being depressed, the King calls attention to Nehemiah's demeanor. Apparently this can be cause for dismissal, or worse. The King's presence is nothing to be messed with. Note Nehemiah's comment, "this made me very fearful." What makes me fearful?

Nehemiah quickly lays out the cause of his fear, to explain his dejection. And the King asks him, "What are you seeking?" In one moment Nehemiah's fear of the king turned to a huge opportunity. He seemed to be "out of God's will" and worrying about the king, and now, suddenly, the door opens just a bit. Don't miss the opportunity!

Nehemiah quickly prays, then asks for permission to go rebuild the city of his ancestors. The king asks for trip details. Nehemiah gives him the timing. But then Nehemiah recognizes the Lord is here working. And boldly, he asks the king for more. "Give me letters of travel safety, and also access to the King's nature preserve for supplies." So the king gave it to him.

While I am waiting for new opportunities, for provision and supply, do I forget the Lord is working? Certainly He is preparing me, and the leaders around me. Take confidence, my heart, and walk in faith!

So Nehemiah went to the Governors, presented the letters. He also found opposition. But he pressed forward, headed to Jerusalem. He didn't come in loudly, rather he quietly surveyed the situation in Jerusalem. Nehemiah was careful with the plans the Lord had placed in his heart.

Notice, he's begun to recognize that God was working. Note to myself - once the Lord shows active, press on, don't give up. Get after it, walk the walk, push the doors, follow the next steps before you. If the King gives me letters, I then need to present the letters to whomever is appropriate.

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Moreover, this is not my gig, it's the Lord's gig. Is He able to work His gig in your life too? Are you willing to endure the upheaval, carry the shame, face the opposition, and continue walking in obedience? This is precisely the walk of faith. Will you press on?

Nehemiah completed the night time survey, and returned to his place of accommodation. His companion and advocate was only the Lord. Sometimes we find the same. It's OK with me to walk this walk as the Lord leads. Is it OK with you to take this current situation, call it blessed, and move forward confidently in faith?

Notice Nehemiah has not shared with the officials, priests, nobles, or workers. Now comes the moment of truth - Nehemiah broaches everything by declaring to them "You see the problem we have: Jerusalem is desolate and its gates are burned. Come on! Let's rebuild the wall so that this reproach will not continue."

If the Lord is working a plan, there will come a "line in the sand" moment, when we either DO or we run away and DON'T. This was Nehemiah's time. So checkout how Nehemiah follows - he shared all the Lord had done, all the King had committed, and he laid out a vision. He added urgency. Then the people prepared themselves, and agreed it was a good project. When the Lord is in something, He is in it. Not because we psych ourselves into believing a mantra, but rather we identify Him in action, sovereignly in our lives. Don't shrink back, but walk forward!

And guess who shows up - the opposition. Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, your best friend's husband, classmates, your boss. Opposition is never fun. But opposition doesn't mean you have it wrong either. One of the ways they show they are off, is they misstate what you know to be true. "Are you rebelling against the king?" Nehemiah knew he was not. In fact he had letters, horses, and Governor support. But the officials, the workers, the priests - they hadn't been with Nehemiah, and this threat was meant to dissuade them.

When you know what's right, you must declare the truth! "The God of heaven will prosper us. We his servants will start the rebuilding. But you have no just or ancient right in Jerusalem." Yes, line in the sand time. Declare the truth. Remember the Lord and what He specifically has done and said. then get busy, hard after it. Push past the opposition, and watch the Lord carry you forward.

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Nehemiah Chapter 3 – Men with a Vision

Please read Nehemiah chapter 3.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 3:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

Let's walk around this city starting at the Sheep Gate. Eliashib and his priest friends arose and built. The men of Jericho... The sons of Hassenaah... Meremoth... Meshullam... Zadok... Men of Tekoa... Joiada... and so it continues until we get back to the Sheep Gate. I can hear

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the sound of "We built this City..." in my head, and my spirit is bolstered. My heart always takes encouragement when I see people stepping up to the Lord's challenge. I cry joyfully when I see faithfulness. I love success, especially when watching my sons.

And so I imagine Nehemiah exulting with joy. But it wasn't always so. He was the wine steward, maybe wondering why he was so far away from his own land. He had been approached by relatives, and then went to despair not knowing how his homeland might ever recover from ruins. He agonized in prayer, and yet months later was still anxious. He got caught by the King, with a despondent appearance, and had to quickly react.

Then the King gave him audience... Sometimes tough times beset me too. I don't know what's next, what to do. And the Lord's path is right down the middle of it all... Yet He really is at work... Ultimately Nehemiah went to his homeland, with the King's supplies, and he inspected. Then he challenged his compatriots to pick up the gauntlet and rebuild the walls. They accepted, and yet opposition was there too.

And the most amazing thing happened. Nehemiah declared to the opponents, ""The God of heaven will prosper us. We his servants will start the rebuilding." This word resounded, and we see family after family after family, all step up, all get after it, and the amazing quick turn around for their city. And this was not simply a big adventure, this was the wall right next to each family's home.

So go, walk the city again. Read of each family. Note that it wasn't just carpenters and masons, it was priests, artisans, perfumers, people from every walk and trade. Imagine your house there too. Grab a trowel. Cart some stone. Pour the mortar. Plaster the face. Set the beams, the hinges, the rods. Establish the gates.

What's next? I don't know.

How will the opposition respond? I am not certain.

Where will we be next week, next month, next year? All unknown.

But what IS known, is the Lord has brought me here. This is the task in front of me. i will walk forward. I will work hard. i will let people know I AM with the WALL BUILDERS. And that this is the Lord's wall, His city. So take courage my soul. Grab a trowel, and let's get busy.

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Nehemiah Chapter 4 – Under Threat

Please read Nehemiah chapter 4.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 4:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

"When Sanballat heard they were rebuilding the wall he became angry..." And so it starts. Nehemiah and crew had begun to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Each family was getting after their part of the wall, and they were upbeat, eager, willing to do the hard work. And then Sanballat got upset.

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Here I am, working hard to repair a situation. I'm trying to correct a major problem. It's embarrassing, the situation I am in, and I want it fixed. I want it for God's glory, but really I want it for me so I won't have the comments, the derision, or the scorn. So I get after it, I set a plan, I get busy.

And then there's Sanballat. He wishes nothing more than failure. He benefits when I travail. He exults because he is winning and I am losing, and that gives him pride. In fact, he relishes his position of power, and the victory of his people over my scattered and broken family. And he cannot stand that maybe we are not outcasts, but a people with value. So he starts the verbal attacks.

Sanballat stirs up his colleagues, and emboldens the army of Samaria. And he takes a stance against the idea that these "feeble Jews" may again offer sacrifice. He belittles their ability to even get the work done. And he has friends! Tobiah begins to challenge the quality of the work, that the wall wouldn't support the weight of a single fox walking on top.

Nehemiah hasn't forgotten his "why", and more importantly, his "Who". The Why? He came because the city of his fathers was in ruins. The Who? The Lord. Nehemiah came to rebuild because the Lord's greatness was challenged, the Lord's reputation had become shattered walls and broken people. So he prays to the Lord, pleading for Him to work against the derision and taunting of those who oppose.

As I am working, I hear voices, thoughts in my head, casual comments. I worry about failure, bearing concerns that maybe I can't surmount my problems, maybe I'll be here forever. When I don't see the end game, and am here in the middle of it all, it's lonely, frustrating, and hard work. And still those words, voices, taunting - they all remain.

Nehemiah keeps building. They joined the entire wall, half height yet connected. The people were enthusiastic in their work.

Work is like that. Getting busy, setting goals, crossing off milestones, taking steps and making progress. Something good happens when we get to work. We find ourselves making headway, and we learn that it's not over. Still cannot see the end game from here, but I'm holding my own in the middle.

Now look who shows up - Sanballat, Tobiah, and in addition, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod. And they were very angry. And they brought their armed forces to fight against Jerusalem. They had to stop this!

My middle game was making progress, I was excited, and feeling good. Now there's opposition, and this time it's more than words. Somebody's going to get hurt. This project may cost me, maybe a lot, and maybe even my all. I could get really frustrated with this game. Only it's not a game, this is real life.

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"So we prayed and stationed a guard." Two great things to do. The most important is to pray. Nehemiah could have thought "This isn't my idea - I was a wine steward. 'Cabernet, anybody?'" this was the Lord's work. Reflecting on how we got here, who really is the Lord, this brings me back to prayer. So we prayed. And then we got busy, made a plan, set a guard.

I have to do this too. It's not about me. It's not my work, although I will try to work hard. It's not my reputation, although I care what people think. It's the Lord at work in my life, and He has brought me to right here. And it's not about whether my reputation gets fixed. It's about His reputation. This is His city, my life is His work, and the results are for His glory. I am willing to let my reputation be hurt, my plans be changed, my ideas be set aside. But His plans, His work, His glory, these are key, and these will reign supreme. So I pray again. And then I get busy, make a plan, trust in His hand, and get after the work He brings.

Terrific! The people of Judah begin declaring our failure. They claim our strength is failed, and our work is merely debris. They have all but cancelled the project. This hurts the most. These are the people who should be with us, seeking the Lord's hand, His glory, rejoicing at His repaired city.

When the Lord moves me, sometimes the believers are there to remind of the failure, to declare job over, project failed. When I returned home from missionary service, I had a fellow church member ask me what it was like to fail for the Lord. Sweet! Actually, I don't know what that was like. Following the Lord has never left me failed. I know what it's like to work under threats. But it's not about me, it's about the Lord., And it's not about my comfort, it's about His glory, and my willingness to seek that.

Nehemiah stationed defenders to protect, and made sure workers were armed. He put families together, knowing they would work hard to keep everyone safe. And he reminded them "Don't be afraid, remember the great and awesome Lord, and fight on behalf of your families."

That's what I must do. Don't be afraid. Remember the Great and Awesome Lord. And then I must fight on.

And so it happened, the adversaries heard the Jews were aware of the threat, and God frustrated the opposition's intentions. From that day forward, the men were working, aware, standing ready, and trusting the Lord. They worked hard, stayed in the city, and never let down their guard.

What about us? We must trust the Lord right where we are. We must work, even under opposition. We must press on, right where the Lord has us. And He will work also. It's about Him.

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Nehemiah Chapter 5 – Adding Pressure

Please read Nehemiah chapter 5.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 5:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

"Then there was an outcry from the people ..." Just when things should start turning around, there arises another set of problems and pressures. Family, food, income, taxes, home - all the same pressures that I face too. But more, the people had begun taking slaves, holding collateral, charging interest against their fellow Jews, all for the sake of "fairness", or

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something like that. This is how the nations act. This is not how the people of God should conduct themselves. See Acts 2:42-47 for comparison...

Nehemiah hears the outcry, understands the anger, and recognizes the capturing of wealth and goods as usury. He alone had the position and credibility to raise the issue among his wealthy countrymen. He calls the people, presents the issue, and the wealthy were silent, finding nothing to say.

Moreover, Nehemiah recognizes the issue as one more strike against the Lord and His character. Those taking property, demanding interest, buying their countrymen as slaves, were in fact showing they were far from the Lord. And Nehemiah goes right there, "Should you not conduct yourselves in the fear of our God in order to avoid the reproach of the Gentiles...?"

I had thought the issue was God's reputation because His city was in ruin, and His people were oppressed. Just like in my life, I thought the issue was my situation and how it reflects on the Lord. In fact, the bigger issue is the heart of God's people. Are they walking with Him, in obedience, growing in His character?

It's the state of my heart. Am I in accumulation mode, defined by my possessions, characterized by my things? When all my actions are added up, am I about my wealth and comfort? What might the nations say about me? Can anyone lay a claim against me?

What about the people around me? Are they hurting while I am cruising happily? Are there gaps, empty plates, homes without heat or water, families over their heads in debt and without hope? When my city looks at me, how do they measure my life?

The Lord is in the process of building His people, in order that He might bless the nations. He wants them to know Him, to find His provision, to learn to care for others and walk in His ways. And He's asking that of me too. What about you?

Nehemiah challenged the people on how they should then live. And they responded by returning slaves, giving back fields and homes, restoring families, and helping the others. The assembly agreed, "So be it!" and then proceeded to praise the Lord. And then they went out and did as they promised.

From that day, Nehemiah was appointed governor, ruling Judah for twelve years. Faithfulness to the Lord always results in the Lord working His plan in His peoples' lives. For Nehemiah, it was a public position, leading the people. This is a long way from the wine cellar, or the King's table. And it's not always the same high public position for everyone who follows the Lord. The certainty is in the Lord working for His people.

For me, I may be in my nice house. Or I might be in a small trailer. I may have a position of recognition, or I might be a diligent worker behind the scenes. The important factor is my willingness to be His person, to act as He leads, to put on His character in my activity, and to lay my trust with Him.

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One last note, Nehemiah never leveraged his position of authority for personal gain. He did not take the wealth from the people, did not charge interest, did not carry himself as governors were known to do. He served his people. He served the Lord. He certainly carried out the duties of his office, meeting with leaders, holding dinners, etc. But he did not grab the position for personal gain.

His only request? "Please remember me for good, O my God, for what I have done for this people."

This is how to get ahead in life!

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Nehemiah Chapter 6 – Intentional Living

Please read Nehemiah chapter 6.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 6:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

The neighbors really don't like the wall. They don't like the city of God being restored. They don't much care for the leadership of Nehemiah, and they don't appreciate the enthusiasm of the people. The walls were restored, even though the gates were not yet hung. The city now has protection, and the people now have a physical refuge.

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Sanballat and Geshem set their plan to trap Nehemiah. They wanted to get him off his plan, to harm him and discourage the people. Nehemiah heard the messengers, and each time responded truthfully - "I am doing an important work." He knew how he arrived at this place, the hand of God at work in him, the favor of the king, the response of the leaders, the working of the people. And Nehemiah kept on!

The fifth time Sanballat sent an assistant with a letter, a public declaration that Nehemiah was rumored to be revolting against the King, had setup prophets in Jerusalem, and was manipulating the people of Judah. Nehemiah's response again was truth - "These rumors are false, are your imagination, you're trying to discourage the workers, and hope the wall won't get done."

And then Nehemiah prays, simply: "Strengthen my hands."

The work I am in, the challenges before me, the tension I am under, is all about following the Lord under pressure. I am beset with challenges. But I think about how I arrived here, the plans of the Lord, the actions He has poured into my life, the direction He has given. I recognize the need to keep walking in faith, keep working with diligence, continue pressing forward. And when discouragement comes, answer it with truth. Intentional Working... And then, pray! "Strengthen my Hands." Intentional Praying.

Then comes the more subtle attack. Shemiah is a shut-in, and Nehemiah visits him. He's a compatriot, a fellow follower of the Lord, member of the family of God. He offers an idea, to go to the house of the Lord, go inside, and hide with protection. "You know how the night can be, and they're coming to kill you."

Nehemiah is quick to recognize the faulty advice, and to stand up against it. Should a man run away? Worse, should someone defile the temple? The more important question is whether the Lord can protect, or whether I should sin and try to create my own protection. Where is my trust? Where is my obedience?

Nehemiah immediately understood the challenge was whether he would continue to walk with the Lord and trust Him. Living under this tension for the long haul is wearying enough. Keeping perspective, trusting the Lord to provide, working diligently in obedience, these are all the keys to living in tense circumstances. And these circumstances are known, understood, and even part of God's plan.

So he prays, "Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat in light of these actions of theirs..." Keep praying. Keep working. Keep walking forward. Intentional living, under the Lord!

And so the wall was completed! Fifty two days - that was quick! The nations were discouraged and disheartened. Moreover, they knew the work had been accomplished with the help of God. So it will be with us too.

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Nehemiah Chapter 7 – You Matter

Please read Nehemiah chapter 7.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 7:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

Nehemiah sees the walls complete, the gates hung, guards stationed, singers, and yet the city is not yet lived in. Jerusalem was vulnerable, an unsafe place to live. Now it's ready for rebuilding homes, and living.

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Nehemiah's next step is to get the people of God into the City of God. He appoints godly leaders, and then goes through the records to see who belongs in the city. Any of God's people are welcome here...

Nehemiah takes the time to list the 49,000 people who are of the families of Jerusalem. These are God's people. Take a read through these families, it's important.

Parosh, Shephatiah, Arah, Pahath-Moab (from the line of Jeshua and Joab), Elam, Zattu, Zaccai, Binnui, Bebai, Azgad, Adonikam, Bigvai, Adin, Ater (through Hezekiah), Hashum, Bezai, Harif, Gibeon, Bethlehem, Netophah, Anathoth, Azmaveth, Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah, Beeroth, Ramah, Geba, Micmash, Bethel, Ai, Nebo, Elam, Harim, Jericho, Lod, Hadid, Ono, Senaah, Jedaiah, Immer, Pashhur, Harim, Jeshua, Asaph, Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, Shobai, Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, Keros, Sia, Padon, Lebanah, Hagabah, Shalmal, Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, Uzzah, Paseah, Besai, Meunim, Nephussim, Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, Barkos, Sisera, Temah, Nezhiah, Hatipha, Sotai, Sophereth, Perida, Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim, Amon, Solomon, Kerub, Addon, Immer, Delaiah, Tobiah, Nekoda, Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai.

Over 42,000 people, and the Lord knows their name.

He knows they are His.

He knows they are made for His city, because they are His people.

And so are you!

Take time to think of this, because it's very important:

You matter.

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Nehemiah Chapter 8 – What's Next?

Please read Nehemiah chapter 8.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 8:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

Once everyone got into their cities, the people gathered together and asked Ezra to read from God's Word, the book of the law of Moses.

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Don't you love it? The people had returned to their land. They rebuilt the walls, hung the gates, rebuilt their cities. But it wasn't about the walls, the gates or the cities. For them, it was about their God, who had brought them back, who had restored His City, and who was working in their midst.

The people wanted to hear what the Lord wanted next. All the people, everyone who could understand. This wasn't just a select group, or the "taught ones", or the "studyers", this was every man and woman and child who could listen.

Oh Lord, please give us hearts to want to listen too. We want to be eager to hear...

So Ezra opened the book, everyone stood, and he read for five or six hours, from dawn until noon. When Ezra blessed the Lord, praising Him, all the people concurred. Then they bowed down, with their faces to the ground. As the people listened, the Levites helped explain the Word, and the people gained understanding.

As the people began to weep and mourn, the Levites instructed them to rejoice, to celebrate. Today God's holiness wasn't a time for self reflection, rather for participation in celebration and worship. Certainly He will work with each one. But right now it's about the Lord, His word, His heart, His love for His people, and His working in them.

The Levites didn't want a token celebration either. They sent everyone to eat their best foods, drink their best wines, share with those who didn't have the same. They were all to rejoice in the Lord and all that He was doing among them.

We need the same celebration, the same trust, the same following, the same heart to enjoy to share, and to encourage each other too. Take the next step! Call your friends, remind them of what the Lord is doing. Join in celebration with fellow believers! Think Super Bowl Party for the Lord!

On the second day, they discovered the Lord's command to live in shelters, to recall when they were in the wilderness with no homes. And so they went to the hills, brought in the materials, built shelters and obeyed the Lord. They also devoted themselves to reading and listening to His word, and to rejoice in Him. And so they continued for the eight days of the festival.

I want to hear His word, and I am committing to obey as I listen, to step out as I hear, and to follow as He leads. It's about Him, and I choose to follow. I also like the celebration - He is pulling us into His work. He is adjuring us to rejoice. He is building us into His people, and we do get the fun in participating...

What's Next? The daily joy of walking with the Lord, and unknown surprises along the way... Will you join in?

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Chapter 9 – Deep Turning

Please read Nehemiah chapter 9.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 9:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

Having spent days in celebration of the Lord, having participated in the Festival of the Booths, the people of Israel have taken a deep look into the magnificence and greatness of God. He surely is awesome, in power, in knowledge, in love, in holiness, in their lives! And here, two

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weeks later, He is working profoundly in their midst. In fact, He is digging deep into their hearts.

They assembled in mourning and repentance for who they had become, how they had behaved, for the acts of their forefathers, and the fact that they themselves were often far from the Lord. They had made alliances with the foreigner, covenants with those not of the family of God, and they had neglected Him.

So here they are, covered in burlap bags, and then with ashes, and He is turning their hearts. They separated from their alliances with the heathen peoples, recounted their sins, they earnestly sought His face, His forgiveness and His cleansing. They read His word for a quarter of the day, they were confessing for another quarter of the day, and they were worshipping.

They returned to worshipping God, remembering who He is, remembering His character, recounting all that He has made in Heaven, in Space, in the solar system, in earth. They reminded each other that He imparts life, that all of heaven worship Him. They spoke of His protection and provision all the days that they ever walked with Him. They began with Abram, and God's blessing to him, God's making him the father of a multitude, God's covenant to Abraham and his descendants. They spoke of the land they were given, a land they merely had to walk into. They remembered that He fulfilled His promise, as He always does. They remembered the great signs in Egypt, the protection as they fled, the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day, so they would know where to travel. And they never lacked any thing.

But their families acted presumptuously. The people wandered from the Lord, and He gave them up. Eventually their sin brought them to the depths, and they recalled the Lord. He brought them back to Him. And they did this again and again. Just like me.

So here they are today, asking for cleansing, seeking Him. And He is right here, pouring out His grace immeasurably, washing the sin, cleansing souls and restoring His people. The future is as it always was, unknown. The only certainty was His promise to be their God, His hand to protect, and His provision for their daily need. Their charge? Simply to obey and follow, to seek His face, to trust in His giving of life and all they will need.

I'm ready for the same deep turning. I've been here, and I've been far away. I have done Christmas, Easter, and also some quiet times with the Lord too. But I wander so quickly, get enamored with the treasures in this land, and then I think it was my hard work, or the result of my character...

Whimsical people with no memory, that's my people, and that's me. Oh presumption, I despise the work you do in my heart. I worry about the next bill, the amounts due, plans for my kids, the care for my family. My eyes are in the wrong place. The God of Abraham, of Israel, the God of Nehemiah, the God of Jesus and the disciples, He is my God. He will provide. He has daily given me so much more than I have ever deserved or even asked. And He has never let us down. NEVER.

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Do I have the courage to put pen to paper, to put my name down as turned? Will I join with these people who finished this chapter with v9:38 “Because of all of this we are entering into a binding covenant in written form; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests have affixed their names on the sealed document.”

It's time to sign up.

I'm in.

Brett Mason.

1-29-2012.

How about you? Join me.

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Chapter 10 – Say You Will

Please read Nehemiah chapter 10.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 10:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

We have seen the Lord do this work! We came to a land broken, and are now in a fortified city. We came to a people despondent, and now we have a heart to follow the Lord. We came to a desert scorned our enemies, and now we are strengthened and lifted up.

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Our hearts are turned, our people want to follow the Lord, and we get it. Today is the Declaration, sign here! And like John Hancock, Nehemiah is the first to sign. Immediately followed by the leaders, priests and Levites.

Oh Lord, We Agree!

Here's the pledge:

- We enter into a curse and an oath
- We will adhere to the Law of Moses
- We will carefully obey
- We will not intermarry with the nations
- We will honor the Lord's Day, and not make it for our gain
- We will follow the Lord in our agriculture, letting the fields lay fallow every seventh year
- We recognize our sustenance is from the Lord, not from our harvests
- We will provide our part in the Temple Worship
- We will bring in our tithes offerings and Gifts to the Lord
- We will give from the first born of our families and our flocks and herds

We finally understand. We are here because of the Lord, and by no other means. Our work, it's from the Lord. Our family, it's from the Lord. Our home, it's from the Lord. Our blessings, they're from the Lord. Our future, it belongs to the Lord.

Moreover, His great love brought us back. His heart moved our heart. His faithfulness compels us. And so we sign up. That's our names, right there!

So - have you signed up?

Today, sign up with me. It's a matter of life and death.

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Chapter 11 – Faith and Action

Please read Nehemiah chapter 11.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 11:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

"So the Leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, while the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to settle in Jerusalem." Until now the city has been a project, but everyone's homes were still outside. Until now, this great project was an adventure, action based on faith in God's working, and Nehemiah's vision.

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Obedience to date was a matter of joining compatriots, following the leaders. And the work was successful! Do you believe it? Is the city ready? Are the walls complete, safe, sturdy and secure? Are the gates in place? Is Jerusalem really ready? All the people had gathered to celebrate the Lord's success in completing the walls, restoring the protection for His city. From Nehemiah on down, they had worshiped the Lord, celebrated His work, confessed their sins, re-engaged with His festivals, and turned their hearts to the Lord.

What's next? The hardest part. The proof of their faith is simply this, moving forward in trust and obedience. Is the city ready? Yes. Do I believe it? Certainly. Am I completely sold on my commitment? Sure. Then it's time to pick up my possessions, and move in. If I really believe that this is His work, then I need to join in. The proof is demonstrated in action.

So who steps up? The leaders, all of them! And then the people cast lots to see whom the Lord wanted also to settle in His city. All the people gave their blessing, and so they moved in obedience to Him. Some went into the city, but all were willing. These people's hearts were to follow the Lord.

The future is unknown. The Lord has been working, until now. Yes, until now, He has brought restoration. Until now, He has protected from Sanballat, Tobiah and all the opposition. Until now, He has protected Nehemiah. Until now, He has moved the hearts of His people to follow. Until now.

Tomorrow is uncertain. The future is hazy. There are certainly tough days ahead. There are assuredly great blessings as well. I see so many challenges before me, and I am frightened. I get a knot in my belly as I look ahead. I worry a lot. Anxiety plagues me.

But here, today, I see where my lot has landed. I know the Lord has brought me to right here, right now. So I am getting my things. My confidence in myself is low. But my head sees the Lord is here, the city is rebuilt, the walls are restored, the gates are hung, and the threats and opposition to date have not prevailed.

So today I am moving forward. I still don't know what is next. I do know who knows. And I am moving forward and trusting Him!

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Chapter 12 – Trust and Diligence

Please read Nehemiah chapter 12.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 12:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

Now the wall was are restored, the gates in place, the leaders have moved into the city, and one of every ten families has moved there as well. Next step was to return as a people to the worship of their God. So they set about all the tasks to restore worship and to once again be

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the people of the Living God.

They brought all the Priests and Levites who returned in order to lead. This included the leaders of the priests, specifically the Levites by name, and then the Priests by name. The Lord specifically recalls each person, their families, and their role. Reminds me, He remembers me and my role too.

Then they brought everyone back to worship. Beginning with the leaders to offer praise and thanks, they put in place the gatekeepers and storeroom guards. These were required for the collection and maintenance of the first-fruit offerings and tithes, and the distribution to the families who served. Next they proceeded with the Dedication. Beginning with all the Levites from wherever they lived, all were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication joyfully with songs of thanksgiving. They brought in all the singers, and then they went to purification. They wanted to be ready.

I want to be ready too. I have a role, and tasks assigned - I want to be ready to deliver. If there's anything I should do to be prepared, I need to take the steps. Serving the Lord, whether as a leader, or as a team member, or as a participant in the body, requires that I am ready. Each one has a part, each one has a role. And I do too. I may not even know what it is. I do know that the Lord knows. Look at the names, He remembers each one...

So all the leaders and participants purified themselves. Then they brought the leaders up on top of the wall, and appointed two large choirs. What a sight this must be, a very large group up on top. Everyone would have seen this, even from a distance away! Then the group separated into two choirs. One headed southward, singing and worshipping, the other heading Northward, singing and worshipping as well. They went to the gates, making their way to the temple. What a sight, in fact, what a sound!

Then they took their stations in the Temple, each participant in his place. And they sang loudly, offered great sacrifices and rejoiced, for God had given them great joy. All the families joined in too, including the women and children, also rejoicing. The rejoicing could be heard from far away. I am reminded, they were still just beginning. Their future was no more known than it had been previously. The opposition still continued outside, and the future was still a big question mark.

I am here too, not sure what's next. I must do the roles assigned, being faithful in each step the Lord has affirmed. For me it's contacting more people, filling out applications. Being faithful in each area, being diligent. I also keep my face toward the Lord, lifting my situation to Him, asking His direction, asking His continued provision. And then all the things I can do, I must do. Applications, connecting with colleagues, following up on referrals. Taking stock of near term opportunities and being faithful. One familiar saying is "Luck follows the prepared", no doubt with some truth in it. For me, it's both "trusting" in His provision, and "preparing" in every way for His service.

For Jerusalem, they then appointed men over the storerooms for offerings. They began receiving in the first fruits and the tithes. The people were delighting in the priests and the

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Levites who were ministering. The priests began the service of purification, according to the commandment of David. All Israel was contributing for the singers and gatekeepers, according to the daily need. And they set aside the portion for the Levites and the descendants of Aaron.

Faithfulness and diligence are hallmarks of trust. When we follow the Lord, we also step up to obey Him in every way we can. This is not trying to take extraordinary measures, but being faithful in each opportunity. Diligence must be our hallmark, while trust and faith must be our character. These people wanted to do all that the Lord had commanded. They understood this City and Nation are His work, not their own. They also realized that they were here by His design, and as such they obeyed and worked His work.

Let the same be true of you and me.

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Chapter 13

– What Kind of Leader?

Please read Nehemiah chapter 13.

Pray, and then reflect.

What does it say?

What did it mean?

What does it mean to me?

Now come back to Nehemiah 13:1 – my notes may encourage you too...

With the walls restored, life has returned to a certain state of normal. The walls and gates are secure. The nation has had a time of celebration, of recommitment, of resuming their walk as the people of God. The leaders and people have returned to their homes, both in the city and in the country. Levites and priests are in place so that Temple worship has resumed. And it

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was working marvelously.

After some time, the Book of Moses was opened, and read aloud to the people. Always a good start! They discovered that they were not to allow the Ammonite or Moabite to enter the assembly. So they removed all who were of mixed ancestry.

Here's a reminder to me, have I removed those parts of life which have no place with the Lord? What parts of my life are descended from the Kingdom of Darkness rather than the Kingdom of our Lord? Am I serious about this walk?

Look who's back! Tobiah... He has a son-in-law who is a priest. And Tobiah has made good use of this relationship. The storerooms for the offerings have become Tobiah's personal warehouse. No longer used for the Lord, Tobiah has discovered the secret of "If you can't beat em, join em!" There goes the grain, incense, vessels, and the olive oil too. And nobody stopped it!

This is not a welcome reunion. Nehemiah had returned to his job with the King, and only discovered this mess when he returned on leave. He wasted little time in cleaning house. Out with Tobiah's household possessions. On to purifying the rooms. And then back to offerings and worship.

Are we willing to do the same? Once I find an area where I've compromised, am I willing to clean it out, purify it with repentance, and then commit myself to following in obedience? Sure, I cannot muster this on my own strength, but with the Lord's working, I can commit myself to following. And He is able to carry us as we set our face to obedience.

Next, Nehemiah discovered that the grain offerings had not been provided. It's a little disobedience. But look how it grows, this little act results in the Levites and singers returning to their fields. A little disobedience goes a long way! And Nehemiah brings it back on the leaders, "Why have you let this happen?"

Are you a leader? Are you maintaining the standards the Lord has given you, or are you letting them slide? When does a little departure become a big problem? What should the leaders have done differently? Can a leader function effectively without maintaining his personal commitment? What should I do differently?

So Nehemiah brings them back to their role in the temple, and all of Judah get back to their tithes and offerings. Trustworthy men are assigned to keep the storerooms. They made sure the distributions were appropriate as well. Nice recovery. Do I have something to recover?

Nehemiah asks, "Remember me Lord" - not because of his personal greatness, or accomplishments, or even piety. Simply Nehemiah has tried to walk in faithfulness and obedience.

Next comes the Sabbath. The Lord had instructed His people to keep the Sabbath holy. The people were to stop their work, and to trust the Lord to provide through His faithfulness. Alas,

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the businessman struggles here! These people found they could crank out much more profit by keeping the machine going every day! They had their supplies lined up, their laborers hired, and their distribution network in order. They were ready to go! The wisdom of Tyre was "Work work work, and you will prosper!"

Not so with the Lord. Certainly we are to work hard. But in His plan, we both work and trust. Ultimately our provision is not from our work, but from the Lord's faithfulness. So we take the Sabbath for Him. Or Sunday, "The Lord's Day" in the New Testament. The issue is obedience and reliance on Him. Are you relying on Him? Are you taking the time for Him, even while you work hard?

Nehemiah brings the issue again to the Nobles, "What have you done? Didn't this fail last time? And so you're doing it even more?" He shuts the gates before the Sabbath begins. He prevented the commerce from going on, and posted reliable men to enforce it. He gets rid of the vendors and suppliers. And once again, he brings on the purification.

The same is required of me. Is there more I need to reflect on? Have I put the Lord behind my business, somehow blending my priorities? It's time to order my world, to put business away while I worship. I can come back on Monday and get busy. Let's get it right!

Next comes the issue of compromise. The Lord has said no to intermarrying. There were men in Judah who had married into Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. In fact, some of their children no longer spoke Hebrew. Nehemiah goes ballistic. He steps right in, punishing the offenders, even pulling out their hair (Isaiah 50:6), forcing them to recommit to the Lord and obedience to Him. He challenges them, can they do better than Solomon did? How so? If the one whom the Lord loved so greatly cannot succeed, where do I get off thinking I can sneak by with compromise?

Guess who else is back? Yeah, Sanballat. Like a bad penny, these guys just keep coming back. Sin is like that for you and I too. A little sin here, a little sin there, and we have lost the race.

So Nehemiah banishes the son of Joiada. And he purifies everything foreign. One last touch, he even provides the wood for resuming the burnt offerings. What does he ask for himself? "Please remember me for good, O my God."

That's what I want too. Remember me for good, O my God. How about you?