

**SPRINGFIELD GARDENS
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Rev. Dr. Cecil B. Stone, *Senior Pastor*

**THE NEHEMIAH
PROJECT**

**REBUILDING THE PEOPLE OF GOD
RESTORING THE BODY OF CHRIST**

**“...THIS WORK HAD BEEN
ACCOMPLISHED WITH THE
HELP OF OUR GOD.”**

NEHEMIAH 6:16

SGUMC Devotional (*Revised 2020*)

Part One • Day 1-16

Pastor Leslie L. Kearse, Writer and Editor

DAY 1

Nehemiah 1:1-2

¹ The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, ² one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

Where Your Heart Is

Nehemiah spots his brother Hanani and his traveling companions as they return from Judah. Although Nehemiah is glad to see his brother for whom he undoubtedly holds great affection, Nehemiah's questions quickly reveal what is heaviest on his mind and uttermost in his heart. In a word, it's JERUSALEM.

Nehemiah was a devout Jew numbered among those who had been taken or born into Babylonian captivity. And, while he may have enjoyed certain benefits because of the position he occupied, his heart was not in the Persian capital of Susa where he lived and worked. Instead, his primary concern was where his thoughts often settled. Everything that mattered most centered on his place of origin, the home of his ancestors, the community and people with whom he had kinship and shared his faith. His heart resided in Jerusalem amidst the city and with her people. And, his ultimate concern was for that nation's welfare.

In this season of your life, where is your heart? What is it or who is it that has captured your attention? What issues concern you most, consume your thoughts and are the driving force behind virtually everything you do? I strongly encourage you to search out the answers to these questions: for there is where you will likely discover your heart. You may also discover that this is where the Lord is inviting you to direct your attention during this season.

1. Pray for clarity and discernment regarding the things that are uttermost on your heart. Whatever is your primary concern (i.e. family and friends, your church family, growing in your faith, finances, finding freedom, physical health and wellbeing) may be the area of your life where God is directing your attention.
2. Where are you being led or which of these areas will you choose as your point of focus over the course of the coming weeks?

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, you know all, and you care about every aspect of our being. Guide us in the way you would have us to go and what it is you would have us to do. Grant us discernment so that we may know your will and walk in your ways.

DAY 2

Nehemiah 1:3

³ They replied, “The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.”

When Things Fall Apart

What do you do when you discover that things in your world are falling or have already fallen apart? What do you say when the things you value and depend on fall into a state of disrepair and dysfunction? When your house feels like anything but a home, finances are a mess, relationships are rocky, or your body begins to war against you, revolt against you, what do you do? “Lord, the news is unbearable. Everything is out of kilter. How are we to handle this?”

I suspect that Nehemiah’s heart and mind were overwhelmed with sadness and foreboding as he listened to the report from his brother Hanani about the failing condition of the people and city of Jerusalem. The relative few that remained in the city after several thousand had been carted off to Babylon, where impoverished. The city, like the people, was broken.

As a community, a church, as families and individuals, we all know something about loss and brokenness. And, although there may be aspects of our lives that are in a fallen state, in a broken state, this does not mean we are to leave things where they are and as they are. Just as Hanani's report alerted Nehemiah to the troubles plaguing Jerusalem’s people and land, the Lord has and or will alert us to the trouble laden areas in our lives. "Why," you may ask? It's simple. God wants to do something about our broken, fallen situations. And, what's more, the Lord desires to work through us and with us to do it.

1. In what areas of your life has or is the Lord revealing to you that there is brokenness?
2. What, if anything, do you sense that the Lord is calling you to do about it?
3. Where are you being called or where have you chosen to begin praying and working at this time?

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, as you increase our awareness and open our hearts to the issues and problems you are calling us to face, please do not allow us to be overwhelmed. Help us to draw direction and courage from you so that we may honor you by doing your will.

DAY 3

Nehemiah 1:4

4 When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Stop, Drop and Pray!

In life, there are times when the weight of our circumstances, the painful news concerning our loved ones, or the unfolding of horrific events before our very eyes can cause us to weep. Too often, when we are thrown into situations or bad news is dropped on us we all too quickly assume that there is nothing we can do. With our minds racing we try to make sense out of what has happened, is happening or what will be. Heart struck with great sadness and intense feelings of disempowerment; we drop to our knees.

Like us, it appears that Nehemiah has been brought to his knees by the grim news of Jerusalem's fallen and failing condition. For many days, he cried and mourned for his people. And, for days on end he refrained from eating. As Nehemiah wept, mourned and fasted he not only considered the pain and suffering of his people, but he gave consideration to the God of his people. Nehemiah prayed to the Lord, God of heaven.

While being bent over may be viewed as a sign of weakness by some, our bent knees are frequently received by God as a sign of our availability to be empowered and used by the Lord. Rather than allowing prayer to be a decision of last resort, *Let Us* make it both our primary and default position for all our concerns. In good times as well as bad, *Let Us* always remember to STOP, DROP AND PRAY!

1. What has and is the Lord revealing to you about what should be your main area of focus in this season?
2. What part has prayer played in clarifying where you are to place your attention?
3. What part has prayer played in you discovering what you are to do?

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, we thank you for the gift of prayer. There is not a single moment when and where we cannot connect with you. Lord, as you continue to bless our understanding, grant us the power and courage to do all things in accordance with your will.

DAY 4

Nehemiah 1:5

⁵ I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments;

Remember This When You Pray (Part 1)

As children of God and believers in Christ, we know that we are called to pray. The fact that we are called to do so doesn't mean that we feel as though we are good at it. And, although we engage in prayer, whether in private or public, it doesn't mean that we are confident that we are praying properly or that our prayers will be effective. In truth, we wonder about a great deal when it comes to prayer.

Nehemiah prays. And, while there is no way we can be assured that he had total confidence in what he prayed, we can surmise that he had complete faith in the one to whom he prayed. We can also detect that this faith was based on who he had discovered the God of his prayers to be. Not only is his God "Lord of heaven" who is "great and awesome," but a loving God who is a covenant keeper.

There are some important lessons we can learn from the first few words of Nehemiah's prayer. When we pray, *Let Us* remember how great and awesome God is. *Let Us* remember that our God is a covenant keeper, a promise keeper. We need to know that the words of God are never empty but are filled with the power to bring about anything the Lord wills to be. Why is this so? It is because God created all things and has command over all. Why should we be confident in the God of our prayers? It is because God's love for us is reflected in the fact that the Lord does answer prayer. For God is faithful.

1. What encouragement or assurance have you gained as it pertains to prayer?
2. What assurance have you gained with regard to God answering your prayers?
3. How will you put the encouragement and assurance you have gained to work (use)?
4. Continue to lift your concerns to the Lord in prayer.

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, we thank you for the understanding you give us and the deeper connections you permit us to make through prayer. Help us to remember that our confidence need only rest on and in you Lord, to will and do your good pleasure.

DAY 5

Nehemiah 1:6-7

⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. ⁷ We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses.

Remember This When You Pray (Part 2)

When we pray, we need to remember to confess our sins and come clean with God.

In reading Nehemiah's prayer, I am reminded of the acronym for prayer **A.C.T.S.** - **ADORATION, CONFESSION, THANKSGIVING, and SUPPLICATION.** In v.5 he engages in adoration; expressing appreciation to God for who God is. Here, in vv.6-7, Nehemiah engages in confession. He comes clean with God about the sins that he, his family and the nation of Israel have committed against God through their defiance of the Lord's holy law.

Like Nehemiah, we need to confess our sins. We need to place all of our cards on the table and confess our wrongdoing. Despite how we may feel or what we may think, confession is not a burden. It is, in fact, a great gift from God. Confession helps make it possible for us to come clean with God so that we can draw near to God. It's not as if God doesn't know all about us, but it pleases God when we are honest with the Lord and with ourselves. Think of making confession to God like the "kid and the cookie jar" scenario. Although the parents clearly see their child covered in chocolate and crumbs from the recent cookie caper, the parents still want to hear the words, "Mom and Dad, I did it." Why? It is because the truth helps build relationships. When we go to God confessing "I DID IT!" we open ourselves to God's blessings of forgiveness and restoration.

1. What sins, wrongs, or misdeeds have you yet to confess to God and to yourself?
2. What denials have you made that directly connect to the specific area of your life you are seeking to rebuild and restore during this season?
3. What blessings and promises are you asking the Lord to open up and restore to you?

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, you know me better than I know myself. I have sinned against you in thought, word, deed and my failure to act as you have directed me. Lord God, please forgive me and restore my soul. And, grant me the blessing of walking in loving relationship with you.

DAY 6

Nehemiah 1:8-10

⁸ Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; ⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.' ¹⁰ They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand.

Conditional Blessings, Unconditional Grace

As Nehemiah continues praying to God, he recalls and rehearses God's promise to Israel. The Lord promises, *'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; ⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments... I will gather them from there and bring them...[home].* God is all loving. God is also righteous and just. While the Lord loves us unconditionally, God's justice is measured out in accordance with what God has promised in the word. God will not ignore our sins even if it means denying us the blessings the Lord most desires to give.

When experiencing God's correction and chastisement, we undoubtedly have asked, "Where's the love?" "How can a loving God allow this to happen to me?" In times when I've been on the receiving end of God's correction, I admit that I found it difficult to "see the love" in it. But, true love calls for correction. It sometimes requires withholding temporary and temporal pleasures for long-term and eternal blessings. God's blessings for Israel were greater than the sin in which they were entrenched resulting in their captivity. Their captivity was the Lord's chastisement used to correct and redirect them. God's hope was that Israel would again return to the Lord and the life intended for them. Saints, what God has for us is greater than the sin that sometimes entangles us, robs us, and causes our brokenness. If we want to realize the fullness of God's blessings, we must be faithful to our Lord. And know this, for anyone who questions whether the Lord's grace is unconditional; realize that we experience it every moment of our lives. Whether we are in right relationship with God or not, the Lord continues to watch and wait for the moment when each of us will return to Him and keep his ways. THEN...the Lord will gather us to himself and bring us home.

1. What blessings are you seeking that the Lord has revealed are tied to conditions?
2. What are you doing in order to meet the conditions that the Lord has set?
3. Have you sought help to align yourself with what the Lord requires of you? If not, why not?

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, you are loving, righteous and just. Our faith and hope are in You. Help us keep your word in our hearts and to walk in your ways. When we turn away, redirect us. Restore us to relationship with You and guide us home.

DAY 7

Nehemiah 1:11

"O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!"

At the time, I was cupbearer to the king.

"P" IS FOR POSITION

Remember the acronym A.C.T.S.? Well, before Nehemiah concludes his prayer, he engages in the "S" of A.C.T.S., supplication. He makes an appeal petitioning God on his behalf and on behalf of those "*servants who delight in revering [the Lord's] name.*" Nehemiah is acutely aware of his need for the Lord. He recognizes that although Israel was held captive by man, their bonds were ultimately created and held by God. Thus, any hope for deliverance could only be brought about by the Lord. Acknowledging who God is while at the same time recognizing the limits of his own position and predicament, Nehemiah asks God to show him favor expressed through the Persian king that was his captor. He prayed, "*Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!*"

Many times, we fail to see our positions for what they are. We may think too highly of ourselves because of where we are. We may have a sense of inferiority because of a less than desirable position we hold. Or, we may see our positions as providing us with just enough to make it, just enough to survive, but offering little or nothing we could use to help anyone else. If, however, we could see ourselves, our possessions, and our positions through God's eyes, our perspective concerning the possible would undoubtedly be quite different. So often our thoughts about what we can do are limited by what we have seen. Our positions may indeed afford us the opportunities to not only make a life for ourselves, but to make a difference in the lives of others. Nehemiah's prayers made him available and open to God. He essentially prayed, "Lord God, here I am. Use me. Grant me favor and success to accomplish your works."

1. When was the last time you prayed to God for the needs of another?
2. When was the last time you prayed to the Lord asking to be used by God for God's own glory and the good of God's people?
3. Pray to God concerning your devotional focus and on behalf of those who will be touched and impacted by the work you are asking the Lord to do in your life.

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, there is nothing great or small that we can do without you. We pray that you would continue to make us receptive to following your will. Make us see the opportunities you have and will set before us so that we may do your will and not waste what you have and shall provide for us. Amen!

DAY 8

Nehemiah 2:1-3

¹ In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. ² So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors' graves, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

"O" IS FOR OPPORTUNITY

After several months of praying and fasting, Nehemiah is in the presence of King Artaxerxes. While carrying out his duties as cupbearer, the king sees a difference in his servant's continence. Nehemiah's affect is heavy and noticeably burdened. Out of curiosity or perhaps even genuine concern, the king addresses Nehemiah to discover what is weighing on his heart and mind. Unnerved by the king's awareness of his sadness, Nehemiah collects himself, gives honor to the king and seizes the opportunity to make the plight of Jerusalem known.

Nehemiah's faithfulness and effectiveness in service was so noteworthy that the one occasion when his heart was heavily burdened, caught the king's attention causing him to be concerned. Did Nehemiah intend to expose his heartache to the king? No one knows. We do know that God turned the occasion into an opportunity. Nehemiah gained an audience with the king. Ask yourself, "What kind of attention does my service draw?" "How is my service and work ethic viewed by my coworkers and superiors?" "Does my behavior and service act as an impediment or incentive to others in terms of their willingness to support the work I'm called to do?"

As faithful servants of God, we are not called to be opportunistic. We are, however, responsible for seeing and making the most of every opportunity the Lord sets before us. *Let Us* not simply play our positions according to established norms. Instead, *Let Us* "pray" our positions. In other words, as we search for that ideal job, that posh new pad or as we compile our list of what Mr. or Mrs. Right must bring to the table, *Let Us* pray. *Let Us* discern God's will, recognizing the opportunities the Lord sends our way, and wait in faith for the Lord's deliverance.

1. How is your service? How is your work ethic?
2. Does your service motivate those around you to serve or to disregard the needs of others?

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, you are the One who provides for all our needs. You even meet the needs we have for discovering and fulfilling our life's purpose. Help us respond humbly and faithfully to every opportunity you set before us. May you forever be glorified, and may your will be done. Amen!

DAY 9

Nehemiah 2:4-6

4 Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, so that I may rebuild it." 6 The king said to me (the queen also was sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a date.

A TIME TO PRAY

Nehemiah's plea to King Artaxerxes prompted the king to inquire more deeply into the problems plaguing Jerusalem. Moved with concern, the king asks Nehemiah, "*What do you request?*" Recognizing this moment as one for which he had been praying, Nehemiah pauses and prays to the Lord God once again before sharing his request with the king.

What do you think would happen if you and I developed the habit of praying before answering? How much do you think our lives and circumstances would change and improve if we practiced praying to God for His will before proclaiming our plans before the world? More times than I care to count, I have found myself regretting decisions I have made and commitments into which I have entered. My regrets have little to do with the requests. Far more often than not, the situations confronting me were valid, and the needs expressed were real. My regrets came because of the response I frequently had to give to three simple questions in times of reflection:

"Did you take the time to pray?"	No.
"Is what you're doing what God wants?"	Ummmm, I don't know.
"What if God had another plan I mind?"	Oh... hmmm.

My not consulting God was bad enough, but the possibility of doing things that were contrary to the Lord's will could have been harmful to everyone concerned despite my good intentions.

When we rush into situations led by our emotions or what we see and think, we can miss the mark God has established. But, when our deeds are preceded by prayer, we stand a far greater chance of following and fulfilling God's plan and purpose. *Let Us* not merely hope to do what is good, but earnestly seek to do what is of God.

1. How much does your prayer life influence how you respond to life's situations?
2. How often do you pray before honoring a request or making a commitment?
3. Share a time when praying before acting or answering made a notable difference.

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Let Us Pray

Lord, teach us to pray. Help us to not merely say what is in our hearts and minds, but to listen and discover what you desire. More and more, help us to align our lives with your will. Help me to not only be kind to others, but to live life in such a way that my works bring you glory.

AMEN!

DAY 10

Nehemiah 2:7-8

7 Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may grant me passage until I arrive in Judah; 8 and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, directing him to give me timber to make beams for the gates of the temple fortress, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the gracious hand of my God was upon me.

THE HAND OF PROVISION

Before Nehemiah set out on the 1,000-mile journey from Susa to Jerusalem, he made sure to include a request for all the resources he envisioned needing in order to accomplish the work of restoring the holy city. He requested letters of safe passage and to be supplied with the timber necessary for rebuilding. But, is what Nehemiah requested truly enough?

The brevity of Nehemiah's supply list has given me cause to pause and question his ability to accomplish the work. After all, what did he really know about Jerusalem? Knowledge of the city's needs had only recently been shared with him by his brother Hanani. Information that was anecdotal at best. He had no knowledge of the scope of work, nor did he have an accounting of the materials required. I imagine more questions than answers surrounded Nehemiah. Did he know how to build the walls that were to be the fortress of the city? Did he have enough resources to begin work? Did he have enough knowhow to get the job done?

While Nehemiah's wisdom may not have been evidenced through the foreknowledge he possessed, it became quite apparent through the faith he showed in the God to whom he prayed. In all things, Nehemiah sought and waited for the Lord's direction. Upon receiving God's word, he acted in faith. Nehemiah acknowledges God above all else as the source of his success and the true supplier of his needs saying, "*And the king granted me what I asked, for the gracious hand of my God was upon me.*"

1. To what extent have you learned to trust God as the ultimate source of your supply?
2. What, if anything, challenges your ability to wholeheartedly trust in God?
3. What step of faith is God encouraging you to take regarding your devotional focus?

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, you are faithful and true. You know our every need, and you have never failed to provide for your people. Thank you for your continued presence and provision in my life. Help me to continually trust you as the source of my supply... trust that you will grant me insight. Lord, I pray for wisdom as I step forward in pursuit of the dreams you have placed in my heart and the work you've ordained for my hands in this season. Amen!

DAY 11

Nehemiah 2:9-10

*9 Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent officers of the army and cavalry with me.
10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.*

WITH YOU, BUT NOT FOR YOU

The arrival of Nehemiah in Jerusalem was indeed good news for some, yet bad news for others. Nehemiah's presence was a sign of hope and a future for Jerusalem and its people that, for many, was hard to imagine. As for Sanballat and Tobiah, the local officials in the region, their good fortunes were about to change. Heretofore, they had benefited greatly from their connection to Israel, but had done little or nothing to support Israel's interests as evidenced by Jerusalem's dilapidated and broken state. Nehemiah's presence, sanctioned and authorized by the king, meant that Sanballat's political hold and Tobiah's relational influence would no longer hold complete sway over Jerusalem's affairs. Now, Jerusalem would benefit from one who would use their connection to the king for the common good of the city and the general welfare of all.

I suspect that each of us has experienced times when persons who have been with us were not truly for us. Or, we know of situations where people in positions of power and influence have done little to aid those who they were called to represent or to whom they claim to be connected. The work the Lord has done and continues to do in your life and mine is not intended solely nor primarily for our personal gain. God positions, equips, and empowers you and me so that what we do is for the common good. Nehemiah did not come to Jerusalem for personal gain, but he came seeking the betterment and general welfare of the people and city.

While our focus during this devotional period certainly has a personal dimension, it should also be of some benefit to others. As we are restored and built-up, our growth and improvement ought to have a positive impact on the lives of others within our familial circle, church family, local, national and the broader human community.

1. What difference does your attention and prayers make in the lives of others as you continue seeking God's rebuilding and restoration in the area of your devotional focus?
2. Are there persons that know you are taking steps to experience restoration in your life, but are not supportive of your efforts? If so, what do you think is behind their lack of support? How are you engaging them? Are you praying for and concerning them? Are you praying and asking God what the nature of your relationship with each person who is non-supportive of you ought to be?

Let Us consider that every relationship whether congenial, contentious or some place in the middle, may have a purpose of which we are unaware. Let our practice always be to seek God's purpose no matter what. To try every spirit, including our own motivations, as to whether they are of God.

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, as you restore and bless me, help me to see, receive and be faithful in the ways you are working through me to be build-up and be a blessing to others. Help me never to be presumptuous, operating of my own volition, but in all my ways and interactions to both acknowledge and trust you to make the path straight... trust you, Lord, to make your purposes clear.

DAY 12

Nehemiah 2:11-12

11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. 12 Then I got up during the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the animal I rode.

STILL AND SILENT

After spending three days in Jerusalem, Nehemiah rises and ventures out under the cover of night. He is accompanied by a few men that he has chosen to journey with him. Although the men travel at his side, they are unaware of his intentions. I imagine them periodically glancing at one another quizzically wondering to themselves, "What could this man hope to accomplish in the darkness?" Whether or not they voiced their questions was of no consequence. At this point, Nehemiah's mind was set on not sharing with anyone what the Lord God shared with him. Nehemiah was determined to hold close what the Lord had placed in his heart.

Three days of what likely appeared to others as inactivity, followed by nighttime exploration. Where was the sense in that? To anyone else, these actions would have appeared strange. But, to Nehemiah, all his time was an opportunity to remain connected and in communion with God. His first three days in Jerusalem marked a time of hearing and preparing. And, who would be better able to show him the lay of the land other than God himself? It was the Lord who gave Nehemiah the vision to restore the city. And, it would be the Lord to guide him in bringing the vision to fruition.

We can all learn a lesson from Nehemiah. *Let us* not be too quick to share our dreams with everyone and anyone. Sometimes in our joy, in our excitement, we prematurely expose our dreams and our plans to others before God has completed the work that needs to be done deep within us. *Let us* practice being prayerful and patient; holding close what the Lord entrusts to our hearts.

1. Have you ever shared information, an idea, a dream or vision prematurely and/or with the wrong party?
2. How did doing so affect you? How did it affect others?
3. How did it impact the birthing or realization of what you were given?
4. Did that which was placed in you, stored in you, entrusted to you ever come to fruition?
5. What have you learned to do differently as a result?

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, thank you for including me and using me in your plan to bring hope and a future to others. Please guide me in what to do, what to say, as well as when you are calling me to be still and silent. Please grant me discernment and wisdom to do all things in line with your will. Help me to practice patient persistence; always waiting on you Lord, and never failing to follow once you have revealed your timing, your will and your way to me, oh Lord.

DAY 13

Nehemiah 2:13, 16

13 I went out by night by the Valley Gate past the Dragon's Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.

16 The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest that were to do the work.

BEYOND BROKENNESS

Still holding in confidence what the Lord placed in his heart, Nehemiah takes a solo trek around Jerusalem examining the wall of the holy city. As he carries out the inspection, he is undoubtedly grieved that the once grand and imposing fortress with its gates 40 feet high and walls 8 feet thick was now burned and broken. And, though the destruction was undeniable, Nehemiah could not focus on what had been, nor the devastation before him, but set his sights on what the Lord was determined to do.

Do you remember the tear in your new jacket, the bleach on your favorite pants, or the time you dented the car? What about the fight with your friend, the rift with your sibling, or the estrangement from your sweetheart? What do these all have in common? It is loss and brokenness. Life's disruptions affect what we value and can be disheartening. Yet, these bumps in the road must not define us. Instead, we should seek the Lord on how to move forward. What should we release, and what are we to rebuild? What should we leave where it is and as it is? What are we called to restore and reestablish for our good and God's glory?

Nehemiah's journey into the city marked the moment when the testimony of hope the Lord had written for Jerusalem, before the city's foundation was laid, would begin to be realized. Disruptions, breaks and losses we experience in life, though they affect us, will not define us if we remember that God has a plan for us. The Lord not only knows the trials we face, but the future God has determined to bring to pass. Like Nehemiah, as you survey your situation, although you may see brokenness, be encouraged. Look beyond what surrounds you... look to the Saviour who has purposed to bring you hope and a future.

1. What losses or disappointments have you found to be difficult to overcome?
2. How has your inability (or unwillingness) to overcome these experiences impacted your ability to grow, move forward and progress in life and ministry?
3. Have you sought God's perspective?
4. What does the Lord want you to look and move beyond in order to see his plan for your future?
5. Do you sense or know that God has a desired plan for you that is presently or has been hindered (i.e. delayed or derailed)?
6. Have you sought God's healing concerning this? If not, prayerfully consider why not. Then, seek to open yourself to God's healing and restorative power.

**Family
& Friends**

Fellowship

Faith

Finance

Freedom

**Physical
Health**

Let Us Pray

Lord God, you have known my end before my beginning, and you know the plans you have for me. Lord, my trust is in you. Help me to not be overwhelmed by life's challenges, but to hope and depend on you. Deliver me from the hurts, injuries, losses and supposed limitations of my past. Lift me up, oh God! Set my feet upon a firm foundation so that I may fulfill the purposes to which you are yet calling me.

DAY 14

Nehemiah 2:17

17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace."

A CALL TO REBUILD

After a time of seeking the Lord in prayer, being sent by king Artaxerxes of Persia to Jerusalem, and silently surveying the walls and gates of the city, Nehemiah addresses Israel's leaders. He calls together the priests, nobles, officials, and the rest compelling them to begin the work of rebuilding the walls surrounding the city and restoring honor to God's holy place.

As you continue going to God concerning your devotional focus, ask the Lord the following: With whom are you called to partner in order to accomplish the work of restoration you are seeking the Lord to bring about in your life? How will the restoration you are seeking add to and bless the lives of others? Is counseling, instruction or some other professional help needed in order to accomplish the work?

The truth is that things, though they may seem bad, do not have to remain as they are. While rebuilding is a process that calls for us to work, we can do it. No need to suffer any longer. Now is the time to begin anew. With the Lord, we can rebuild our relationships, strengthen our connection with other believers, grow in our faith, improve our financial outlook, be free from that which has bound us... free to live in the fullness of life, to grow healthier or become better in whatever area of our lives we are experiencing the greatest need. *Let us* begin the work of restoration, and in so doing, tear down the shame of loss and brokenness in our lives.

1. What role has shame or embarrassment played in preventing you from taking steps to improve your life circumstances?
2. What are your feelings about seeking professional help as a means of reaching your goals?
3. Consider the progress you have made in recent weeks. What more is needed for you to continue moving forward?

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Let Us Pray

Lord God, I thank you for the help you continue to send my way and the blessings you continue to pour out in my life. Help me to make the most of every opportunity. As you destroy the enemy's influence... breaking the adversary's hold and hand... as you bring forth healing and wholeness in me, help me to take courage. Strengthen me to shake off every hindrance and empower me to walk in the fullness of your love. It is my hope, my heart's desire to honor you with everything I think, say and do.

DAY 15

Nehemiah 2:18

18 I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good.

BY DIVINE DESIGN

It is interesting how the right word at the right time can be a powerful motivator. And, when that word is spoken by the right person, it can make all the difference in the world. Nehemiah was the man and he had the message that moved Jerusalem's residents and returning exiles to view the home that had fallen to ruin as the city of hope it was created to be.

Nehemiah's proposal was more than encouraging words. It had the backing of divine authority from the Lord God. It also came with the promise of earthly support from king Artaxerxes who designated some of his kingdom's resources to aid in the rebuild. Word that God's gracious hand was upon Nehemiah and that the king stood behind the plan was exactly what the people needed to hear. They too were now able to commit and willing to give what they had, their time and ability, to the rebuilding efforts.

1. What do you need to hear that would help you to believe in God's plan for your future good?
2. What word have you been called to share that might motivate others to make a commitment to the work that God desires to do?
3. What has God given in terms of time, talent, resources or opportunity?
4. How much of God's investment in you are you willing to commit to God's work in your life and for the common good.

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Lord God, we are grateful for how you have spoken and continue to speak in our lives. We are grateful that your hand of guidance, protection and provision remains on us. Help us to submit ourselves to you and commit ourselves to your service.

DAY 16

Nehemiah 2:19

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they mocked and ridiculed us, saying, "What is this that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

HERE THEY GO AGAIN

Inasmuch as the right word at the right time can be a powerful motivator, the wrong word strategically placed can hinder the progress of good. As the gospels report that the adversary, after failing in his attempt to cause Christ to fall to temptation, left the Lord until a more opportune time, so too was the case with Sanballat and Tobiah. They now add to their ranks an Arab leader named Geshem. Together they commence with badgering the Israelites with the intent of discouraging them to the point that they would stop the work which they had only recently begun.

The fact that you and I have had to face opposition is nothing new, nor is it an experience specific to us. The reality is that we will likely have to face opposition again. Confrontation by opposing forces is virtually a guarantee. No matter what you are seeking to do, there will always be some person, faction, or entity that perceives your progress as being antithetical to theirs, as if God does not have enough blessings to go around. When opposition arises and accusations fly, do not be distracted. Continue to maintain your focus on the work that the Lord has called you to do. Know that every question does not merit a response, and every accusation does not require a defense. If we do our part, which is to do the work, we can leave the battle of defending ourselves to the Lord.

1. What have you heard or are you listening to, that is a threat or hindrance to your progress as it relates to your devotional focus?
2. What causes you to yet entertain words, ideas, and thoughts that do not support the goals that you have set, or more importantly, that the Lord has set for you?
3. What can and will you do about the opposing and contradictory influences?
4. Where can you best invest your energy and attention in order to accomplish your goals?

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Lord God, we know that opposition is to be anticipated whenever we are seeking to do what you desire. Help us, nevertheless, to set our sights and hearts on you and to trust in your word. Though the enemy will seek an opportune time to come against us, we know, O Lord, that you are the greatest of all. And, you will see us through.