

MAIN TEXT: NEHEMIAH 1:1-11

Getting Started

After greeting one another, take a minute or two of silence together and offer an opening prayer.

Opening Question

Invite each group member to share briefly about how they are feeling about this season of rebuilding, about the possibility of renewal and reopening, both in their own life and/or the life of OCC.

Purpose of This Week's Study

To help us establish or re-establish habits of regular prayer, both individually and communally, in the season of rebuilding ahead.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS SERIES

Around the world, this pandemic year has been one of disruption, discord, social distance, economic pain, and loss of life, and we have felt this acutely in our own nation, in our own church, and in our own families. All of us have been impacted, and all of us have felt, and are still feeling the press of the pandemic year in one way or another. This has been, by any estimation, a truly difficult year.

Earlier this year, we, along with the church around the world, observed the season of **Lent**, where we have embraced our mortality, acknowledged our sin, and sought the God of all mercy and comfort to lay hold of and re-establish our lives once again.

And on **Easter Sunday**, we celebrated together the glorious resurrection of Jesus, who overcame even the hopelessness of death to rise again as our living hope, and to invite us once again to hope in him, and to join him in rebuilding our lives and our world in the light of his radiant life. And so we embark together on a new season of rebuilding, and a new series entitled "Let's Rebuild!" based on the book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah Series – Study 1

The story of Nehemiah picks up after the people of Israel begin their return from exile in Babylon to find Jerusalem and the Temple in a state of destruction and disarray. The city walls have fallen down, the Temple is in disrepair, homes are in ruins, and enemies are everywhere. Everything needs to be rebuilt and restored, and much stands in the way of that happening. Does this sound at all familiar?

Assessing the destruction firsthand, Nehemiah leads out in all the work of rebuilding – the work of planning and politics, physical work, spiritual work, and the work of defense – and he recruits others to join him. And though they face many obstacles together, the walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt, the temple restored (see the Book of Ezra), and the people of Israel turned back to the worship of God. As we press into our own season of rebuilding together, we have much to learn from the story of Nehemiah.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS WEEK'S STUDY

Implicit in the idea of rebuilding anything, is that something is in really rough shape – after all, you don't need to rebuild what isn't broken. Often when we survey the damage around us – in our personal lives, culture, politics, relationships, and even in the church, we are filled with despair. But Nehemiah teaches us that the first thing to do when it comes to rebuilding is to turn our eyes toward God in prayer.

So, in our study this week we will briefly consider the landscape around us, and then begin to lean together into intentional prayer for this season of rebuilding. One of the great pitfalls of talking about prayer is that we often talk a lot and pray very little. It makes no particular sense to spend a lot of time discussing prayer if we don't actually pray, so it will be praying, and not discussing prayer that will be the central aim of our time together this week.

NEHEMIAH 1:1-11

V	NIV	MSG
1	The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa,	The memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hachaliah. It was the month of Kislev in the twentieth year. At the time I was in the palace complex at Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, had just arrived from Judah with some fellow Jews. I asked them about the conditions among the Jews there who had survived the exile, and about Jerusalem.
2	Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.	
3	They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."	They told me, "The exile survivors who are left there in the province are in bad shape. Conditions are appalling. The wall of Jerusalem is still rubble; the city gates are still cinders."
4	When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.	When I heard this, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God-of-Heaven.
5	Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,	I said, "God, God-of-Heaven, the great and awesome God, loyal to his covenant and faithful to those who love him and obey his commands: Look at me, listen to me. Pay attention to this prayer of your servant that I'm praying day and night in intercession for your servants, the People of Israel, confessing the sins of the People of Israel. And I'm including myself, I and my ancestors, among those who have sinned against you.
6	let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you.	
7	We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.	We've treated you like dirt: We haven't done what you told us, haven't followed your commands, and haven't respected the decisions you gave to Moses your servant. All the same, remember the warning you posted to your servant Moses: 'If you betray me, I'll scatter you to the four winds, but if you come back to me and do what I tell you, I'll gather up all these scattered peoples from wherever they ended up and put them back in the place I chose to mark with my Name.'
8	"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,	
9	but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'	
10	"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.	"Well, there they are—your servants, your people whom you so powerfully and impressively redeemed. O Master, listen to me, listen to your servant's

V	NIV	MSG
11	Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.” I was cupbearer to the king.	prayer—and yes, to all your servants who delight in honoring you—and make me successful today so that I get what I want from the king.” I was cupbearer to the king.

For Reflection & Discussion

- In **verses 1-2**, Nehemiah inquires after Jerusalem and its people from Hanani and some others who had recently returned from there, and he reports their response in simple but powerful terms in **verse 3**.
 - What most stands out to you from their report?
- How does **verse 4** describe Nehemiah’s reaction to this report?
 - What most strikes you about his response?
 - Why do you think it’s important to face reality both practically and emotionally as a first step in beginning a process of rebuilding?
 - What is one thing you find challenging about rebuilding after this past year?
- How does Nehemiah address God in **verses 5-6**?
 - What most strikes you about the God he addresses in these verses?
 - How does Nehemiah’s description of God in **verse 5** give you hope as we face the process of rebuilding in our personal lives, in the church, and in the world?
- In the second half of **verse 6** and in **verse 7**, what is the focus of Nehemiah’s prayer?
 - What is most difficult for you about confessing your sins?
 - Why do you think that is?
- What promises of God does Nehemiah remember in **verses 8-9**?
 - What does Nehemiah remind God about in **verse 10**?
 - What does he ask of God in **verse 11**?

For Prayer Ministry

Our time of prayer ministry today will be spent according to the prayer model offered in this week's sermon. Begin this time of prayer by sitting quietly before God together and asking God the question below; then spend two full minutes waiting quietly and listening (you might consider having someone set a timer on their phone as you wait):

Lord, we come before you and pray that you would guide our prayers today.

Call to our attention what is most on your heart for us as we begin this process of rebuilding together.

After a time of waiting, spend a few minutes praying through each movement of the **A C T S** model below:

Adoration: First, spend some time speaking out words of praise and worship to God.

Confession: Next, ask God to search your heart and to reveal any areas of sin. Then, either in silence, or if you prefer to do so out loud, simply confess your sins to God and ask his forgiveness.

Thanksgiving: Now, take some time to offer thanks to God for even the smallest things in your life that evidence his kindness and generosity to you.

Supplication: Finally, take some time to offer requests to God – for yourself, for your family, for OCC, for our city, our nation, and the world.

For Further Reflection & Action Outside of Group

- Take some time over the next week to read the Book of Nehemiah.
 - Consider reading sections of the book aloud – especially chapter 1.
 - What most impacts you as you read this book?
- Spend a few minutes a day using the **A C T S** prayer model.
 - Begin your times of prayer with a minute or two of listening prayer and consider praying aloud.
- Read a psalm aloud as part of your daily practice of prayer.