

chosen

Nehemiah and Esther

Hi ladies!

Welcome to Calvary Women Bible Study! We are so excited about this year as we are studying two of our favorite books: *Nehemiah* and *Esther*. Nehemiah was the first book of the Bible I taught the women at Calvary San Juan Capistrano twelve years ago. It was an appropriate book as we were beginning to build a new work. We are still growing and battling, and the Lord is faithfully working.

Warren Wiersbe rightly said the Christian life is not a playground; it's a battleground. This year we will learn how to battle while building. We'll be reminded that we, too, are chosen just like Nehemiah and Esther *for such a time as this* to stand emboldened for our faith.

We are a privileged people living in tumultuous times that demand our careful attention and diligent service. Let's not waste the time we have left but use it to further the Kingdom of God. No matter our situation in life, as Christians, we are *chosen* and called to build our faith, family and friends! You are *chosen* to battle and fight for what's right! And Chosen to be bold in your faith—for such a time as this! But no work for God is accomplished without a fight.

When God called Nehemiah and Esther to accomplish a difficult task, the enemy opposed them. Whenever we step out in the name of the Lord, we can expect opposition. But we have the assurance that He who calls us is faithful and He will do it! (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Who's up for the challenge to build, battle and be bold for Him? This year, we will learn how we can best prepare to fight our battles and how to persevere when the building gets tough! Get ready ladies! Prepare for battle with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other!

We look forward to a fruitful year!

Love,
Michelle

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Nehemiah and Esther

This book belongs to

Visit www.calvarywomen.net to watch or listen to archived bible study teachings, including the study from our current lesson. Every study is added to the website and on our podcast (Calvary Women SJC) soon after the bible lesson is complete.

CALVARY WOMEN'S MINISTRY
email: calvarywomen@ccsjc.com
website: www.calvarywomen.net
instagram: [@calvarywomensjc](https://www.instagram.com/calvarywomensjc)
podcast: Calvary Women SJC

Practical helps for your bible study year

PERSONAL “BE”-attitudes:

BE DETERMINED - Examine your daily schedule then set aside a consistent time and place to do your study.

BE PREPARED - Gather the materials you'll need: the Bible (we use NKJV), your workbook, and a pen. Try to get your answers from the bible before going to a commentary. Sometimes another version (NLT, ESV) can help.

BE INSPIRED - Begin each day with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and to illuminate your mind.

BE COMPLETE - Read the suggested Bible passages and finish the homework each day. You will get out of this study what you put into it.

BE PERSISTENT - Answer the questions as fully as possible. If you are unable to answer a question, move forward to the next question or ask your leader for further insight.

BE CONSISTENT - Don't get discouraged. If you miss a day, you can catch up the next. At the same time, remember there is grace here. Life gets busy sometimes, so do what you can, and come to the group time anyway! You will be blessed!

BE HONEST - When answering questions, allow the Lord to search your heart and transform your life.

BE BLESSED - Enjoy your daily study time as He speaks to you through His Word.

SMALL GROUP “BE”-attitudes:

BE PRAYERFUL - Pray before you begin your time together.

BE BIBLICAL - Keep all answers in line with God's Word; avoid personal opinions.

BE CONFIDENTIAL - Keep all sharing in your small group confidential.

BE RESPECTFUL - Listen without interrupting. Keep comments on track and to the point, so that all can share. Do not use your group as a platform for politics or solicitations, or personal businesses of any kind. ***It is our policy that literature, handouts, business cards, tracts, invites to home parties, etc., are not allowed.***

BE DISCREET - In some cases, you do not need to share more than is absolutely necessary. Some details about personal issues do not need to be made known.

BE KIND - Reply to the comments of others lovingly and courteously.

BE MINDFUL - Remember your group members in prayer throughout the week.

LESSON	ASSIGNMENT	DATES Friday, Monday
No lesson	Welcome & Introduction	Sept 27 Sept 30
1	Nehemiah Chapter 1, Nehemiah's Prayer	Oct 4 Oct 7
2	Nehemiah Chapter 2, Nehemiah's Preparation	Oct 11 Oct 14
No lesson	Koinonia in homes	Oct 18 Oct 21
3	Nehemiah Chapters 3-4, Rebuilding the Wall	Oct 25 Oct 28
4	Nehemiah Chapter 5, Crisis in the Community	Nov 1 Nov 4
5	Nehemiah Chapter 6, Finished Walls and Frenemies	Nov 8 Nov 11
6	Nehemiah Chapter 7-8, Revival	Nov 15 Nov 18
7	Nehemiah Chapter 9, Repentance and Renewal	Nov 22 Nov 25
No meeting	Thanksgiving Break	Nov 27 to Dec 4
EVENT	Women's Christmas Dinner (2 nights)	Thurs, Dec 5 Fri, Dec 6
No meeting	Christmas and New Year's Break	Dec 7 to Jan 2
8	Nehemiah Chapter 10, Resolve and Dedication	Jan 3 Jan 6
9	Nehemiah Chapter 11-12, Up on the Wall	Jan 10 Jan 13
10	Nehemiah Chapter 13, Remember, Repent, Repeat	Jan 17 Jan 20

11	Esther Chapter 1, The King's Garden Party	Jan 24 Jan 27
12	Esther Chapter 2, Winsome to Win Some	Jan 31 Feb 3
No lesson	Koinoinia in homes	Feb 7 Feb 10
13	Esther Chapter 3, Haman's Heartless Plan	Feb 14 Feb 17
14	Esther Chapter 4, A Date with Destiny	Feb 21 Feb 25
15	Esther Chapter 5, The Turning Point	Feb 28 Mar 2
16	Esther Chapter 6, Sleepless in Susa	Mar 6 Mar 9
17	Esther Chapter 7, What Goes Around Comes Around	Mar 13 Mar 16
RETREAT	Calvary Women's Retreat	Mar 20 to Mar 21
18	Esther Chapter 8, Reversing the Irreversible	Mar 27 Mar 30
19	Esther Chapter 9-10, Never Forget and Koinonia	Apr 3 Apr 6

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Introduction to Nehemiah and Esther

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Studies in Nehemiah

Session 1 – Nehemiah’s Prayer | Nehemiah Chapter 1

It’s the account of one man’s determination to see the wall of Jerusalem rebuilt. To see the city of God brought back to life. Against all odds, he rallies dispirited men to rise and rebuild.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover similarities between Nehemiah’s world and the times we live in.
- Consider how God uses life’s problems and our prayers to accomplish His plan.
- Pray honest prayers that rekindle faith and a passion to serve.

Ice Breaker

When you hear of someone else’s need, in what ways are you most likely to offer help?

The Back Story

When King David made Jerusalem his capital, it was ten acres of strategic land surrounded by steep hills and defensive walls. During his forty-year reign, Jerusalem thrived and the nation of Israel became a major military power. David’s successor, Solomon began well and the Lord caused all that he did to prosper. He built a house for the Lord. He extended the walls and transformed Jerusalem into a world-class city.

Twenty years into his reign, God renewed His promise to Solomon with a warning. If he turned away from the Lord, the nation was headed for disaster. The people would be scattered and the temple reduced to ruins (1 Kings 9:7–8). Eventually this is what happened. Solomon died and the nation broke apart. Ten tribes went north and two tribes went south. Within 200 years, the northern kingdom was absorbed into surrounding cultures. The southern kingdom’s on-again, off-again relationship with God (depending on who was king) lasted for two more centuries until Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah.

When Nebuchadnezzar’s soldiers marched out of Jerusalem, the city was in ruins. The temple was looted and burned. Homes and public buildings trashed. Walls destroyed. Survivors were marched off to Babylon. The poorest were left behind to fend for themselves, defenseless and abandoned. All the warnings—so long in coming and chronically ignored—were over. God’s rebellious people were in exile.

Decades passed and Babylon was overthrown. Persia’s King Cyrus decreed that the Jews could return and rebuild Jerusalem. The first group to return laid the temple foundation before opposition shut them down. The unfinished temple sat neglected for nearly 20 years until Haggai and Zechariah urged them to finish.

Fast-forward 60 years. More Jews return with Ezra who came to teach Scripture, restore worship, and rebuild the *people*. Through Ezra’s faithful work, the people repent and commit to obey the Lord. But the walls of their city (and lives) are in shambles. The people are vulnerable, afflicted, and too exhausted to hope that life will ever get better. This is the sad situation that reaches Nehemiah’s ears.

The Power of Prayer

Nehemiah 1:1–11

The prayer of one man in this first chapter sets in motion God's plan to stir His people to revival.

1. It started with a question, and became a matter of personal concern for Nehemiah. Describe what Nehemiah learned about the conditions of life for God's people in Jerusalem.

Good to Know

Susa was 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf in Iran. The citadel (a fortified palace) was the king's winter residence.

2. What does Nehemiah's response tell us about the kind of man he was?

This is where, 35 years earlier, Esther was made queen (Esther 2:16). The king Nehemiah served was Esther's stepson.

- a. What specific concerns did Nehemiah mention in his prayer?

- b. Nehemiah prayed before he took action. What effect did this have on the way he viewed the situation and what needed to be done? List anything you can think of.

- c. Recall a time when you prayed about a specific situation before taking action. How did taking time to pray it through give you clear perspective and guide your response?

3. What will make our prayers effective? Read each verse and answer in your own words.

2 Chronicles 7:14

Jeremiah 29:13

John 15:7

1 John 5:14–15

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves,
and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways,
then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14 ESV

Think About It . . .

What is God's prescription for healing a nation? Where and how does it begin?

Revive Us Again

Nehemiah 1:5–11

As the king's cupbearer, Nehemiah held a high-level position of trust and influence. He wasn't simply a wine taster. The confidential nature of his job called for wisdom, discretion, and courage—the same God-given traits that will enable Nehemiah to rebuild the wall in spite of opposition.

1. Nehemiah was a man of action. He was accustomed to identifying a threat or problem and dealing with it. But he was also a man of prayer. Think about it. The destruction of Jerusalem's wall wasn't news to Nehemiah, but it's as if he is hearing about *the people* for the first time.

Maybe you can relate to Nehemiah. As you become more aware of the needs of others, what requires your attention and prayer? Are you willing to be part of the answer to your prayer? In what way?

2. Throughout the study of this book we will see, time and again, that Nehemiah's first response to problems was to pray. **ACTS** is a helpful acronym to remember four elements of effective prayer. Note where, or in what way, you see these expressed in Nehemiah's prayer.

Adoration

Confession

Thankfulness

Supplication

3. In your observation or experience, what is likely to be the outcome of a specific situation or need when:
 - a. We pray, but don't take action.
 - b. We take action, but don't pray.
 - c. We pray *and* take action.

"You never lighten the load unless first you have felt the pressure in your own soul. You are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened your eyes to see things as they are."

Alan Redpath
Victorious Christian Service



Gospel at a Glance: Redemption | Nehemiah wept for Jerusalem, praying and confessing sin on behalf of God's people, "Your servants...whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand" (Nehemiah 1:10 ESV). The day would come when Jesus would weep over the city (Matthew 23:37) and pray for broken people living in exile because of sin. He became the answer to His own prayer by giving His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Adoration Confession Thankfulness Supplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

God sparked Nehemiah to pray and take action. Others joined in and the work began. With God's blessing, power, and protection, the wall was rebuilt. In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, for our nation. As a focus for your prayer, use the memory verse, another Scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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Studies in Nehemiah

Session 2 – Nehemiah’s Preparation | Nehemiah Chapter 2

Nehemiah’s plea for God’s help became a burden to rebuild. He surveyed the problem—first on his knees in prayer and eventually on a moonlit ride over broken and neglected borders.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the vital connection between prayer and preparation.
- Consider the needs and opportunities God is putting in front of you.
- Pray honest prayers that risk much and rely on God’s Spirit to accomplish.

Ice Breaker

If you have ever taken on a “fixer-upper” project or restored an old car, what was your reason for doing so? Did you finish it? Describe the challenges and rewards.

Favor with the King

Nehemiah 2:1–10

After four long months, Nehemiah gets the opening he’s been praying for and makes his request to the king.

1. Nehemiah prayed for success and favor with the king (Nehemiah 1:11). In what ways did God clearly answer his prayer in chapter 2:1–10? List what you observe from the text.

Good to Know

Nehemiah risked losing his position and even his life with this request.

Years earlier, it was Artaxerxes who halted the project to rebuild the city walls after a petition from locals accused the Jews of planning to incite a rebellion (Ezra 4:9–23).

2. What does Nehemiah's detailed request indicate he did during those months of waiting and praying?
 - a. Give some thought to the connection between prayer and planning. Explain why both are essential for following through on any endeavor to serve the Lord.

3. "The good hand of my God was upon me." Did Nehemiah just happen to be in the right place at the right time? In a way, yes—and no. What can the person who prays and actively looks for God to open doors be certain of? Consider each verse and answer in your own words.

Proverbs 21:1

Proverbs 16:9

Zechariah 4:6

James 1:5

John 15:4–5

4. Nehemiah was finally headed on the 800-mile journey to Jerusalem with the king's approval and provision. What types of challenges did he encounter along the way? From what you can tell, how did he respond?
 - a. Can you recall a time when you faced hardship or opposition for pursuing the Lord's will? Share how it challenged and/or strengthened your resolve.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts.
Zechariah 4:6 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Answering God’s call to action frequently requires venturing out of our comfort zone. Nehemiah was willing to dream big and work at full capacity, but he knew it wouldn’t be enough without an outpouring of God’s Spirit. What are you praying for that only God can accomplish?

Surveying the Need

Nehemiah 2:11–20

Nehemiah’s late-night inspection confirmed the magnitude of need he had been praying about for months. Were the needed repairs worse than he expected? Possibly. Did he recognize that the work would tax the limit of his skills and abilities? Certainly. Did he scale back the plan while it remained just between him and God? Clearly not.

1. Nehemiah surveyed the ruins for himself first, before saying anything. Was he simply on a fact-finding mission? How would you explain the timing and purpose of his night ride?
 - a. Nehemiah took a “few men” with him to examine the actual condition of the wall. Before sharing his mission with the community, Nehemiah trusted these few to survey the need and go the distance with him. Think about it. How important is it to be part of a trusted circle of friends who will encourage, advise, pray, and go the distance for each other?
2. “You see the trouble we are in.” The people in Jerusalem were so used to living with broken walls that they no longer seemed to see them. Earlier attempts to repair the wall were opposed and they quit, discouraged. How did Nehemiah motivate them?

3. Nehemiah was moved with compassion to do something. It's easier to tell someone what to do about a problem than it is to go stand with them in their trouble. What do the following scriptures have to say about it? Answer in your own words.

Galatians 6:2

Hebrews 10:23–25

Romans 12:9–13, 15

Colossians 3:12–17

4. Does Nehemiah's example motivate you to action? In what way? Retrace Nehemiah's steps and consider how to apply them.

a. He surveyed the need. What needs do you see?

b. He came up with a plan. What will you do to begin?

c. He enlisted others. Who will you ask to pray, and go the distance with you?

"When you wait on the Lord in prayer, you are not wasting your time; you're investing it. God is preparing you. However, when the right time arrives for us to act by faith, we dare not delay."

Warren Wiersbe
Be Determined



Gospel at a Glance: The Messiah | Nehemiah marked the date in his journal when he was authorized to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem as Nisan (March/April) in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign (445 BC); A notable date for Nehemiah, but greater significance in history. Many years earlier, Daniel prophesied that when the order is given to restore and build Jerusalem, it would be sixty-nine "weeks" (483 years) until Messiah would come and be "cut off" (Daniel 9:25–26). Using the ancient calendar, the end of sixty-nine weeks coincides perfectly with the date of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His crucifixion.¹

¹ See notes on Daniel 9:26 taken from *The Nelson Study Bible*, ©1997 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

God sparked Nehemiah to pray and take action. Others joined in and the work began. With God’s blessing, power, and protection, the wall was rebuilt. In each session, we will take time to pray—for others and for ourselves, for our church, our communities, and our nation.

As a focus for prayer, you can use the memory verse, another scripture, or simply what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

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Studies in Nehemiah

Session 3 – Rebuilding the Wall | Nehemiah Chapter 3–4

Rebuilding the wall, after years of neglect, was no small feat. There was debris to clear. Decisions to make on what could be salvaged and repurposed. Teams to organize and work together. Heavy lifting. Long hours. Short tempers. Just to name a few of the hurdles that Nehemiah and his crew needed to clear in their own camp. All this while being harassed and threatened by their enemies.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Nehemiah can teach us about building and battling.
- Consider the ripple effect that one person's faith and obedience can have.
- Pray honest prayers that spark faith, harness hope, and inspire a call to action.

Ice Breaker

When the credits roll at the end of a movie, do you usually head for the exit right away or do you stay and read them? What might motivate someone to sit through reading a long list of names?

Working Together

Nehemiah 3:1–32

Nehemiah records names of builders and where they worked on the wall. No one went unnoticed or overlooked.

1. Skim this chapter and circle the phrase, "*next to them*" or "*after him*" every time you read it. The words in your Bible translation may vary, but you get the idea. What does this indicate about . . .
 - a. The value of each person's participation in the work?
 - b. What motivated them to work on the wall?
 - c. Did everyone participate? Why or why not?

2. From the descriptions of the workers, notice the variety of backgrounds and skill sets. These weren't professional builders. They weren't all locals either. Volunteers came from all around to build the wall. In what way is serving the Lord more about *availability* than ability? Share your thoughts.
3. The Hebrew word for *repair* is used 35 times in this chapter. It conveys the idea of building, strengthening, and supporting. How does this apply to the work that we, as the church, are called to do? Consider what the following verses say and answer in your own words.

Romans 12:4–5

Ephesians 4:15–16

Philippians 2:3–4

Colossians 3:16

Hebrews 10:23–25

4. More than fifty-thousand people lived in and around Jerusalem when Nehemiah arrived. He came with a God-inspired vision and a plan, but the work was bigger than one man. It took many to make it happen.

God used Nehemiah, a man of conviction and faith, as a catalyst to start the work, but there was a part for every person who was willing to participate.

- a. Are you currently engaged in doing something for the Lord that requires teamwork? In what way?
- b. Who and/or what inspired you to pitch in and help?
- c. What do you find most rewarding? Most challenging?

Awaken

By Lawrence Tribble

**One man awake, awakens another.
The second one wakes his
next-door brother.
Three awake can rouse a town
by turning the whole place
upside-down.
Many awake can cause such a fuss
it finally awakes the rest of us.
One man awakes
with dawn in his eyes,
Surely then it multiplies.**

*Written in the 1740s, inspired by the
preaching of George Whitfield
and the spiritual movement known as
The Great Awakening.*

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,
for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9 NIV

Think About It . . .

The greater the project, the more chance there is for frustrations. Any number of things can slow or divert progress. Equipment breaks down, supplies run short, miscommunications happen, and steps need to be repeated. Critics will complain and disgruntled neighbors may threaten to shut you down. By God's grace, we are all works in progress. Where are you most in need of strength and courage today?

Overcoming Obstacles

Nehemiah 4:1–23

Rebuilding the wall was a good work, and it was hard work. While Nehemiah and his team made progress, the opposition increased.

1. In each section, explain what sort of opposition they faced and how Nehemiah dealt with it.

Verses 1–9

The opposition:

Nehemiah's response:

Verses 10–14

The opposition:

Nehemiah's response:

Verses 15–23

The opposition:

Nehemiah's response:

2. How would you describe the tone of Nehemiah's prayer in vss. 4–5?

- a. The enemy's attempts to circumvent the work and demoralize the workers were appalling to Nehemiah. In some ways, his prayer echoes the lament of Psalm 79:4, 6, and 12 (written after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem). These were not benign neighbors, simply being difficult to get along with. By opposing the work, Sanballat and his cronies were showing themselves to be enemies of God. Was Nehemiah's prayer appropriate, given the situation? In what way? Consider the following verses in your answer.

Psalm 4:3–5

Deuteronomy 32:35

Romans 12:17–19

Good to Know

Nehemiah contended with three specific enemies: Sanballat, governor of Samaria to the north; Tobiah, who controlled Ammonite territory to the east; and Geshem the Arab (Nehemiah 2:19) who ruled to the south. These powerful men deeply resented the Jews. Generations earlier, their ancestors were displaced when God gave the Promised Land to Israel (see Deuteronomy 7:1–6).

Ashdod's territory was due west, along the Mediterranean Sea. When they joined forces with Sanballat and his allies, Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies on all sides.

3. Nehemiah's response to opposition was just what the people needed to see in their leader. It's no secret that our adversary, the devil, tries to obstruct and sabotage the work God wants to do in and through us. Nehemiah's example gives us a pattern to follow. Give some thought to each point and briefly explain why it is essential for overcoming obstacles.

- a. **Pray.** Nehemiah prayed first, and he prayed frequently.
- b. **Stay focused.** Eyes up! Our courage and strength comes in knowing who fights our battles.
- c. **Resolved and ready.** Have a plan and follow through. Pay attention and be ready to adapt.

4. Nehemiah led by example. He didn't ask anyone to do what he was unwilling to do himself. Do you know someone who has been a Nehemiah for you? In what way?

How might you be a Nehemiah for someone, in your family, your church, your workplace?



Gospel at a Glance: Retribution for Sin | While Nehemiah's prayer seems harsh, it reminds us that God is angry toward wickedness every day (Psalm 7:11) and will not let sin go unpunished. In Romans 2:5–9, Paul warns that those who refuse to turn from sin are storing up wrath for themselves when God's righteous judgment will be revealed (see 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9). Retribution for sin is part of the gospel that we dare not leave out. The wages of sin is death (the bad news) but God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from the punishment we deserve. Every person who believes in Jesus, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own precious blood, receives forgiveness now, and the free gift of life forever with Him.

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

Notes

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Studies in Nehemiah

Session 4 – Crisis in the Community | Nehemiah Chapter 5

In our previous session, we saw Nehemiah and his crew working shoulder to shoulder. But what happened to this picture of courage and cooperation? While enemy threats failed to halt work on the wall, inner conflict was putting further progress in jeopardy.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Nehemiah can teach us about character, conduct, and compassion.
- Consider what it takes to stand firm and stay true to God's call on your life.
- Pray honest prayers that relinquish our rights and inspire a heart to serve.

Ice Breaker

How do you react when you see someone being taken advantage of? How about when someone takes advantage of you?

A Time to Raise Your Voice

Nehemiah 5:1–13

Nehemiah hears the outcry of the people; he confronts those who exploited the circumstances for profit at the expense of their Hebrew brothers.

1. The protest was widespread and deeply felt, but this crisis didn't happen overnight. Several factors contributed to the hardships that brought this conflict to a breaking point.
 - a. Remember that Nehemiah's workforce was voluntary. These were men who sacrificially left their normal trades, professions, and farms for nearly two months in order to work on the wall. Consider the impact this would have had on their families and villages.
 - b. For most people living in and around Jerusalem, it was a struggle to make ends meet, even before the rebuilding project. What else made life difficult for them?

2. Nehemiah's initial reaction to this situation was righteous anger. In your observation, what does this say about Nehemiah?

a. Although Nehemiah had good reason to be angry, he did not immediately take action. What did he do, and what does this say about Nehemiah?

b. Even when anger is appropriate, why is there wisdom in waiting to speak? Consider what you read in these verses and answer in your own words.

Proverbs 12:18

Proverbs 15:18

Ephesians 4:25–27

James 1:19–20

3. Nehemiah called all of the people together and confronted those few leaders who were responsible for causing this problem. Briefly summarize what Nehemiah said to them.

a. Nehemiah and others were doing what they could to redeem fellow Jews who had sold themselves as slaves in order to survive. It was the right thing to do (Leviticus 25:47–49) and it would help in the effort to reestablish Jerusalem. But their efforts were being hampered. In what way?

b. From what you have read in the text, what exactly was Nehemiah rebuking the nobles and rulers for? How did they respond?

Good to Know

Nehemiah contended with the leaders for their unethical treatment of the people and for ignoring the Mosaic Law.

Jews were not to charge their own people interest (Deuteronomy 23:19-20) on any kind of loan. Interest could be charged on loans made to a foreigner.

God's people could not force an impoverished fellow Jew into slavery in order to pay a debt or have sustainable means to live. They must be allowed to work off their debt, interest-free, as a hired worker (Leviticus 25:35-42).

4. Nehemiah understood that you can't correct what you will not confront. He insisted they own their behavior from a legal and moral standpoint. He also made a strong appeal on the basis of their witness. They were adding fuel to the enemy's fire by bringing reproach to God's name. What message did their wrong behavior send to their unbelieving neighbors?

- a. Nehemiah reminded the leaders of who they were ultimately representing. He called on them to make it right—and to their credit, they did. As believers, our conduct declares what God is like as much as our words do. Use the following verses to explain how our behavior can make the gospel attractive to others.

“When we Christians behave badly, or fail to behave well, we are making Christianity unbelievable to the outside world.”

C.S. Lewis
Mere Christianity

John 13:34–35

Matthew 5:16

Romans 12:9–13

- b. Nehemiah had a project to complete, but people mattered to him. Think about it. When a conflict threatens to slow or halt your work, what is your usual response? What would you like it to be?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

He has shown you, oh man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8 NIV

Think About It . . .

We are called to live differently than the world around us. In actual practice, what does this look like in my life and conduct?

Act justly ...

Love mercy ...

Walk humbly ...

Ambition and Lasting Treasure

Nehemiah 5:14–19

Nehemiah's appointment as governor of Judah granted him all the perks and privileges of the job. However, Nehemiah did not exploit his position for personal gain.

1. Nehemiah was entitled to a food allowance for his household and official entertaining. As a Persian official, he had the right to collect taxes for this but he chose not to. What two reasons did he give for not doing so?

- a. If Nehemiah had set this example only during the rebuilding project, it still would have been admirable. But the wall was completed in 52 days. Why do you think Nehemiah made this a policy for the twelve-year duration of his term as governor?

Good to Know

The “fear of the Lord” does not mean being afraid of God. It isn't dread of being punished. This fear is a healthy desire to please our loving and gracious God and to avoid anything that would be dishonoring to Him. It is an attitude of heart that finds its way into how we deal with every practical matter of life.

- b. In what ways did Nehemiah and those who worked for him conduct business differently than the previous governors?
- c. For Nehemiah, bending rules to benefit himself was not an option. There is a current trend to “take a knee” in protest, but Nehemiah took that posture for a different reason. Consistently bending the knee *in prayer* instilled Nehemiah with a healthy fear of the Lord that kept his conscience clear and personal ambition in its proper place.

Christians are called to make the most of their God-given abilities and resources to serve the Lord and bring Him glory (see Luke 19:12–27). What will keep our aim clear and true? Read the following scriptures and answer in your own words.

Jeremiah 45:5a

Matthew 6:19, 20, 33

Mark 10:43–45

Philippians 2:3–7

2. The Bible tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). When our highest ambition is to please God and serve Him effectively in all our endeavors, what can we be certain of? Find the promises in the verses below and answer in your own words.

Proverbs 2:3–8

Psalms 25:12

Psalms 147:11

Colossians 3:22–24

3. Nehemiah committed to rebuild a wall—not because he had a passion for construction, but because he loved God and His people. Maybe you can relate to Nehemiah.
- a. Have you ever committed to serve others in a way that you wouldn't naturally pursue on your own? What did it require? Briefly share how it stretched you.
 - b. What blessings/benefits have you seen for others or experienced personally as a result of your service?
 - c. Would you be more likely to step out of your comfort zone to serve others in the future? Why or why not?



Gospel at a Glance: Servanthood | For Nehemiah, being governor was a position of influence that came with great responsibility. It meant honoring God's name, obeying God's Word, and loving God's people. He was entitled, as the king's representative, to benefits and privileges that could be very profitable for him. But Nehemiah devoted himself to work alongside the people. Rather than add to their hardship, he bore the cost that came with his responsibilities and served. Nehemiah's love for God fueled his compassion for people, making him a worthy example of servant leadership. But we have the highest example in Jesus, who said "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). As Paul so beautifully stated in Philippians 2:6–8, Jesus set aside His divine privileges, took the humble position of a servant, and bore the cost for all who believe in Him to be freed from the burden of sin.

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

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As a focus for prayer, you can use the memory verse, another scripture, or simply what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

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Group Prayer Requests

Notes

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Studies in Nehemiah

Session 5 – Finished Walls and Frenemies | Nehemiah Chapter 6

As the rebuilding project nears completion, Nehemiah's personal character and integrity takes a direct hit from the opposition.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Nehemiah can teach us about unshakeable faith.
- Consider ways the enemy uses fear to weaken our resolve and rule our actions.
- Pray honest prayers that cultivate courage and remain vigilant in success.

Ice Breaker

How well do you know Nehemiah? From our studies in Nehemiah so far, what character trait or habit do you most admire, and why?

Schemes and Intimidation

Nehemiah 6:1–9

When Sanballat and his allies failed to stop the rebuilding project, they went after Nehemiah.

1. Jerusalem's wall had been neglected in ruins for nearly 150 years. Amazingly, Nehemiah and his men rebuilt it *without any gaps* in 52 days. What did Sanballat and his allies do when they heard about this?
 - a. Why did Nehemiah refuse to meet with them?
 - b. Describe how Sanballat's open letter increased the pressure on Nehemiah.

Good to Know

As the king's cupbearer, Nehemiah would not have taken a rumor of disloyalty lightly. Early in Artaxerxes' reign, a revolt in one of his provinces took six years to defeat. During that same time, the king sent Ezra to Jerusalem with his blessing. But opponents (Sanballat was likely among them) convinced the king that the Jews were also a threat to the Persian empire (Ezra 4). Nehemiah understood the danger of such a rumor.

2. If Sanballat could discredit Nehemiah's character, it would undermine the entire project. Such a serious accusation, though untrue, would circulate and Nehemiah's response would be a crucial factor in determining how—or *if*—the work continued.
 - a. What did Nehemiah realize about their plot and how did he respond?
 - b. Put yourself in Nehemiah's spot. What would you have prayed and asked the Lord to do?
 - c. Nehemiah prayed for strength to keep working and left the care of his reputation to God. People may praise, or criticize, but it's who we are before God that counts. We may not be able to avoid rumors but we don't have to feed them. According to God's Word, what is the best way to fight a rumor?

Proverbs 2:6–7

Psalm 1:1–3

Psalm 119:69

1 Peter 3:13–17

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Nehemiah's enemies tried to discourage him with lies and intimidation. What tends to draw you away from confident prayer and clear thinking?

Courage under Fire

Nehemiah 6:10–14

Shemaiah tries to convince Nehemiah that his life is in danger.

1. Since Shemaiah had access to the temple, he may have been a priest. It seems that Shemaiah confined himself at home, pretending to be in danger himself. Or he may have done it as a symbolic act to give more weight to his “prophecy” that Nehemiah was going to be killed.
 - a. What two reasons did Nehemiah give for refusing to go along with Shemaiah’s plan?
 - b. Remember when Nehemiah urged the workers to stay at their post? “Our God will fight for us” (Nehemiah 4:20). What would it say about their leader if Nehemiah abandoned his post now?
 - c. Remember when Nehemiah rebuked the leaders for breaking God’s law in order to profit themselves? (Nehemiah 5:9). What would it say if Nehemiah ignored God’s law out of fear for his own safety?
2. Nehemiah’s courage under fire is remarkable. What kept his thinking clear? It’s worth noting that his resolve to trust and obey God first (verse 11) is what enabled him to have courage and discern the situation correctly.

Think about it. It’s not a sin to be afraid, it’s an emotion. It is a powerful weapon in Satan’s arsenal to tempt us to sin. The enemy uses fear to weaken our resolve and rule our actions. Nehemiah knew God’s Word and he knew the power of prayer. He relied on both for strength when he needed it most. He is a biblical hero to us, but he had heroes too. Note just a few, and what Nehemiah would have seen in them.

Psalms 16:8

Psalms 31:1–4, 15

Daniel 3:17–18

Daniel 6:10, 20–22

Good to Know

If an Israelite’s life was threatened, it was lawful to seek refuge at the altar outside the temple, but only priests could go into the holy place within (Numbers 18:7).

“The highest degree of courage is seen in the person who is fearful but refuses to capitulate to it.”

J. Oswald Sanders
Spiritual Leadership

Success and Vigilance

Nehemiah 6:15–19

Rebuilding the wall in fifty-two days was a stunning success, but Nehemiah fills in another detail at the end of this chapter. While he was busy finishing the wall, Tobiah was building an alliance with some of the Jewish nobles.

1. The wall was finished, but the gates still needed to be hung (see verse 1). Here's something to consider. If the enemy can't have us living with broken walls, he at least wants us to leave the gate open. He doesn't care if you *look* finished, so long as he can still get in.

Eve left the gate open when she believed the serpent's lie that God was holding out on her. She reached for that forbidden fruit instead of obeying God. King David left the gate open when he stayed home instead of going out to battle. Bathsheba caught his eye and the rest is history. Peter left the gate open when he boasted of being more devoted and courageous than the average disciple. But when fear gripped him, he denied knowing Jesus.

Can you identify an open gate in your life? Nehemiah refused to compromise under pressure or success, and so must we. Explain how we keep the enemy from getting a foot in the door.

Psalms 119:10–11

Proverbs 4:23, 26

1 Corinthians 10:12–13

Ephesians 6:10–11

2. Nehemiah ends this chapter by mentioning a different kind of pressure he faced. Tobiah tried to use his connections to get Nehemiah into an alliance with him, but Nehemiah resisted. From what you read in the text, who had clouded judgment: the nobles or Nehemiah? Why, and in what way?



Gospel at a Glance: Enemies of the Cross | Nehemiah's enemies did everything they could to prevent him from finishing the work God called him to do. They tempted him with false offers of peace, but Nehemiah would not be deterred: "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down." They used fear and intimidation but Nehemiah refused to back down: "But now, O God, strengthen my hands." Nehemiah's resolve is noteworthy for the glimpse it gives us of Jesus who endured threats, taunts, and temptations, yet He resolved to finish the work that His Father sent Him to do (John 17:4). He was not swayed by the devil's false offer of peace (Matthew 4:8–9), or the eager multitude to make Him king (John 6:15), or the mockers who dared Him to come down from the cross (Mark 15:29–32). Jesus "set His face like a flint" (Isaiah 50:7) to redeem and restore broken lives. The enemies of the Cross, could not prevent Jesus from accomplishing the *finished work of salvation*.

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Group Prayer Requests

Notes

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Studies in Nehemiah

Session 6 – Revival | Nehemiah Chapter 7–8

Building the wall was a tremendous undertaking, but establishing a God-worshipping community is what would make Jerusalem *the holy city* again. As God would have it, the wall was completed just in time to celebrate two of the most family-oriented feasts on the Jewish calendar.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Nehemiah can teach us about the key elements of revival.
- Consider where God wants you to step out in faith to be part of His work.
- Pray honest prayers that rekindle devotion and obedience to God's Word.

Ice Breaker

Have you ever traced your family tree? How many generations back can you go?

Rebuilding the Community

Nehemiah 7:1–73

After the wall was completed, Nehemiah focused on rebuilding the community. His first priority was seeing to their physical protection and spiritual instruction.

1. Nehemiah chose two men to oversee the security of Jerusalem. It appears they replaced the men who previously held that position (Nehemiah 3:9, 12).
 - a. Who did Nehemiah appoint, and what qualified them for such an important position?
 - b. It speaks well of both men that Nehemiah had confidence in them. If you were being recommended for a position of trust, what would you most want to be said about you?
 - c. From verses 3–4, describe the safeguards Nehemiah put in place, and why these would be necessary.

2. If Jerusalem was going to be a thriving city again, it needed permanent residents. Now that the wall was built, most of Nehemiah's workforce would go back to their homes and regular jobs. Who would be willing to uproot their families, move to the city, and help rebuild the infrastructure? This was a big ask, and Nehemiah prayed about what to do. When he found a copy of census records, (dating back 90 years to Zerubbabel and the first group to return), Nehemiah got his answer.

He gathered the leaders to work out a plan (verse 5). The plan is described in more detail later (Nehemiah 11:1–2), but essentially it went like this; the entire population registered using the same categories as the old census. This determined who was eligible and what role they would serve in rebuilding the community. Ten percent were then asked to relocate to Jerusalem. It was a major upheaval and readjustment of ordinary life but they willingly did so, knowing they were part of something bigger than themselves.

Good to Know

Nehemiah 7:6-73 is the list of men from the original census, long before Nehemiah's time. The actual record of the census Nehemiah took is listed in Nehemiah 11. Approximately 5,000 men along with their families voluntarily left their homes and moved to Jerusalem.

- a. When serving the Lord requires stepping outside of our comfort zone, what can we be certain of? Consider the following verses and answer in your own words.

Joshua 1:8–9

Proverbs 3:5–6

John 15:16

Philippians 4:13

- b. When has taking a step of faith in order to be part of God's work required making some significant adjustments in your life? In what way?
- c. "The good hand of my God was upon me" (Nehemiah 2:8). When you think about the work that God has called you to participate in, what will you praise Him for?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and all the people said, “Amen! Amen!” as they lifted their hands. Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Nehemiah 8:6 NLT

Think About It . . .

Ezra led the people in worship and they made a vocal and physical response. How comfortable are you with engaging in worship? Where might you stretch your comfort level, not for show, but as an intentional effort to engage more fully?

Bring Out the Book!

Nehemiah 8:1–18

Nehemiah 8 opens with the entire community gathered for the Feast of Trumpets, a kind of “opening day” for the harvest season (Leviticus 23:23–25). On this year, they asked Ezra to read from the Book of the Law, which is the first five books of the Old Testament. Ezra may have concentrated on Deuteronomy in particular.

1. They wanted to hear God’s Word. Can you picture the scene? From Nehemiah 8:1–8, note anything you see to indicate how eager and intentional the people were to hear God’s Word.

- a. Before reading the Book of the Law, Ezra prayed and praised God as the source of all blessing. How did the people respond? What does their verbal and physical posture indicate about the posture of their heart?
- b. The Levites (verse 7) spread out to help the people understand what they heard. The language barrier (many weren’t fluent in Hebrew anymore) made it difficult to catch the meaning without help. Why is teaching essential for understanding the Bible? What effort on your part is required? Share what helps you personally to gain a better understanding of God’s Word.

Good to Know

Ezra was a priest and scribe, an expert in teaching the Scripture. He was sent to Jerusalem by Artaxerxes some 13 years earlier to instruct the people and restore temple worship. When he arrived, he found the people living in moral and spiritual compromise. From Ezra’s perspective, the revival we read about in this chapter was long overdue, an answer to unrelenting prayer.

Ezra devoted his life to studying and obeying God’s Law (Ezra 7:10). Bible scholars believe he was the first to compile all the scriptures that existed during his time, in a way that eventually came to be recognized as our Old Testament.

2. When Ezra read the Law and the Levites explained it, the people began to weep. It was an emotional scene—not caused by theatrics to stir up the crowd, but because of the impact of God’s Word. How does Hebrews 4:12 describe the power of God’s Word?

- a. Ezra and Nehemiah urged the people to stop weeping. The kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads to a change of heart and direction. That’s repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10) and it is always a good thing. But the people were so overcome with their sin that they were in danger of missing the follow-through.

Think about what is happening here. What if the people were allowed to fixate on their failures? If discouragement settled in, what might they be tempted to do?

The Bible cuts across the surface of our words and actions and penetrates to the heart of the matter. The Bible gives us insight into our own life: What is broken, what needs to change, what absolutely must go.

START! to Follow
Harvest Ministries

Do we see what a subtle enemy the devil is? He was trying to hijack their revival! Sorrow for sin is only half the story. An authentic response to conviction of the Holy Spirit brings us to our senses and stirs us to lean into the grace and strength of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Use these verses to explain how conviction and repentance leads to joy.

Jeremiah 15:16

Titus 3:3–7

1 John 1:9

- b. Nehemiah encouraged the people to focus on God’s blessings and rejoice together. They were told to spend the rest of the day feasting and sharing their food with those who had nothing to prepare. The next day, the family leaders met again with Ezra and the Levites to hear more of God’s Word. From Nehemiah 8:13–18, what did they discover and do?
- c. If we describe Nehemiah 8 in one word, it would be *revival*. As you look over this chapter, think back on your own history with God. Can you point to evidence of His goodness and faithfulness to you? In what way?



Gospel at a Glance: Revival | The rebuilt wall signaled a new beginning for Jerusalem. Now that the city was fortified and protected from enemies outside the wall, inner restoration and daily living could begin. The first indication of things to come was the people’s renewed interest in God’s Word and responsive hearts. Their spiritual heritage, lost in the rubble of time and neglected tradition, was rediscovered. Let this be our prayer, individually and as the church. “Repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and He will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah.” Acts 3:19–20 NLT

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

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Group Prayer Requests

chosen

Studies in Nehemiah

Session 7 – Repentance and Renewal | Nehemiah Chapter 9

The revival at the Water Gate three weeks earlier was gaining momentum. Observing the yearly Feast of Tabernacles had been more joyous than anyone could remember. For seven days, they gathered around to hear Ezra read from God's Word. For seven nights, families camped out and taught their children the stories of how God faithfully took care of His children so long ago. The festival was over but people lingered, wanting more.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Nehemiah can teach us about corporate prayer and individual commitment.
- Consider how God's mercy and faithful ways can be traced in your own story.
- Pray honest prayers that elevate our focus and fervency for God.

Ice Breaker

If you have ever stood in line or in a large crowd for hours, what were you there to see or do?

From Feasting to Fasting

Nehemiah 9:1–5

Two days after the week-long festival concluded, another assembly was planned. This was not an official feast day, but the people came to worship and renew their commitment to the Lord.

1. From this scene, it is evident that Ezra's daily reading (Nehemiah 8:18) has made a significant impact on the people. In what way?
 - a. Fasting, sackcloth, and dust on the head were outward signs of mourning and repentance. Today, if someone is serious about putting away sin in their life, how might they show it?

2. Rediscovering God in His Word was like a magnet for the people. The more they listened, the more conscious they were of their sin and the Lord's faithfulness. As Romans 2:4 says, the kindness of God leads us to repentance. These verses are a *small sample* of all that Ezra read to the people. Briefly note how you see evidence of God's kindness to them.

Deuteronomy 4:5–8

Deuteronomy 4:27–31

Deuteronomy 30:15–20

3. For three hours, the descendants of Israel stood and listened while the Word of God was read aloud. Then for another three hours they confessed and worshipped the Lord their God. The word used here for *confess* means to acknowledge what is accurate and true.

- a. When we, as individuals or as a community, confess our sins (verse 2) what are we acknowledging about ourselves?

Good to Know

"They confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers." They confessed their own sins, as individuals and corporately as the community of God's chosen people.

The iniquities of their fathers, means they acknowledged Israel's history of sin and chronic rebellion toward God.

- b. When we, as individuals or as a community, confess God (verse 3) we are acknowledging what is accurate and true *about God* in our worship and praise. When you think of it this way, how valuable does knowing God by reading His Word become to you?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Stand up and praise the Lord your God, for He lives from everlasting to everlasting!
Nehemiah 9:5 NLT

Think About It . . .

What will you stand up and praise the Lord for today?

What Happens When God's People Pray?

Nehemiah 9:6–38

The Levites direct the people in a corporate prayer of confession and praise, probably written by Ezra. By reviewing their history, this prayer confessed God's mercy and faithfulness to His people. In every generation, at every twist and turn, God had remained true to His promise.

1. They weren't just reciting facts, they were tracing the pattern of God's faithfulness and their fickleness. They recalled their undeserved blessings and God's unfailing love. From what you have read, give a *simple* description of:
 - a. Israel's cycle of behavior toward God:
 - b. God's character and response toward Israel:
 - c. Their prayer of renewed commitment to God:
2. If we were to recite our own spiritual history, would it resemble Israel's story in some way? What milestones do we find along the path He has brought us? Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have seen and experienced firsthand of God's goodness. Share your thoughts.

**"What a blessing it would
be to reflect upon His
goodness! I think we
could come to the
conclusion that God's
mercy with a sinner is
only equaled and perhaps
outmatched, by His
patience with the saints,
you and me."**

Alan Redpath
Victorious Christian Service

3. What happens when God's people pray? The prayer of Nehemiah 9 begins with a call to action and concludes with the people renewing their commitment to the Lord. Can you hear the call?

Stand up and praise the Lord your God, for He lives from everlasting to everlasting!

Nehemiah 9:5 NLT

From where we sit, we have to look between the lines to see Ezra and Nehemiah in this chapter. Nothing is mentioned of either man, but do you see what they are doing? They are standing with their people, arms raised, calling out, confessing and worshipping the Lord their God. Both men had wept over the ruins. They spent time on their knees, fasting and praying for God's people. Now their prayers were being answered. Revival had come to Jerusalem.

The people responded by pledging obedience to God in every part of their lives: their home life, their social life, and their church life. It happened in Nehemiah's day and it can happen again. Here. Now.

Do you believe the prayers of one man or woman can have a remarkable impact? What if the one becomes a few? What if the few includes you?

Read the verses below and consider what God can do when His people pray. Choose at least one that you will consistently pray, for yourself and for the church, in the weeks to come.

2 Chronicles 7:14

Acts 3:19

Colossians 4:2–3

“Revival starts with the church and then affects the world. Revival is getting back to the Christian life as it was meant to be lived.”

“We cannot organize a revival but we can agonize for one in prayer.”

Pastor Greg Laurie



Gospel at a Glance: God's Mercy | The focus of this prayer is not the history of Israel's rebellion but the history of God's unrelenting mercy. In the Old Testament, mercy is an important word defining God's longsuffering and forgiving nature. It describes more than what God does, it describes who He *is*. When God made a covenant with Abraham, He swore by His own unchanging nature (Hebrews 6:18). When Moses prayed *show me Your glory*, God passed before him proclaiming His own name: “The Lord, the Lord God, *merciful* and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6–7). God could have abandoned Israel for their perpetual rebellion but it is not in His character to do so. God keeps His promises. In Jesus, the unrelenting mercy of God has its greatest expression. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

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Group Prayer Requests

Notes

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Studies in Nehemiah

Session 8 – Resolve and Dedication | Nehemiah Chapter 10

In our nation's history, Watergate is a reminder of leadership gone wrong. In Nehemiah's day, the public reading of God's Word at the Water Gate sparked a revival that turned the nation around. The people rededicated themselves to live in obedience to God's Law.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Nehemiah can teach us about faithfulness and priorities.
- Consider the influence that godly living can have on the world around us.
- Pray honest prayers that embrace obedience and demonstrate a heart to serve.

Ice Breaker

Which best describes your approach to making new-year resolutions? 1) Aim high, stay focused; 2) Good intentions, weak follow-through; 3) Here today, gone tomorrow.

As for Me and My House

Nehemiah 10:1–30

The leaders join Nehemiah in signing a written pledge, outlining the covenant that they made with the Lord. Eighty-four men committed to lead the people by faithfully upholding God's Law.

1. This document was signed by leaders from every aspect of the community. Whether they held a religious position or led in a secular capacity, every man committed to live and lead in obedience to God's Law. While it seems obvious, explain why personal obedience and godly leadership is needed in every facet of life.

Identify one or two people (past or present) who have been a strong and godly influence in your life. In what way?

2. In addition to the leaders, who else takes the oath to live according to God's commands?

a. The people understood the practical implications of this covenant they were making with God. In any society, there is always pressure to conform. Consider what it would involve for them to be *separated* or set apart from the prevailing culture and practices of the people living around them. Briefly explain.

Good to Know

"A curse and an oath." This phrase indicates that the people knew the serious nature of their promise and how their ancestors failed to honor their covenant with God.

Ezra's reading included the blessings and curses that Moses had described (Deuteronomy 28–30) just as Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land.

Curses were not threats—they were warnings. God, who sees the future with complete accuracy, showed them their history in advance. By Nehemiah's time, the terrible consequences of rejecting God's Law had become their heartbreaking history.

b. What does it mean to be *separated* from the world? In actual practice, what does it look like? Consider the following verses and answer in your own words.

Psalms 1:1–3

Romans 12:1–2

1 Peter 1:14–16

c. As a follower of Jesus, when has your commitment to obey God required separation from other individuals, groups or pursuits? In what way?

3. God's Law prohibited His people from blending into the culture, but they were still supposed to be good neighbors. Christians aren't called to isolate—we are called to influence. Use the verses below to describe the impact that godly living can have on the world around us.

Matthew 5:13–16

Colossians 4:5–6

1 Peter 3:15–16

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.
John 14:15 NKJV

Think About It . . .

After recounting God's loving faithfulness to them (Nehemiah 9) the people confessed areas of neglect and listed specific ways they would obey God. Consider how, and in what way, you can do the same.

Changed Hearts, New Priorities

Nehemiah 10:29–39

When Ezra read the Book of the Law, the people listened and understood. They confessed their sin, individually and as a nation. They were serious about putting God first in every area of life.

1. After an honest examination of their waywardness and God's faithfulness, they said, "Now because of all this we are making an agreement in writing..." (Nehemiah 9:38 NASB). The decision to obey God's Word was not a vague commitment. They focused on three areas of chronic neglect and came up with a specific plan of action.
 - a. Marriage and family (verse 30). This was not about racial differences, it was about being spiritually different. Explain why this was important and how obeying God's will in this area affects the family.
 - b. Work and worship (verse 31). Sabbath was about honoring God in work, in rest, and in all their business interests. Sabbath is more than keeping a specific day; it is keeping God first in everything. What are some ways we can observe the principle of Sabbath?
 - c. Support for the house of God (verses 32–39). The people promised to give as God commanded (firstfruits, tithes) and as specific needs came up; in this case, wood and a yearly portion to support the house of God. Think about it. These are the same people with the same economic conditions we saw in chapter five, but something has changed. From the verses below, do your best to describe the *how* and *why* of giving.

Malachi 3:10

Matthew 6:19–20

2 Corinthians 9:5–12

2. Make it personal. Think through and pray over these areas of your life. Ask the Lord to help you identify your priorities and how you can honor and obey Him.

a. I will honor the Lord in my home/family by:

“Christianity is not a long list of restrictions. It flings open the windows to the real joy of living. The happiest people I know are separated followers of Jesus Christ.”

b. I will honor the Lord in my work/worship by:

“...after men and women come to Christ, they go back into the world to live for Christ as a witness to the world. We are to love those for whom Christ died. We are to pray for them, witness to them, help in all the worthwhile social projects that we can. But we are to achieve that most difficult of all tasks, not to be conformed to the world.”

3. “We will not neglect the house of our God.” This was more than a pledge to take care of the material needs of the temple—in a sense, it was their mission statement. A declaration that they would be God’s people, worshipping and serving together. As a result, they would be a light to the world around them.

Billy Graham
In the World, But Not of It
©1968 BGEA

Why is it important to be actively involved in fellowship and serving in our church? Consider the following verses and answer in your own words.

Hebrews 10:24–25

Ephesians 4:11–16



Gospel at a Glance: Firstfruits | The principle behind firstfruits was giving God the *first and best* of all that you have to offer. This was a tangible expression of worship that recognized God as the giver of all good things and worthy to receive the very best. Dedication of the firstborn son was also a reminder of the Exodus, when God’s people were spared from death and delivered out of bondage. More significantly, it pointed to the redemption from sin and death that comes through Jesus Christ (see 1 Peter 1:18–21). God did not withhold His very best from us. He willingly gave all. As Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

God sparked Nehemiah to pray and take action. Others joined in and the work began. With God’s blessing, power and protection, the wall was rebuilt. In each session, we will take time to pray—for others and for ourselves, for our church, our communities, and our nation.

As a focus for prayer, you can use the memory verse, another scripture, or simply what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

Notes

chosen

Studies in Nehemiah

Session 9 – Up on the Wall | Nehemiah Chapter 11–12

Now that the wall was finished, the real work could begin. In fact, it already had. Rebuilding the wall had always been about bringing the city of God and His people back to life.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Nehemiah can teach us about surrender and dedication.
- Consider fresh ways to demonstrate faith and creatively support God's work.
- Pray honest prayers that express praise and cultivate thanksgiving.

Ice Breaker

For you personally, what has been the high point of studying Nehemiah so far?

Urban Renewal

Nehemiah 11:1–36

Nehemiah implements a plan to repopulate the city of Jerusalem.

1. Jerusalem's rebuilt wall was amazing, but the city itself was a sprawl of vacant land and urban decay (Nehemiah 7:4). Only a small percentage of people were actually living there. How did Nehemiah go about repopulating the city?
 - a. Why was it important for more people to live in Jerusalem? List the reasons you think of.
 - b. What possible reasons might keep someone from moving their family to Jerusalem?
 - c. We've been asked this question before but it is worth considering again. When has taking a step of faith in order to be part of God's work required making significant adjustments in your life? In what way?

2. By now, we understand that Nehemiah's lists were a vital part in the history of God's people. In this list, we notice ordinary people doing a variety of jobs and responsibilities.

Considering all the work it would take to make Jerusalem a thriving city again, the response to Nehemiah's call to action is inspiring. Think about it. The economy was not much different than we read about in chapter five. Times were still tough financially, and most families were still living paycheck to paycheck. But they *willingly* moved, knowing they were together in this great work that God was doing in Jerusalem.

God gifts each individual with different skills and abilities to accomplish His work in a variety of ways. Every person is needed and no task is insignificant. What can stir up a willing heart to serve? Consider the verses below for your answer.

1 Samuel 12:24

Mark 10:45

Colossians 3:23–24

Romans 12:1

3. **We're in this together.** Something more than bricks and mortar was restored during those fifty-two days of rebuilding the wall. At the start, they were willing to put their hand to the work. Now they are willing to uproot and move. What would you say has happened?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Romans 12:1 ESV

Think About It . . .

There can be no growth without change, and no change without surrender. What is helping you to grow in your faith? What might be hindering you?

Good to Know

Joel and his assistant, **Judah** (v. 9) served as city overseers, possibly ensuring that city streets and markets were maintained.

Seraiah (v. 11) supervised the temple priests. His family tree is briefly mentioned here, but it appears he was also the father of Ezra the scribe (Ezra 7:1).

Zabdiel (v. 14) supervised the "men of valor" similar to our modern-day police force.

Shabbethai and **Jozabad** (v. 16) were in charge of the Levites who did maintenance and repairs on the temple. **Gatekeepers** (v. 19) did similar work.

A New Wall, A New Beginning

Nehemiah 12:1–47

Dedicating the wall was an exuberant celebration. After laying in rubble for more than a century, Jerusalem's wall was a significant landmark again. But it was a symbol of much more than urban renewal.

1. This chapter includes a list that documented family lines of the priests and Levites who returned to Jerusalem a century earlier with Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple. It pointed Nehemiah's people back to their spiritual roots.

Before rebuilding, the people were out of touch with their own history. They could recite the past but they couldn't relate to it. Those glory days were long gone. Broken walls and neglected foundations was all they'd ever known. But now Jerusalem's wall was strong! And everyone, even their enemies, knew that God had helped them to accomplish it (Nehemiah 6:16).

What if they would have quit when it got hard? What if Nehemiah let them give in and give up? What if Ezra never brought out the Book of the Law and taught them? Consider how different the outcome of their story—and our own—would be without God's Word and the faithful examples of so many who have gone before us. What do the verses below command us to remember?

Deuteronomy 6:5–7

Psalms 66:16

Colossians 3:16

2 Timothy 3:16–17

2. The wall dedication was centered around worship—a legacy passed down from King David when he brought the ark of God back to Jerusalem. Music was so important to David that he established an organized system for singing in worship from that time on. As they prepared for the dedication, ceremonial purification was necessary. True worship in God's presence still requires clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3). In what way do we do this?

John 4:24

1 John 1:9

“Biblical history is a good memory for what doesn't work—and what does work. We need the centuries of experience provided by our biblical ancestors.”

“A Christian who has David in his bones, Jeremiah in his bloodstream, Paul in his fingertips and Christ in his heart will know how much and how little value to put on his own momentary feelings and experience of the past week.”

Eugene Peterson
A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

3. Nehemiah divided the people into two groups with a choir to participate in a thanksgiving parade on the wall. Can you picture it? There were city officials, community leaders, and ordinary citizens. There were priests and Levites whose job it was to lead the people in praise and worship. They were the musicians, the singers, and the choir directors.

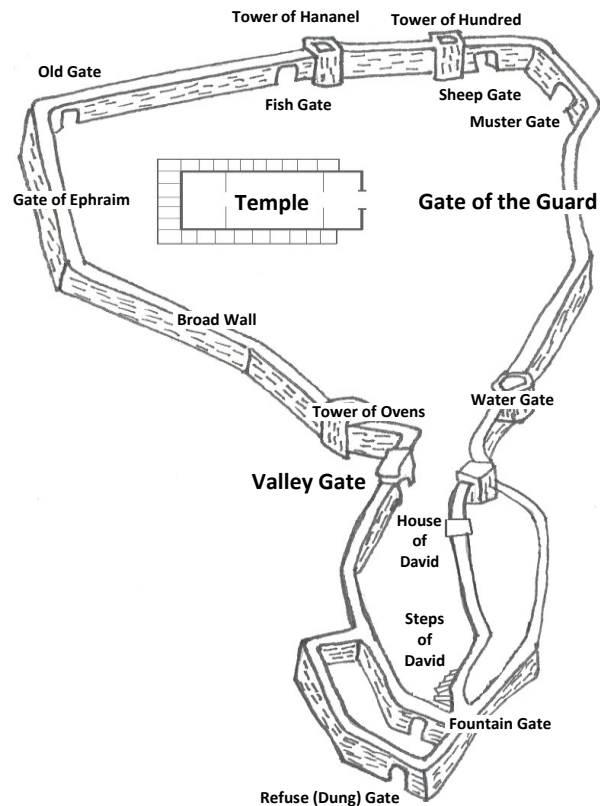
- a. Trace the route of both choirs as they marched on the wall, beginning at the Valley Gate.

Who led the first choir?

Who followed the second choir?

- b. The first choir started out by following Nehemiah's route on the night when he went out to survey the ruins. Go back to Nehemiah 2:11–15 and review what he remembered about that night. Note the details here.

When Nehemiah reached the Fountain Gate, what did he have to do? Try to retrace his route on the diagram.



- c. The choirs were high-spirited as they sang and marched around the city walls. Antiphonal music (two choirs performing together but taking turns singing alternate phrases) was a classic style of worship for Israel. They marched along, singing beautifully and loudly to the Lord and each other. Also, they were giving witness that it was God who accomplished the work! The ridicule of their enemies was answered in their praises to God. One insult in particular was put to rest that day. Why, and what was it? (See Nehemiah 4:3)
- d. The choirs made their way around the wall and went into the Temple where the praise and worship continued. What else stands out to you?

4. What a spectacle they made! Two choirs, rhythmically winding around the city, atop a wall that—a few months earlier—nobody dreamed would ever exist again. But the real wonder would have been the singing. Imagine that. Cymbals and strings and baritone voices bursting out in song over the city below, first from this end of the wall and echoing back from the opposite end. Praise. Exuberant praise!

- a. The wall dedication was no small occasion. From what you can gather (Nehemiah 12:27–29) who participated and how much time and teamwork went to planning music for the festivities?

Good to Know

The Hebrews were known for their music. Songs about their collective experience, shared from one generation to the next.

Moses sang, and his sister Miriam did too (Exodus 15). He wrote Psalm 90, a stirring refrain that ponders God's eternal nature and man's fleeting days. Moses sang a ballad of Israel's history on the last day of his life, as part of his farewell to the nation (Deuteronomy 32).

David's catalog of songs and the songwriters he inspired (like Asaph), has been part of his legacy to all believers for generations.

- b. A newly rebuilt wall called for new songs. Their songs aren't recorded here, and we certainly can't prove it, but Nehemiah's singers may have found inspiration in the lyrics from a few classic oldies:

By the Rivers of Babylon Hebrew exiles hung up their strings and sat down by the river and wept, homesick for Jerusalem. *"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget how to play the harp...my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I fail to remember...Jerusalem my greatest joy."* (Psalm 137:5–6)

Like a Dream The exiles were allowed to come home, and it seemed too good to be true. *"We were filled with laughter and we sang for joy. The Lord has done amazing things for us! What joy!"* (Psalm 126:2–3)

If you were asked to write a song of praise inspired by some recent experience, answered prayer, or new chapter in your life, what would you choose to sing about?



Gospel at a Glance: A Sacrifice of Praise | The great festivities on this day included the people offering joyful sacrifices to God. Their singing was so loud and exuberant that *the joy coming out of Jerusalem could be heard far away* (Nehemiah 12:43). The day is coming when every living soul who puts their faith in Jesus will be gathered in Heaven and our hallelujahs will be like crashing ocean waves and roaring thunder. All to Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world. C.H. Spurgeon was fond of saying that when we offer praises now, we are simply rehearsing our eternal song. *Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name* (Hebrews 13:15).

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

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Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

Notes

chosen

Studies in Nehemiah

Session 10 – Remember, Repent, Repeat | Nehemiah Chapter 13

Happy endings are nice. If that's all Nehemiah was looking for, he would have finished this record with the wall dedication. After twelve years as governor, Nehemiah was called back to Persia. Sometime later, Nehemiah returned to find that Jerusalem had slipped back into spiritual neglect.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Nehemiah can teach us about holiness and devoted living.
- Consider the dangers of spiritual drift and the need for accountability.
- Pray honest prayers that remember past mercies, repent of sin, and repeat new growth.

Ice Breaker

If you could have one do-over for the past twenty-four hours, how would you use it?

Absence Makes the Heart . . . Wander

Nehemiah 13:1–31

Nehemiah returns to find that the people of Jerusalem have wandered back into a spiritual drift.

1. The first three verses wrap up the previous chapter, when the community was on fire with renewed devotion to God. Excluding Ammonites and Moabites from the assembly is a strong indication that they were serious about following the Lord with pure and undivided hearts.

Being part of the assembly essentially meant *you're one of us*—fully participating in the worship and life of God's covenant with His people. Converts were welcomed (Ruth was a Moabite) but it meant leaving their pagan beliefs and practices behind.

- a. Why was it so vital for Israelites to separate themselves from the influence of unbelieving people groups? Why is it for us? Use the following verses to explain your answer.

Luke 9:62 and 10:27

John 14:15

2 Corinthians 6:14–18

- b. Long ago, God had promised Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you” (Genesis 12:3). God’s command regarding the Ammonites and Moabites was simply keeping His promise.

When the children of Israel were coming out of Egypt, the Ammonites callously refused to do the right thing. The Moabites intentionally did the wrong thing. Is there a lesson here for us? We tend to think of sin in terms of *doing the wrong thing*. In what ways do we also sin by *not doing* the right thing?

James 1:22–24

James 4:17

Good to Know

The Ammonites would not let the Israelites coming out of Egypt pass through their land or buy food and water from them (Deuteronomy 2:27-30 and Numbers 21:21-23).

The Moabites hired a prophet named Balaam to curse God’s people and deliberately tried to harm them (Numbers 22).

2. During Nehemiah’s absence, things were allowed to deteriorate. When Nehemiah returned, he was stunned to find out that Tobiah the Ammonite was actually occupying rooms in the temple compound.

The temple was built with a series of chambers originally meant for storing worship utensils and all of the offerings, firstfruits and tithes. These items were earmarked to support the priests and Levites who served full-time in the temple (Nehemiah 12:44–47) but the supply had dwindled over time because of misuse and neglect.

- a. Since the rooms were empty, Eliashib the high priest let Tobiah move in and set up house. Tobiah had been a troublemaker from the beginning, but why didn’t Eliashib see it that way? Look for clues in Nehemiah 6:17–19 and answer in your own words.

- b. After clearing out the junk that Tobiah brought in, what else did Nehemiah do?

- c. There will always be Tobiahs in life. By that, we mean worldly pressures and our natural tendency to allow other things to occupy our thoughts and affections. But God’s Word provides ways to keep our hearts stocked with truth and ready for worship. In what way?

Ephesians 5:15–17

Philippians 4:6–8

Colossians 3:16–17

3. **Not on my watch.** It's been said that the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.¹ Nehemiah wasn't about to let the people forget all that God had brought them through! Does Nehemiah's example motivate you to action? In what way?

- a. **Remember.** No one could accuse Nehemiah of being indifferent. He had wept and prayed for them. Built and battled alongside them. They'd prayed together, worshipped together, and walked that rebuilt wall together. He had a long, self-sacrificing, and God-centered history with them.

There are times when we need a Nehemiah like this in our life. Someone to speak truth, pray with us, and even (figuratively) yank on our hair as needed. Can you allow someone to be this kind of Nehemiah for you? Have you been this kind of Nehemiah for someone else? Why or why not?

"The Christian life is one of progression, growth, and constant change. The simple fact is that you are either moving forward as a believer or you are moving backward."

Pastor Greg Laurie

- b. **Repent.** *You see the trouble we are in.* It wasn't the city walls bringing reproach this time (Nehemiah 2:17) but there was debris that needed to be cleared. Earlier in this lesson, we considered how sometimes sin is doing the wrong thing (commission) and sometimes it is *not doing* the right thing (omission). Either way, what will *always be true*?

1 John 1:5–9

- c. **Repeat.** Once the debris was cleared, the wall was ready to be rebuilt. Remember that every man was assigned to repair that part of the wall closest to home (Nehemiah 3:23)? Ask the Lord to identify any necessary repairs. Note what He shows you about:

Right things must be kept in the right place.

Neutral things must be surrendered.

Wrong things must be abandoned.

¹ Edmund Burke (1730-1797) was an author, orator, political theorist and Member of Parliament during the Revolutionary War.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!
Psalm 139:23–24 ESV

Think About It . . .

While you chew on this verse, why not also turn it to praise? Allow God to search your heart—and also tell Him something that you know about His heart, His thoughts, and His ways.

Remember Me, O My God

Nehemiah 13

Four times in this last chapter, Nehemiah prays one of his “remember” prayers. Some think he was discouraged by the compromise and half-hearted living among God’s people. If so, his fervent prayer was the right response.

1. God answered Nehemiah’s *remember me* prayers. His unwavering faith and obedience is forever recorded in God’s Word. As we finish our study in this book, what life lessons can we take away from Nehemiah about:

Faithfulness

Prayer

Obedience to God’s Word

Our Influence

Resolve and Dedication

Building and Battling

Courage under Fire

Finishing Well

2. For you personally, what has been most life changing in our studies in Nehemiah?



Gospel at a Glance: God's Perfect Plan | Nehemiah accomplished what God sent him to do, but his account still ends with a sense of unfinished business. And it was. Nehemiah led the last great revival of God's people in the Old Testament. The wall was rebuilt and Nehemiah gets a glimpse of God's perfect plan. But the rest of the story was not his to tell. Thirty years after Nehemiah passed from the scene, the people were back to broken promises and careless living. God sent Malachi to rouse His people back to their first love but Israel rejects God's question with a question. The Book of Malachi opens with "I have loved you," says the Lord. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'" And so the Old Testament ends in a 400-year chasm of silence, filled with promises made by men and broken. Only the Lord Himself could provide a way out of this impasse.

John the Baptist came...a voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord." (Matthew 3)

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

chosen

Studies in Esther

Session 11 – The King’s Garden Party | Esther Chapter 1

Our study in Esther opens with King Ahasuerus flamboyantly parading his extravagant wealth and unlimited power for all to see. Meanwhile God’s unseen hand turns the wheel.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the subtle indications of God’s providence all through the story.
- Consider the far-reaching consequences of our choices.
- Pray for the powers-that-be to have wisdom and courage.

Ice Breaker

Give an example of being *in the wrong place at the wrong time* and how you handled that.

Kings and Kingdoms

Esther 1:1-22

Esther’s story opens with an elaborate campaign by King Ahasuerus to show off his vast wealth and supreme authority.

1. The narrator describes an extravagant feast in the third year of his reign. This matches with history accounts of a campaign by Xerxes to rally support for a large-scale invasion of Greece.*
 - a. For six months, the king entertained a rotating stream of key political and military leaders from all parts of his vast empire. It was no small feat to keep such a diverse group (with their own cultures and regional concerns) loyal and motivated to serve his will. How would a grand display of his wealth and generosity have helped to accomplish this?

Good to Know

The Persian Empire spanned two million square miles from modern Pakistan in the east to modern Turkey in the west and part of Africa (Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia).

Xerxes (Ahasuerus’ Greek name) was the king from 486-465 BC. His mother was the daughter of Cyrus who defeated Babylon and let the exiles return to Judah. His father, Darius, treated the Jews kindly (Ezra 6:1-12).

Events in the book of Esther cover a ten-year span, beginning in the third year of Xerxes’ reign (Esther 1:3) to the end of his twelfth year (Esther 3:7).

Xerxes ruled for 21 years and he was killed by the commander of his own palace guard. Artaxerxes (the king that Nehemiah served) took his father’s place.

* Xerxes’ father, Darius had been soundly defeated in an attempt to take Athens. He died soon after and Xerxes vowed to avenge his father’s humiliation and expand his own empire to include Greece and all of Europe. Source: *The History*, by Greek historian Herodotus (485-425 BC).

2. The king held a second feast for men who lived and served at all levels in the palace fortress at Susa (not the ordinary folks who lived in the city itself). The queen did also for the women.
- a. Every detail of this week-long party was intended to impress. From what you read, what is your impression of Ahasuerus? In a sentence or two, describe what's important to him.

- b. As a grand finale, Ahasuerus wants to show off his trophy wife but she refuses to appear. This is understandable, but Vashti's refusal creates an embarrassing dilemma for the king.

Look carefully at how this episode unfolds. The king's advisors were his closest friends (verse 14) and they are in the room (verse 11). It's an awkward moment for everyone—and Memucan breaks the inebriated silence with a solution to help the king maintain his dignity. #spindoctor #madskills

Describe Memucan's plan (verses 16-20) in your own words.

- c. **And the reply pleased the king and the princes.** Early in his reign, Ahasuerus followed a long tradition of keeping royal counselors, but when he promoted Haman over all of his advisors his inner circle went from bad to worse. Consider the verses below and what we can learn from the king's example.

Proverbs 12:26

Proverbs 13:20

Proverbs 20:1

Proverbs 25:28

Good to Know

Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego served in Nebuchadnezzar's council. (Daniel 1:6). Daniel served as a royal counselor for the rest of his life. The last king he served was Cyrus, grandfather of Ahasuerus (Daniel 6:28).

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations.

Psalm 22:28 NIV

Think About It . . .

To what extent do you see God's hand in the leaders and events of our time? Write the names of one government, military and education leader you will commit to pray for by name this week.

She Refused

Esther 1:10-21

Vashti is usually cast, in a positive or negative light, for refusing the king's command. Was she a rebellious wife, or a woman with strong conviction? Or both? The text doesn't really say what Vashti's reasons were but her decision had long-term consequences. So that will be our common ground for this part of the discussion.

1. We all have times when a situation beyond our control comes up and a choice has to be made. Sometimes with short notice, or none at all. The pressure is on, we react, weigh the options. Do what's right...what's easiest...what is safe. Do what others expect you to do.

It's been said that you make your choices and then your choices make you. So how do we make good choices? Consider the following verses and answer in your own words.

Psalm 119:9-11

Proverbs 3:5-7

Proverbs 19:20

2. We should learn from biblical examples. Select a few examples of someone who is making a life-changing choice. Consider two things: How their choice reveals what's important to them; and what their example teaches you.

Eve – Genesis 3:1-6

a) What's important:

b) Teaches me:

Lot – Genesis 13:10-13

a) What's important:

b) Teaches me:

Joseph – Genesis 39:6-12

- a) What's important:
- b) Teaches me:

Ruth – Ruth 1:14-18

- a) What's important:
- b) Teaches me:

Nehemiah – Nehemiah 5:14-19

- a) What's important:
- b) Teaches me:

Mary – Luke 10:38-42

- a) What's important:
- b) Teaches me:

Paul – Philippians 3:7-14

- a) What's important:
- b) Teaches me:

3. Some choices are more important than others—but we can't always identify them ahead of time. Vashti, who was not a worshipper of God, didn't see the far-reaching consequences of her choice. But as a child of God, we have a distinct advantage. What can you count on when faced with a difficult choice? (Note if there is a condition to the promise.)

Proverbs 2:1-5

Isaiah 41:10

Philippians 4:6-7 & 13



Gospel at a Glance: God's Providence | Fifty years before Ahasuerus threw a party to show the world that he was in charge, his grandfather Cyrus quietly slipped his army into Babylon through a water canal and brought down Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty while the king trembled in a drunken stupor. Cyrus was a conqueror and a diplomat who famously allowed his subjects to retain their own customs and religion. God providentially stirred this pagan king to let the Jews return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-4). After Cyrus came Darius, another pagan king used by God to accomplish His purposes (Ezra 6:1-12). Ahasuerus also served God's purposes, even though he remained oblivious to it. Man's plans ultimately serve God's purpose (Romans 8:28)

In simple terms, providence is God working His plan through natural events. Esther's story gives us true-to-life examples of God's providence. Instead of miracles, we see flawed people who make seemingly insignificant choices. Plots are hatched, but then something happens to reverse the outcome and God's people are saved from certain death. It's a picture of the gospel, and the great reversal of outcome that God provided through Jesus Christ. Sin condemns us to death and we are powerless to save ourselves, but at the right time God sent His Son to die for us (Romans 5:6-9).

A Adoration C Confession T Thankfulness S Supplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will take time to pray—for others and for ourselves, for our church, our communities, and our nation.

As a focus for prayer, you can use the memory verse, another scripture, or simply what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

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S _____

Group Prayer Requests

Notes

chosen

Studies in Esther

Session 12 – Winsome to Win Some | Esther Chapter 2

As you look at this chapter, resist the tendency to read it like a fairy tale. Get to know Esther and she will surprise you. She may puzzle you. Hopefully she will challenge you.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what set Esther apart and brought her into a position of honor.
- Consider God’s purpose for all believers and what shapes us for influence.
- Pray honest prayers that embrace wise counsel and cultivate a heart to serve.

Ice Breaker (choose one)

In high school, what would you have been voted “most likely” for and why?

Finish this sentence: In the next five years, I can see myself ...

Living the Good Life?

Esther 2:1–23

The search for a new queen begins.

1. Summarize what the plan was to find a new queen.
 - a. As far as the king was concerned, what three things made a woman desirable?
 - b. By God’s standard, what makes a woman desirable? Consider what you read in Proverbs 31:30 and 1 Peter 3:1–4.

Good to Know

“After these things...”
Three years have gone by between chapter one and two. During that time, Ahasuerus invaded Greece but his army was soundly defeated. A dejected king is a recipe for trouble, so his personal attendants come up with a plan to find him a new queen.

2. It's reasonable to suppose that the king's edict caused mixed reactions among his subjects. Some girls would have gone against their will, deprived of any real chance for a normal life with the people they loved. Others would see the opportunity of a lifetime.

a. Mordecai adopted his young cousin and raised her as his own, providing stability and shelter. The king's edict changed any plans Mordecai had for Esther's future. Mordecai couldn't change Esther's circumstances, but he helped her navigate them. In what way?

b. Regardless of what she may have thought or felt about it, Esther found herself living in a culture obsessed with physical appearance, looking at an uncertain (to her) future. How did she respond, and what does that say about her?

c. At this point in the story, can you identify with Mordecai or Esther in some way? Consider the summary statements below. If you could ask a question or offer advice to Mordecai or Esther, what would it be?

└ Mordecai gave Esther wise instruction and inquired daily (from a distance) about her welfare—but he had to relinquish direct control over her care and safety.

└ Esther's life took an unexpected turn; she was plunged into an environment that tested her values and compelled her to choose between what's right and what's culturally acceptable.

3. This chapter raises a valid, head-scratching question that has been asked by many people. *What's a nice girl like Esther doing in a place like this?*

This is a good time to remind ourselves that "God is working in places where you and I might think He is absent."¹

a. It was Hegai's job was to make sure the king was always pleased. Explain how God used him to advance Esther's position.

b. Mordecai's job (thanks to Queen Esther?) put him in the right place at the right time. Explain how God used him to save the king's life.

Some see this episode as proof positive that Mordecai and Esther had no business being in Susa when they should have been in Jerusalem with the rest of God's people. But the record shows the returned exiles were living in a perpetual cycle of backsliding too (see Haggai 1:2-7 and Zechariah 1:3-4).

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 713

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

Proverbs 11:2 NLT

Think About It . . .

Like Esther, we live in an all-about-me world. When everything within us asserts *me, myself, and I*, we are driving blind. Am I pursuing any unwise path? How will I make a course correction?

Shaped to Influence

Esther 2:15

On the surface, it appears that Esther led a charmed life simply because she was a natural beauty. But more than a lovely face, she had a disposition to match.

1. The narrator frequently mentions that Esther *obtained favor* with everyone who knew her. When we trace this phrase through the Bible, we see that obtaining favor isn't about how you look—it's about how you live. More to the point, it's about making the most of your influence as an opportunity to serve God.

From the examples given, explain how God used these individuals who had *favor with others* to influence their world.

Joseph (Genesis 39:4, 21 and 41:38–41, 57)

Moses (Exodus 11:3)

Samuel (1 Samuel 2:26 and 3:19–21)

David (1 Samuel 16:7, 12 and 21–22)

Jesus as a boy (Luke 2:52)

The early church (Acts 2:47)

2. **When opportunity knocks.** On the surface, Esther's story appears to be a random string of events and relationships strung together by circumstance. But she was given a position of privilege for a reason. And with privilege comes responsibility.

Even those of us who live more ordinary lives answer to God for the opportunities we are given. According to God's Word, what is our purpose and how does God shape us to be an influence?

Ephesians 2:8–10

Philippians 2:13

Romans 12:1–2

Colossians 3:12–14

Titus 2:11–13

3. By the providence of God, Esther found herself in a palace. Where has God placed you? Identify key roles and relationships you have in life. List them here.

- a. In what ways has God given you favor with others? How can you make the most of these opportunities to serve God?

“The great use of one's life is to spend it for something that will outlast it, for the value of life is calculated, not by its duration but by its donation.”

J. Oswald Sanders
Spiritual Leadership



Gospel at a Glance: Adoption and a Crown | Esther's story from rags-to-royalty almost sounds like a fairy tale. Considering that God's name is never mentioned, we might wonder where the gospel can be found. But here is a glimpse, pure and simple. Mordecai adopted his orphaned cousin, a lovely girl named Hadassah. Her Jewish name means *myrtle* or *fragrance*. Esther, her Persian name, means *star*. She is doubly named, and doubly blessed. Chosen for adoption simply because she was loved (Deuteronomy 7:6–7) by Mordecai who chose to become a father to her (2 Corinthians 6:18). By God's grace and favor, she was chosen for a crown—and so are we. Destined to reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12) by virtue of putting our faith in the saving work of Christ on the cross for us. *“But thank God! Now He uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume”* (2 Corinthians 2:14 NLT).

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

Notes

chosen

Studies in Esther

Session 13 – Haman’s Heartless Plan | Esther Chapter 3

History is littered with despicable characters and in this session, Haman struts onto the scene.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how Mordecai chose the difficult right instead of the easy wrong.
- Consider what God hates and why that’s good news for us.
- Pray honest prayers that instill courage and stand firm in faith.

Ice Breaker

Without going into too much detail, when is the last time you felt peer pressure? In what way?

Pride and Prejudice

Esther 3:1–6

The story picks up five years later. Mordecai’s role in saving the king’s life has been recorded and forgotten. That detail figures in later, but for now all eyes are on the king’s new favorite.

1. Haman comes on the scene at the high point of his career. He’s been promoted (no reason is given) and the narrator gives a few hints why that’s going to be a problem. Let’s start with the less obvious one.

Haman’s authority. Remember the king’s advisors (chapter 1), that close inner circle who always had access to the king? Where do they figure in the picture now?

What happens when you combine human nature with a shift of power? Consider what you read and share your thoughts.

James 3:16

Proverbs 29:5

Good to Know

Haman’s promotion signaled major changes all around. By giving Haman authority over *all the other* advisors, the king essentially created a new government position. Safe to say, this didn’t go over well with everyone, which may partially explain why the men in the king’s gate pressed the issue with Mordecai—not out of loyalty to Haman so much as looking for a reaction. If Haman couldn’t command respect from one man, he wouldn’t deserve their respect either.

2. **Haman's ancestry.** Haman's animosity was deeply ingrained. For the descendants of Agag, hatred for the Hebrews had been nursed and rehearsed for generations. For Mordecai's part, no self-respecting Jew would ever respect an Amalekite. So, when Mordecai would not bow, Haman's raging ego took over. Like the hair trigger on a loaded gun, he set out to annihilate God's people.

- a. Why do you think Mordecai refused to bow in Haman's presence? Was he simply being stubborn? Did he resent Haman's promotion while his own service was overlooked? Was this a matter of conscience for Mordecai? Consider Deuteronomy 25:17–19 and share your thoughts.

Good to Know

The Amalekites were Israel's sworn enemies all the way back to the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt, when God cursed the Amalekites for brutally attacking Israel (Exodus 17:8–16).

Later, when Saul was king, God instructed him to destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions. Saul attacked, but kept some choice animals and spared Agag, their king. When the prophet Samuel confronted him, Saul made excuses but he was rejected as king. Then Samuel "put Agag to death before the Lord" (1 Samuel 15:33).

- b. Haman's name sounds similar to the Hebrew word for wrath (*hemah*) which certainly describes his explosive demeanor. He was a hateful man who embodied the very things God hates. According to Proverbs 6:16–19, "There are six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him . . ."

What seven things does the Lord hate? Note each one and what makes it so deplorable.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

3. Put yourself in Mordecai's place. Have you ever found yourself in a confrontation you didn't choose but couldn't avoid without compromising your faith and witness? Briefly share how God shaped you through that experience.
 - a. What part did God's Word and prayer have in your response?
 - b. What was the outcome?
 - c. Would you say your beliefs were tested? Strengthened? In what way?
 - d. What, if anything, would you do differently in the future?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes;
for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.

Proverbs 3:25–26 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Trusting God doesn't exempt us from trouble, but it does remind us who has control. He is never caught off-guard or tripped up. Where do you most need to be reminded of this today?

A Wicked Game

Esther 3:7–15

Haman sets his heartless plan into motion.

1. Before taking his plan to the king, Haman privately met with court astrologers to determine, according to the gods, when to massacre the Jews. Casting lots (Pur) was a ritual used to decide the future.
 - a. They cast lots in the first month, Nisan (April), and it came up for the twelfth month, Adar (March). How long would Haman have to wait to carry out his plan? How did this work to the Jews' advantage?
 - b. Haman let *fate* choose the date, convinced it would all come together as planned. In a way, he was right. But what was missing in his calculations?

Proverbs 16:9

Proverbs 16:33

2. How does Haman persuade the king to go along with his plan? What truths and half-truths do you spot in his presentation? What details does he leave out?
 - a. What would motivate Ahasuerus to sign a death warrant for countless thousands of his subjects, with no questions asked?
 - b. *Act now, think later.* We notice a consistent pattern in a king who can't seem to get past his own blind spot. Ahasuerus was accustomed to forming opinions and solving problems by listening to men who only said what he wanted to hear. What do we learn here?

Proverbs 18:13

Psalms 1:1–3

3. The decree was written in every language and delivered to every province in the Persian Empire (including Jerusalem). Imagine if everyone in the United States got a push notification like this:

APRIL 17, 474 BC¹

BY ORDER OF KING AHASUERUS

ALL JEWS, YOUNG AND OLD, INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN MUST BE KILLED, SLAUGHTERED, AND ANNIHILATED. ALL CITIZENS MAY PARTICIPATE. ALL POSSESSIONS SEIZED WILL BE LAWFULLY YOURS. THIS ORDER WILL BE IN EFFECT FOR 24 HOURS ONLY, MARCH 7, 473 BC. **THIS IS NOT A DRILL.**

- a. While Haman and the king sat down to drink, what is happening in the streets, and shops, and homes, and workplaces of Susa?
- b. What if you suddenly found yourself living under this kind of threat? What would matter the most to you? What would matter less?

**“We must learn to trust God,
not only in the adverse
circumstances of our individual
lives, but also in the adverse
circumstances of the church
as a whole.**

**We must learn to trust God
for the spread of the gospel,
even in those areas where it is
severely restricted.**

**He is sovereign over the nations
where every attempt is made to
stamp out true Christianity.”**

Jerry Bridges

Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts



Gospel at a Glance: A Death Warrant | Haman’s rage towards Mordecai caused him to devise an evil plan to destroy all the Jews. Centuries later, in a similar way and for equally wicked reasons, King Herod was incensed to learn that a rival king had been born (Matthew 2:3). Like Haman, Herod was willing to exterminate many in order to destroy the one who was his rival. While the child Jesus was providentially spared, He would be convicted on false charges and condemned to die. The death warrant issued against Jesus is—and will ever be—the greatest injustice ever committed. And yet, what Satan meant for evil God intended for good. “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected . . . and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Luke 9:22 NIV).

¹A number of dates in the book of Esther can be cross-checked with dates in surviving Persian records and related accurately to our modern calendar.

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

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S _____

Group Prayer Requests

Notes

chosen

Studies in Esther

Session 14 – A Date with Destiny | Esther Chapter 4

News of Haman’s wicked plan is sent to every province in the empire. In eleven months, the Jews will be slaughtered and all their possessions confiscated.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how Mordecai persuades Esther to do the right thing.
- Consider the vital connection between prayer, fasting, and courage to act.
- Pray honest prayers that boldly trust and wholeheartedly obey.

Ice Breaker

Share your recollection of a time when our nation experienced crisis. What was your reaction? What was the collective mood in our nation?

Breaking News

Esther 4:1–17

The Persian Empire was home to several million Jews, including everyone who returned to live in their own land of Israel. It’s difficult to imagine or exaggerate the anguish being felt in towns and territories all across the empire.

1. When Mordecai *learned all that had happened* it was unthinkable. How did he express his shock and sorrow?
 - a. Jews in every province had the same overwhelming response. They knew that the king’s edict could not be revoked. What does this imply they were doing, and who were they looking to?

Good to Know

Sackcloth is a coarse cloth made from goat’s hair, quite uncomfortable and abrasive against the skin. Ashes on the head signified desolation and ruin.

Wearing sackcloth and ashes was a public sign of grief for personal or national disaster. It was an outward expression of repentance and humility—a plea for God to intervene and deliver.

2. Persian law demanded that the king never be exposed to sorrow or mourning. He was to be insulated from the troubles and daily burdens of his subjects (Nehemiah 2:1–2). Mordecai was required to keep his grief outside the gates. According to God’s Word, how different is it for us?

Isaiah 53:3–4

Matthew 11:28–29

Hebrews 4:15–16

3. Meanwhile, Esther (who is insulated from the realities of life outside the palace) hears about Mordecai’s behavior at the gate. Trace Esther’s reaction as the crisis begins to dawn on her.

Note: Up to now, we’ve only seen Esther’s unspoken example. In this chapter, her own words are recorded.

- a. **Esther’s distress** (verses 4–5). At this point, what does Esther know *and not know*? How does she respond and why?
- b. **Esther’s dilemma** (verses 6–11). Esther is stunned by Mordecai’s news and instructions to her. Her first answer could be summed up in two words: ***I can’t***. It wasn’t that she didn’t care, but she couldn’t see how her actions might make a difference. And at what cost?

Recall a time when you have been in a tough position and wanted to say *I can’t*. Did you act, or not? Looking back, what, if anything, would you do differently?

- c. **Esther’s decision** (verses 12–16). Mordecai persuades Esther that she is in a unique position to make a difference. We can sum up her second answer in two words: ***I will***. Mordecai put things in perspective for Esther. The choice still wasn’t easy, but it was clear.

Recall a situation when taking action was hard and you chose to say *I will*. What factors made it difficult to act with courage? Was someone a *Mordecai* for you? In what way?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Like Esther, sometimes we need the crucible of crisis to remind us what is true. We are a work in progress and He is writing us into His story. For your part, will you trust Him? In what way?

Reluctance and Resolve

Esther 4:9–17

Esther's hesitation to do what Mordecai asked is understandable. Going into the king's presence, unbidden, was risky to say the least.

1. **Esther's reluctance.** Give more thought to Esther's predicament and what might reasonably have been going through her mind.

... Besides breaking protocol (an offense punishable by death) Esther would be putting the king in an awkward position. Look what happened to Vashti. The king might feel that Esther was defying his authority.

... Xerxes was temperamental and notoriously unpredictable.*

... After five years of marriage, the king is not nearly so infatuated with her (she hasn't been summoned by him for thirty days).

... Esther will have to reveal her Jewish identity.

All things considered, the odds didn't look promising. Esther had two options and neither one was ideal. Describe Esther's options and the probable outcome for her and others.

Remain silent:

Make an uninvited visit to the king:

* Herodotus tells the story of Pythias, an ally of King Xerxes who hosted the king and his army on their way to Greece. He gave a huge sum toward the war effort, but Xerxes refused it and instead generously rewarded Pythias for his loyalty. But when Pythias asked for one of his five sons to remain home (so that he might have an heir to take care of him in his old age) Xerxes viewed it as a sign that Pythias doubted his ability to win. Xerxes removed his son from the ranks, cut him in half, and laid both sections of his corpse on either side of the road for his army to pass through as they marched off to war.

2. **Esther's resolve.** What specific instructions did Esther send back to Mordecai? What did she say she would do?

Good to Know

Fasting involves abstaining, usually from food or water, for the purpose of seeking God. There are many reasons to fast, and for Esther it was a matter of life and death. Esther's call for a fast implies that she and her supporters would engage in earnest prayer, pleading for God to intervene and give her favor with the king.

- a. Esther waited for three days to act, even though her decision was already made. What was the purpose for those three days, and what can we learn from her example?

3. Esther was fortified by waiting on her unseen, ever-present God. He put iron in her soul to rise up and confront the situation with wisdom and confidence.

Bold moves call for bold prayers. Like Esther, let's resolve to obey and trust God to give us courage under fire. From God's Word, what can you confidently pray for such a time as this?

Romans 8:31, 37

Psalms 138:3, 7–8

Isaiah 41:10

2 Corinthians 4:7, 16–18

2 Timothy 1:7

4. **What time is it for you?** We don't need the drama of a defining moment to know that God has called us to make *the best use* of our time (Ephesians 5:15–16). So, don't wait. He has placed you right where you are for a purpose—how will you cooperate with Him?

Name at least one area for each category and how you can be faithful to fulfill that call. Be practical and specific.

Roles/Responsibilities

**This job has been
given to me to do.**

**Therefore, it is
*a gift.***

**Therefore, it is
*a privilege.***

Relationships

**Therefore, it is
*an offering***

**I may make to
God.**

Skills/Resources

Elisabeth Elliott

Service/Ministry



Gospel at a Glance: A Choice to Die | Esther's defining moment came when she responded to Mordecai's refrain, "*Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" In anguish for the peril of her people, she put her own life on the line to save them. She chose to die, if need be, to bring relief and deliverance to her people. "*And if I perish, I perish.*" In the Garden of Gethsemane, the defining moment came when the fate of the world for all eternity rested on one Man. In anguish, Jesus prayed, "*If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as You will*" (Matthew 26:39). Jesus chose to die, knowing that if He remained silent, relief and deliverance would **not** come from another.

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

Notes

chosen

Studies in Esther

Session 15 – The Turning Point | Esther Chapter 5

Esther risks her life by approaching the king without permission. Haman escalates his revenge against Mordecai.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how events begin to shift in favor of God's people.
- Consider the contrast between Esther's wisdom and Haman's pride.
- Pray honest prayers that surrender complacency and stretch your capacity to trust.

Ice Breaker

When was the last time you did something way outside your comfort zone?

Esther's Wisdom

Esther 5:1–8

After three days of fasting, Esther was prepared to go to the king. Her plan was simple, but it involved great risk.

1. **Hurry up and wait.** Esther waited for three days to act, even though her decision was made. Most of us don't wait well. But in the Bible, waiting is more than just passing time. In the Psalms, David (who preached to himself through song) wrote, *"Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord"* (Psalm 27:14 NASB).

Remember Nehemiah? While he prayed and fasted, a plan was forming in his mind. Esther did the same thing for those three days between chapter four and chapter five. God put iron in her soul and a plan in her mind.

At this point in the story, what stands out most to you about Esther?

In Hebrew, **wait** comes from a root word for twisting or winding a cord. It means *"hope"* and indicates **active** and **focused planning** as you wait to hear from God with the intent to obey.

2. Esther's first risk was going to the king's inner court. Explain why his response was crucial.

- a. Esther's approach was crucial as well. It wasn't enough to show up and say *did I catch you at a bad time*. She took care to approach the king in a pleasing, respectful manner. Note what she did to accomplish this.

Verses 1–2

Verses 3–5

Good to Know

Excavations of Xerxes' palace reveal a vast hall thought to be the king's court. Measuring over 120,000 square feet, this vast area was supported by 72 columns estimated to be 68 to 80 feet tall. That's nearly double the size and taller than the White House.

3. Esther exhibited strength and courage, and now we see another crucial trait: discernment. She possessed intuitive good timing. But that does not guarantee a risk-free environment. Imagine Esther's relief as Xerxes extends the scepter and the immediate danger is past—but there are more hazards to navigate.
- a. After the king and Haman enjoy their meal, Xerxes again asks Esther what her request is. Why did she wait and invite them back for a second banquet? Consider some possible reasons and share your thoughts.
- b. The narrator doesn't explain Esther's motive for delaying her request, but there is more here than meets the eye. Safe to say, Esther went to bed that night praying the next day would go as she hoped. Haman climbed into bed gloating about his "in" with the king and queen—and dreamed of hanging Mordecai high. But the king? Look at Esther 6:1 and note how *he* spent that night.
- c. Providence is easier to spot in hindsight. We see how the king's sleepless night fit into God's plan but what about our sleepless nights? Do you believe that God is actively involved in the daily affairs of your life? In what way?

4. Mordecai's *for-such-a-time-as-this* challenge woke Esther up. She had to do something. But what? And how? Three days of focused waiting on God gave Esther courage and wisdom she didn't know she had.

The will to obey is our decision.

The power to obey is God's provision.

- a. Does Esther's example motivate you to action? In what way?
- b. Identify a situation you need courage and wisdom to deal with. Is it more difficult for you to pray and wait? Or to plan and take action? In either case, what can you be certain of?

2 Corinthians 3:5

2 Corinthians 9:8

Philippians 4:13

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,
making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:15–16 NIV

Think About It . . .

If you could discuss this verse with Esther, what do you think she would say? What might she tell us about being intentional with our time and opportunities?

Haman's Pride

Esther 5:9–14

Previously, Mordecai would not bow to Haman when he walked by. This time, he refused to stand or even acknowledge Haman's presence.

1. Haman was in high spirits when he left Esther's banquet. But his mood flipped like a nickel when he encountered Mordecai. After legislating a death warrant against him, what reaction did Haman want from Mordecai?
 - a. What did Haman do to nurse his bruised ego?
 - b. What did Haman's wife and friends suggest to make him feel better?
2. **Self-importance and other annoying habits.** Haman is the villain we boo, a wicked man who apparently had no redeeming qualities. So, who in the group wants to raise their hand first to identify with Haman? Truth be told, we all know something about this. Human hearts just naturally default to pride.

Haman is the extreme. The magnifying-glass version of lessons we do well to learn.

- a. Pride's appetite. Listening to Haman prate on and on about himself, you'd think he could talk himself right back into a good mood. But he wasn't counting his blessings—he was keeping score. Selfish ambition poisoned everything Haman touched. What about us?

Romans 12:3

1 Timothy 6:6–7, 11

- b. Pride's fool. Haman thought the gallows was a great idea! By the next day, he would be asking himself why he ever listened. But they only told him what he wanted to hear. Have you ever followed (or given) bad advice because it went along with how you felt? What would you do differently now?

Where can we *always* go for good counsel?

Proverbs 8:14, 17

2 Timothy 3:16–17

3. Haman's *every-time-I-see-Mordecai* rant sent his ego into a tailspin. Why so consumed? It wasn't about protocol, it was about control. Does Haman's example warn and motivate you to action? In what way?

"God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves."

D.L. Moody

- a. Why is pride such a dangerous attitude to indulge or even tolerate in ourselves? Consider the warnings in Scripture and explain in your own words.

Proverbs 26:12

James 3:14–16

Revelation 3:17–19

- b. What is the perfect antidote for pride?

1 Corinthians 13:4–6

Philippians 2:3–4

James 4:6–8



Gospel at a Glance: The Golden Scepter | The king who could justly sentence Esther to death for coming unbidden into his presence, extended the golden scepter. When Esther came near and touched the tip, her safety in his presence was assured and her petition would be granted. All she had to do was ask. We see traces of the gospel, not in Esther's flawed king, but in her approach to the throne. "For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). God graciously extends salvation to all who come near through the cross of Jesus Christ. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24 NIV).

A Confession T Thankfulness S Supplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

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Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

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Group Prayer Requests

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chosen

Studies in Esther

Session 16 – Sleepless in Susa | Esther Chapter 6

God oversees every detail of life. He determines when a “chance” encounter becomes a turning point in the life of an individual or the course of a nation.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how circumstances turned to Mordecai’s honor and Haman’s disgrace.
- Consider God’s providential use of ordinary events to serve His purposes.
- Pray honest prayers that humbly trust in God’s presence and perfect timing.

Ice Breaker

Think of three significant life changes you’ve experienced. Which category would you put them under? ☐ Right on time. ☐ Just as I planned. ☐ Who would have thought?

An Unrewarded Deed and An Unwitting Servant

Esther 6:1–14

While Haman plots Mordecai’s death, he unwittingly plans the ceremony to honor him.

1. In this chapter, the narrator gives us a front-row seat to watch God’s plan come together. We see what neither Haman nor the king can see.
 - a. What was on the king’s mind that morning? How did Haman figure into his plans?
 - b. What was on Haman’s mind that morning? How did the king figure into his plans?
 - c. What was on God’s mind that morning? How did they both fit into His plan?

Good to Know

The book of the chronicles was the official record of Persian kings, with every official court transaction recorded. Extraordinary acts of service were noted and promptly rewarded to show generosity and promote loyalty. For some reason, several years slipped by without Mordecai being honored for saving the king’s life.

2. Just as before, Haman rushed home to tell his wife and friends about his day. This time, however, there was no bragging or boasting. Seeking comfort, what did he get?
 - a. While they were right in what they said, it makes us wonder how they meant it. What do you think? Were they advising him to abandon his plan (the one they suggested to begin with) or were *they* abandoning *him*?
 - b. At any rate, they confirm what the narrator has been leading us to all along. There is no such thing as chance or blind fate. Someone is behind all these random events and reversals. According to God's Word, why can you be certain that God has a purpose and will carry out His plan for you?

Deuteronomy 31:8

Psalms 139:3–6

Isaiah 55:8–11

3. Mordecai's actions right after the parade say a lot about what kind of man he was. Does his example inspire or instruct you? How so?

"Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil's reach as humility."

Jonathan Edwards

If you were in a similar position as Mordecai, with your enemy humiliated and the chance to get back at them, what harm would there be in gloating? Consider the verses below and share your thoughts.

Romans 12:17–19

Proverbs 24:29

Proverbs 27:2

1 Peter 5:5–9

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Pride ends in humiliation, while humility brings honor.
Proverbs 29:23 NLT

Think About It . . .

Do I pursue self over service? How graciously do I take correction? How often do I admit that I'm wrong and apologize? How easily do I forgive?

Inconspicuous Providence

Esther 1–6 Overview

1. **All things work together for good.** Seemingly trivial and unrelated circumstances all fit together in the plan of God. Keep in mind that Esther and Mordecai did not know just how things would work out. When you string seemingly insignificant details together, who is in control? Use this simple exercise to review what has happened in the story so far. Fill in the blanks from memory or scan the previous chapters for help.

2	1			5
3	7 6	1-----4	2	1
4	5	2	3	3 4

- 1) Ahasuerus gives an elaborate_____.
 - 2) Vashti refuses to_____.
 - 3) The king's advisors tell him to_____.
 - 4) Later, the king sponsors a kingdom-wide_____.
 - 5) A Jewish man named Mordecai is raising his_____.
 - 6) Esther is taken to the palace because she is_____.
 - 7) Hegai befriends Esther because_____.
-
- 1) Ahasuerus chooses Esther to be_____.
 - 2) Esther keeps her Jewish identity_____.
 - 3) Mordecai foils a plot to kill the king, but his deed is_____.
 - 4) Haman is promoted but Mordecai refuses to_____.
-
- 1) Isolated in the palace, Esther hears that Mordecai is_____.
 - 2) A trusted servant, Hathach, relays messages between_____and_____.
 - 3) Esther breaks protocol but the king extends_____and offers to give her_____.
 - 4) Haman has a gallows built and plans to kill_____.
 - 5) The king can't sleep and plans to honor_____.

2. We have seen God working quietly to bring circumstances and events together in this story. In hindsight, can you trace God's finger connecting the dots in your own life? In what way?

3. From our limited vantage point, life doesn't always make sense and it isn't always fair. Good deeds are overlooked; evil actions go unpunished. Do you tend to pray more—or less—about life situations that don't seem to make sense to you?

Consider the verses below and explain how or why we can trust God to know exactly what He is doing, even if we don't understand.

Proverbs 15:3

Jeremiah 29:11

Jeremiah 32:27

Isaiah 41:10

Romans 8:28

Philippians 2:13



Gospel at a Glance: The Robe of Righteousness | Haman was certain that the king intended to honor him, and he wanted nothing less than the very best the king had to offer. Wearing another's garment was a symbol of sharing in their character and power—and Haman thought to himself, who is more deserving of esteem than me? Self-confidence blinded him from seeing the king's intention and reminds us that God's favor has nothing to do with our deserving it (Titus 3:3-5). No one is good enough and never will be, apart from repenting of their sin and putting saving faith in Jesus (Romans 10:9-10, 13). But God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV). This is good news! God offers nothing less than His very best to every undeserving sinner who comes to Jesus.

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10a NKJV).

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

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Group Prayer Requests

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Studies in Esther

Session 17 – What Goes Around Comes Around | Esther Chapter 7

At the second banquet, Esther approaches the delicate task of confronting Haman and pleading for her life and for the lives of her people.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how Esther confronted her enemy in the presence of the king.
- Consider the realities of reaping what we sow.
- Pray for courage to act and confidence to overcome the enemy.

Ice Breaker

When you need to have a particularly difficult conversation, what helps you most to prepare for it?

Haman's Day of Reckoning

Esther 7:1–10

For nearly a week, Esther has waited for the right time to plead her case with the king.

1. After dinner, the king again asks Esther what she requests and promises that he will grant it. This time, Esther comes right to the point.
 - a. Safe to say, Xerxes was not expecting to hear his queen plead for her life. From what you read, would you say the king even recalled signing a death decree? Why or why not?
 - b. What can we reasonably assume was going through Haman's mind when Esther reveals her Jewish identity and makes her impassioned plea to the king?
 - c. Just like the *troublemaker and villain* who deceitfully plots evil in his heart (Proverbs 6:12) disaster suddenly overtakes Haman. How does it end for him?

Good to Know

A Persian gallows was a sharpened stake made from a tree and used to impale the victim. Much like being skewered, it was torturous and a humiliating way to die. The Romans modified it to crucifixion, which took less work for them and extended the time it took to die.

2. **The adversary and enemy!** What can we learn from the way Esther dealt with her enemy? She was resolved to obey the Lord, come what may. She was fortified by waiting on God, in fasting and prayer, to confront the enemy with courage under fire.

Haman seemed unbeatable until Esther confronted him *in the king's presence*. What weapon did she use? Truth! And so must we. The Bible warns us to stay alert—our adversary the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour.

“Stand firm against him and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are” (1 Peter 5:9 NLT).

How do we resist and stand firm against the enemy? Find your answer from the following verses and put it in your own words. Be practical and specific.

Psalms 118:5–6, 13

Psalms 119:11

Philippians 4:6–8

Ephesians 6:13–18

“Prayer does not produce weak resignation to the evils we deplore. It is strenuous battle against the powers of destruction. God invigorates us to moral battle.”

Eugene Peterson
Praying With the Psalms

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked.

A man reaps what he sows.

Galatians 6:7 NIV

Think About It . . .

As you ponder this verse, in what ways is it a warning? In what ways can it be comforting?

Sowing and Reaping

Esther 7:1–10

Haman thought he could do whatever he wanted with no consequences. But God does not allow the wicked to go unpunished.

1. Do the wicked prosper? Maybe in the short run, but God sees the finish line. When the enemy seems to have the upper hand, what can we be certain of? Consider the verses below and share your thoughts. (Look for instructions, promises, and warnings.)

Proverbs 4:19

Proverbs 5:21–23

Proverbs 16:5

Psalms 37:7–11

2. Waiting for justice can be painful while the Hamans in life get ahead, do harm, and pay no penalty. Like the martyrs who suffered cruelty and injustice (Revelation 6:10) we want to cry out *how long Lord?* But God keeps account and everyone—*everyone*—reaps what they sow.

Haman got exactly what he deserved and God's providential hand set things right. Can you identify an example of injustice (in culture or in your own life) that you are actively praying to see God's hand put right? Are you willing to be part of the answer? In what way?

3. Sowing and reaping isn't just a physical law, it's a spiritual absolute. Take a few minutes to consider how we reap what we sow in the following areas of life. Share your thoughts.

→ In our relationships.

→ In our attitudes and speech.

→ In our habits and pursuits.

→ In our giving and service.

**"Sow a thought,
reap an action;
sow an action,
reap a habit;
sow a habit,
reap a character;
sow a character,
reap a destiny."**

Ralph Waldo Emerson

4. There is another principle of sowing and reaping that we should be aware of. We reap what someone else has sown.
 - a. The prime example of this is our salvation. We reap all the benefits of forgiveness now and eternal life in Christ because of the seed that Jesus sowed. When Jesus said that if a grain of wheat dies, it will bear much fruit (John 12:24) He was speaking of Himself. You already know that Jesus died for us but go over the facts again (it'll do your heart good).

Romans 3:10, 23

Romans 6:23

Romans 5:8

Romans 10:9–10, 13

Romans 8:1–2

Romans 5:1–2

- b. We also reap what someone else has sown through the work and prayers of believers who have come and gone before us. The Bible is full of examples. So is history and the heritage of Christian men and women who influenced their world for God's glory and our good. Identify a few people that you directly credit with contributing in a significant way to your spiritual growth.

- c. **Sow what you reap.** Plants that are harvested also produce seeds for the next sowing. The farmer sows, tends, reaps, collects the seeds—and sows again. How do we sow what we reap? Put another way, Jesus commands every believer to *pay it forward*. How do we do that?

→¹ God furnishes the seed. What does He promise to provide and do? (Isaiah 55:10–11)

→¹ How do we sow what we reap? (Matthew 28:18–20)

→¹ What ultimately will be the harvest? (Revelation 7:9–10, Revelation 22:1–5)



Gospel at a Glance: Triumph over Evil | Haman's downfall brings a sense of poetic justice. How ironic that the evil he intended for Mordecai was the instrument of his own destruction. Consumed with malice, he ordered the gallows seventy-five feet high, so that everyone would see what happens to the enemies of Haman. But God turned Haman's wicked plan back on him. It gives us a glimpse of Calvary. Jesus said, "The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world will be cast out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself" (John 12:31-32 NLT).

At Calvary, the devil gloated to think of executing God's own Son. But what appeared to be a victory for Satan was the instrument of his defeat. And our salvation. "Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and He is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, interceding for us...not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love" (Romans 8:34, 38 NLT).

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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A _____

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Group Prayer Requests

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Studies in Esther

Session 18 – Reversing the Irreversible | Esther Chapter 8

Haman's removal was a reason to celebrate, but the edict was still in effect. Esther went to the king again, pleading for mercy to spare the lives of her people.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Esther and Mordecai did to intervene for their people.
- Consider what God has done to outwit and outmaneuver the enemy's evil plan.
- Pray for bold faith and divine appointments to share the Good News.

Ice Breaker

When the odds are seriously stacked against you, what is your response most likely to be?

☐ It's impossible; why try? ☐ Accept and make the best of it. ☐ There's always hope, go for it.

A Providential Reversal

Esther 8:1–8

Even though Haman has been exposed and put to death, his evil plot is still in force.

1. After Haman's execution, the king's anger subsided (Esther 7:10). It appears that Xerxes was outraged because Haman put the queen in harm's way, but he had no thought for the Jews. But God, though not mentioned, never stopped thinking of them.
 - a. Because he was executed as a traitor, all of Haman's estate was forfeited to the king. What did Xerxes do with it?
 - b. Now that the king knew Esther was Jewish, she was free to tell him who Mordecai was in relation to her. We saw how life dramatically changed for Esther in chapter two; now it's Mordecai's turn. Ironically, Haman's downfall leads to Mordecai's advance. How so?
 - c. Think of the ways that Mordecai's promotion would benefit Esther in particular, and the Jewish people in general. Note what comes to mind.

2. At this point (verses 1–2) the king could easily have put the whole episode behind him. But God’s people are still in danger. From verses 3–8, explain what is similar—and different—this time as Esther goes to plead with the king.

Her courage:

Her demeanor:

Her intercession:

His response:

3. Some things never change. Does a particular situation or circumstance cause you to feel that way? Take a few minutes to identify the obstacles and what seems impossible about it.

Esther’s intercession was fueled by compassion and focused on reversing the irreversible. What about us? As you plead to our King for that insurmountable situation, what can you know for certain?

Jeremiah 32:27

1 John 5:14–15

James 5:16b

Philippians 4:6–7

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.
Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.
Ephesians 6:10–11 ESV

Think About It . . .

God foresees every trick the devil may use on you. Is your spiritual armor in place? If not, why not? Which piece do you feel most in need of today?

Good News Travels Fast

Esther 8:9–17

Mordecai's carefully worded decree in the king's name goes into circulation right away.

1. Everything that wicked Haman acquired through greed and deceit was providentially given to Mordecai, illustrating that "a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous" (Proverbs 13:22 NIV). Mordecai leveraged his own *for-such-a-time-as-this* moment to help save his people.

- a. Describe what this counter-edict would accomplish for the Jews.

Good to Know

Haman's edict was issued with the king's authority and could not be rescinded.

- b. The wording of Mordecai's decree mirrors almost exactly the same wording Haman used (Esther 3:13) with one significant difference. What did Haman's decree command the people to do?

Mordecai's decree, also issued with the king's authority, gave Jews the right to defend against any who might attack them.

Essentially, this was a way to circumvent the first edict.

What did Mordecai's new decree allow the Jews to do in response?

2. Imagine the buzz of activity after Xerxes gave Mordecai permission to write a new law. The date set to kill the Jews was still about nine months away, (see Esther 3:13 and 8:9), but Mordecai expedited getting the new edict into circulation. What would motivate him to act with urgency? Note what comes to mind.
3. In contrast to the confusion that gripped the city of Susa after the first edict (Esther 3:13) what was the response in *every city and province* wherever the king's second decree was proclaimed?

- a. By now we're familiar with the twists and sudden reversals in the Book of Esther. In this chapter, we see the complete reversal of Mordecai's position. From sackcloth and ashes, condemned to die—but how things have changed!

Now Mordecai emerges from the king's presence wearing royal robes and a crown. And he bears good news of deliverance for his people! The enemy no longer had the power of death over them.

This is a good place to pause and think about our own experience. In what ways are we like Mordecai?

In what way are we like the couriers in verse 14?

- b. Someone took time to share the gospel with you—are you ready to tell someone else? Jesus said, "Preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere" (Mark 16:15 TLB), and your own story is a simple way to do that. Take a few minutes now to consider what you would say. Use the prompts for help and write a brief personal testimony in your own words.

✓ ***My life before Christ.*** Describe how you were before Christ in a sentence or two.

"If you have no joy in your religion, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere."

Billy Sunday
1862-1935
*Former baseball pro and
great American Evangelist
in the early 1900's*

✓ ***My life changed.*** Tell how you came to know Christ. You can include key elements of the gospel such as:

- I realized I was a sinner (Romans 3:23, 6:23).
- I recognized Jesus died for my sin (Romans 5:8).
- I repented of my sin (Acts 3:19).
- I received Jesus as my Savior (Romans 10:9–10, 13).

Try to keep this to three or four sentences.

✓ ***My new life in Christ.*** Briefly explain how your outlook and purpose in life has changed as a result of knowing Jesus as your Savior and Lord. (Again, three or four sentences.)



Gospel at a Glance: Reversing the Irreversible | Esther went to the king on behalf of her people asking him to reverse the edict of death. Not even the king himself could revoke the law, but he issued a new decree to save the Jews from death. Our own salvation is clearly illustrated in this.

In Esther, the irreversible decree of death and the counter-measure to ensure life were both issued by the king; sealed with his signet ring. God's law of holiness emphatically declares that, "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4 ESV). Ever since the fall of Adam, the law of sin and death has been in force (Romans 6:23), and God will not revoke that law. Instead, God put another law into effect through Jesus Christ, who bore the guilt and penalty for our sins on the cross. By His death and resurrection, Jesus reversed the irreversible. "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2 NIV). This is the good news that God sends us out into the world to share in every language, to every nation.

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Group Prayer Requests

Notes

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Studies in Esther

Session 19 – Never Forget | Esther Chapter 9–10

The book of Esther closes with the deliverance and victory of her people.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how the Jews were delivered in spite of overwhelming odds.
- Consider the realities of spiritual battle and victory.
- Pray honest prayers that remember and celebrate this chosen life in Christ.

Ice Breaker

Besides holidays or birthdays, is there a memorable event that you observe every year? Why is it special and how do you celebrate it?

Defense and Deliverance

Esther 9:1–19

Eleven months after Haman cast the lot, the day of destruction comes. But not for the Jews.

1. Haman's edict gave haters a license to kill every Jewish man, woman, and child and take their property. Mordecai's edict gave Jews the right to protect themselves and their families from the massacre their enemies had planned.
 - a. Even with the second edict, the Jews still faced overwhelming odds. When the day came, what made it possible for Mordecai and the people to overcome their enemies?
 - b. Why do you think the narrator emphasized three times that the Jews took no plunder? What did he want us to understand about their reasons for destroying their enemies?

Good to Know

Out of an estimated 100 million people in Xerxes' kingdom, Jews were a small minority (perhaps 15 million) scattered through 127 provinces. It is nothing short of miraculous that they were able to defend themselves and destroy their enemies in two days.

2. The Jews killed the ten sons of Haman the Agagite. Just like dad, they traced their ancestry to the Amalekites, sworn enemies of Israel all the way back to the exodus from Egypt. God cursed Amalek for brutally attacking Israel and said that He would have war with them until they were destroyed (see Exodus 17:14 and Deuteronomy 25: 17–19).

Bible experts aren't sure why each son is listed by name, but here's an interesting side note. Each name contains the root word *self* in the Persian language. Coupled with the implied meanings of their names (for example: serving; ambition; superior; pity) it's not hard to see a little of Haman in all his sons.* So what does that have to do with anything? Just another reminder that seeds of pride and sin can't be ignored.

- a. Months had passed since Haman's execution and his boys were just biding time until they could strike. To leave them be wasn't safe or wise. The day after they were executed, what did Esther ask the king to do, and why?

- b. There will always be "sons of Haman" in life. By that, we mean seeds of pride and sin that can take root and grow trouble. We tolerate or ignore them at our own peril. As an old Puritan preacher named John Owen said so well, "Be killing sin or sin will be killing you."

The Jews were engaged in holy war and God was on their side to protect and deliver them. We too are engaged in a holy war. Use the following verses to identify how and why we have victory over the enemy.

Romans 6:10–14

Romans 8:13

Colossians 3:5–10

Ephesians 6:10–17

* Definitions based on Herbert Lockyer, *All the Men of the Bible*, Zondervan Publishing

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go
and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the
Father in My name He may give to you.
John 15:16 NKJV

Think About It . . .

God's providence is easy to spot in hindsight. We see His hand in choosing Esther and Mordecai, putting them in the right place at the right time. How about you? Looking forward takes eyes of faith, but what can you be absolutely certain about God's plan for you?

The Feast of Purim

Esther 9:20–10:3

The story concludes with Mordecai's summary of events and why the Feast of Purim became an annual celebration.

1. When the book of Esther was written, Purim (pronounced purr-em) was still a relatively new tradition. The writer was helping the Jews understand why they celebrated Purim.

- a. **Remember why.** The feast of Purim was instituted so that God's people would not forget when and how they were delivered instead of destroyed. A death warrant was issued against them and yet they were still alive.

**"In God's hands,
intended evil becomes
eventual good."**

Max Lucado

Take some time to remember the day of your salvation. Consider what these verses say about how and why you've been delivered instead of destroyed.

Romans 8:1–2

Ephesians 2:4–5

Titus 3:4–6

- b. **Why remember?** The events of the Esther story show God's unlimited power to keep His promise, even many centuries later and far away from the place it was made. The message of Purim is that God is still in control. Consider the verses below and share your thoughts.

Romans 8:28

2 Peter 3:8–9

2 Corinthians 1:20

1 John 2:25

2. For you personally, what has been one memorable insight or takeaway from reading Esther?
 - a. Suppose someone asked you to explain what the story of Esther has to do with God and why it's relevant for today. What would you tell them?



Gospel at a Glance: Purim and the Story of Esther | Purim celebrates God's hidden providence in protecting His people from destruction and bringing everything to its rightful conclusion. In Esther's story, evil appears to be winning but God reverses everything. Evil is turned back on its head and ultimately shows that even what the enemy intended for evil has been used for good. **"Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us and He is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us" (Romans 8:34 NLT).**

A^Adoration C^Confession T^Thankfulness S^Supplication

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Group Prayer Requests

The Rebuilt Life | The Chosen Life
Studies in Nehemiah and Esther

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