

Week 1, Nehemiah 1- Hook



Main Point: Choose prayer and reliance on God in times of crisis.

Current Event: According to a recent study, the day of the Boston Marathon bombings was the saddest day in America in the past five years. A research team from the University of Vermont has developed a “happiness scale” that tracks the language used in the tweets of Americans. Depending on the content of tweets, a score could range from one (void of happiness) to nine (completely happy). On April 15, 2013, a trend presented itself. The number of positive words decreased and the number of negative words such as “sad” or “victims” increased dramatically.¹ Americans mourned, expressing their feelings, garnering the lowest recorded happiness score.

Discussion Questions:

What was your reaction when you heard about the bombings in Boston?

Is there a proper or an improper way to respond to tragedy? How can faith be exemplified in the midst of sorrow?

Personal Story: Share a story of a time when you heard bad news, and share your response. In addition, share how God brought you through that time and answered your prayers of desperation.

¹ Stephanie Pappas, *Boston Marathon Bombings “Saddest” Day in Five Years: Twitter Data*, nbcnews.com

Nehemiah 1 - Book

Main Point: Choose prayer and reliance on God in times of crisis.

Text Summary: Nehemiah learns of Jerusalem's dilapidation. Nehemiah hears of the distress of Jerusalem and Judah (vv. 1–3) and prays for God's favor toward them (vv. 4–11).²

Nehemiah 1:1–3 (Read)

Sub Point: Think beyond yourself.

In the very beginning of this narrative we get the bad news: Jerusalem is unprotected. The city's gates and wall have been destroyed. The gates and wall were their security system, the city's protection. Now, Jerusalem is exposed and defenseless.

The news of Jerusalem comes in verse 3, but just before that in verse 2, we learn that Nehemiah asks his brother Hanani and the men from Jerusalem about the city. This is how we come to learn about the situation in Jerusalem, because Nehemiah asks them; Jerusalem is on his mind. This question that he poses to Hanani and these men from Jerusalem makes it clear that Nehemiah's interests and concerns from the very beginning were not for himself, but for the people of Jerusalem. Before we learn about the quality of Jerusalem, we learn about the quality of Nehemiah and the kind of man that he is.

How do believers cultivate a concern for those they've never met?

How can a Bible Fellowship cultivate an awareness for others internationally?

Another Perspective: *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*

The lack of a city wall meant that the people were defenseless against their enemies. K. Kenyon (*Digging Up Jerusalem*, 170) has noted:

The effect on Jerusalem was much more disastrous and far-reaching than merely to render the city defenseless.... The whole system of terraces down the [eastern] slope, dependent on retaining walls buttressed in turn by the fill of the next lower terrace, was ultimately dependent on the town wall at the base, forming the lowest and most

² Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 824.

substantial of the retaining walls.³

Discussion: The situation was deadly serious. The weight of a problem dictates the response; discuss with your class how they most naturally react to disaster. Nehemiah responded with prayer and fasting; give some steps or thoughts as to how your class members can begin to respond to crises in a God-honoring way.

Nehemiah 1:4 (Read)

Sub Point: Respond to trouble with prayer and fasting.

As soon as Nehemiah received the news of Jerusalem, he sat and mourned for days. Nehemiah was broken, affected, and filled with grief. In the midst of this, in all his brokenness, his first response was to fast and pray. For this godly man, fasting and prayer was of help and comfort.

There was no period of waiting, confusion, or debating for Nehemiah. He knew exactly what he must do: seek the great and awesome God who is in control over all things and has everything in His hands.

What is your first response to bad news? How do you handle situations and circumstances that take unexpected turns?

How would you respond to someone who feels that God is far off in difficult times?

Why is it difficult for prayer and honesty before the Lord to be our first response in tough times?

Nehemiah 1:5–11 (Read)

Sub Point: Allow your prayer life and perspective to be shaped by God's character.

Through the words in his prayer, we are confronted again with Nehemiah's deep concern and sensitivity for the people of Jerusalem. But more important than his concern for his people, Nehemiah's prayer reveals he was a man of great faith and that he had great trust in the Lord. He was confident and his confidence was not only in God's ability to act, but also in the very nature of God's character and who Nehemiah knew God to be.

By looking at the structure and content of Nehemiah's prayer, we can learn five valuable truths

³ Longman, Tremper, III, and David E. Garland, eds. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 Chronicles–Job (Revised Edition)*, Vol. 4. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

about whom Nehemiah is and the convictions that he holds.

Nehemiah affirms and appreciates who God is. Nehemiah opens his prayer with praise for God's character. He says, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him. ..." Nehemiah begins with praise and adoration, making known his belief and gratitude for who God is before he does anything else.

Nehemiah knows God is active and listening. Nehemiah knows God will hear him. He asks in verse 6, "let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant. ..." Nehemiah knows that God: cares for His children, is near, hears his (Nehemiah's) pleas, and is relational.

Nehemiah knows his sin and the condition of his heart. Nehemiah knows that he has offended God; his sin is great. Understanding the nature of his own heart, Nehemiah enters into a time of confession. He began in verse 7, "We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses." Nehemiah confesses and asks for mercy. He doesn't ask for things on the basis of what he has done, as if he has earned God's action. Rather he comes in brokenness and awareness of his need for mercy and for grace.

Nehemiah knows the Word. Nehemiah recalls the Scriptures. He cites the commands the Lord gave to Moses. He says in verse 8, "Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses..." His prayer isn't based on his own demands, but based on the account of who he knows God to be from the authority of His Word.

Nehemiah depends on what God has done and will do. Nehemiah is confident and rests upon what God had done. He rejoices in the glorious truth that he and God's people have been redeemed by God's power alone and His strong and mighty hand. He was also aware that whatever success may come it would be delivered straight from God's gracious hand. Nehemiah prays in verse 11, "...give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy. ..." Nehemiah trusts and believes that God is in control of every detail and has been throughout the history of time.

What attributes of God do you find yourself highlighting in your prayers? What attributes do you feel you might be neglecting?

How have you allowed Scripture to inform your prayers?

What are some obstacles that hinder you from spending time in prayer? What steps can you take to address those obstacles?

Nehemiah 1 – Took



Main Point: Choose prayer and reliance on God in times of crisis.

In Today's Culture: According to Pew Research, nearly six in 10 Americans claim to pray daily,⁴ and the Barna Group concludes that 84 percent of Americans pray at least once per week.⁵ While those statistics indicate that most Americans pray consistently, what do we expect the outcome to be?

Nehemiah prayed, “O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” Nehemiah believed and expected God to answer his prayers.

Class Exercise: Break everyone up into groups of three to four people, and have them discuss these questions: How do they pray? What do they expect to happen as a result of their prayer? Why can we have confidence that if we turn to God and cry out for His help, He will help, revive and reform our lives and His Church? After answering these questions, pray, asking God to help you become more like Nehemiah.

Challenge: It wasn't Nehemiah in his own accomplishments and efforts that made him a great leader and someone who people would follow. On the contrary, it was his reliance and dependence on a great God that made him great. It was laying himself aside and asking God to work and move in and through him that brought about victory. We see from this opening chapter that before Nehemiah moved in action, he bended in praise and petition.

Charge your class members to have the heart and faith of Nehemiah. Ask them to take an inventory of how they spend their time and energy in prayer. Use this time to encourage and redirect their focus in prayer from themselves and toward the city. May we become people who rely more and more on the goodness and greatness of our God with each day that passes.

⁴*Prayer in America*, pewresearch.org

⁵*Five Out of Seven Core Religious Behaviors Have Increased in the Past Decade According to Barna Survey*, barna.org