

## LESSONS LEARNED

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### Nehemiah

Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to reconstruct the walls and in the process revitalized a spiritual community.

The book of Nehemiah has taught us a lot. I pray it has been beneficial as you pray for God's guidance not only in our remodeling project but in how you direct your life.

Greek historian, Thucydides, writing in the same century as Nehemiah, made the point that it is the people not the walls that make a city. In the same way it is the people not the building that make a church.

Nehemiah taught us about godly courage and direction through deep and intense prayer. He taught us about risking everything to do God's will. Through Nehemiah we learned about care and compassion for others.

We saw how the Israelites were united in God's purpose and task—they worked together on the walls. When threatened, discouraged, and just plain tired, Nehemiah refocused their eyes upon God, they persevered, and the walls and gates were rebuilt.

It was clear to their enemies, to surrounding nations, even to their own people, that the work of the walls was accomplished with the help of God. It could have only been done through His strength and leadership.

This is what God asks of us today—to lean on Him for direction and strength and to show His love and compassion for people—the only reason this church is here.

To do this we must constantly be spiritually renewed to be the people that God wants us to be. Nehemiah 8 gives us some wonderful lessons on how to do this:

# 1. United as one for God's purpose.

Nehemiah 8:1a (NIV) All the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate.

Work on the wall was finished during the 6th month. The first day of the seventh month was a public holiday known as the Feast of Trumpets.

Just a few days after the completion of the wall, hundreds of men, women and children gathered as one for a new year celebration.

It hadn't been easy. Don't make the mistake of thinking that everything had been smooth sailing. There had been dissension and squabbling.

Some turned against Nehemiah, and some tried to betray him. Outside forces threatened them. The builders were discouraged and frightened. Yet somehow, through it all, they had pulled together and rebuilt the walls.

They knew it happened in God's strength. They looked back over everything that happened—from the time Nehemiah arrived with the news that God wanted the walls rebuilt to the completion, and they saw God's hand in it all.

Now "all the people" gathered together as one to celebrate and praise and thank God.

The measure of our church in the eyes of God and of eternity will not be our size, not our great programs, not the preachers and deacons.

The measure of our church, in the eyes of God, will be whether or not we are united, as one, in His purpose to reach our community with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

# 2. Love God's Word.

Nehemiah 8:1b-3(NIV) 1bThey told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. 2So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. 3He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

Nehemiah 8:7-8(NIV) 7The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah— instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. 8They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

The most remarkable thing about v.1 is that it was the people who wanted the Scriptures read. Isn't that wonderful? They asked that the Bible be read to them.

United as one, men women, and children—all who could understand, listened attentively to the reading of God's Word.

Those Levites in v. 7 were trained to explain and make clear what the Bible said. Many of the Jews did not speak Hebrew, since they had just come out of Persian exile. They needed translators. Everyone needed help understanding.

Today our Sunday school teachers, our Bible study leaders with their small groups, help us understand God's Word.

We Baptists call ourselves "people of the book," the Bible. Through the centuries our confessions of faith have been based squarely and solely on the Bible.

How many here believe the Bible is the infallible, inspired Word of God? Most Baptists believe it is. That's wonderful!

But it's not a popularity contest. Because you and I say it is doesn't make it so; it is inspired because it is God's Word. The sad thing is that while most of us say the Bible is the inspired word of God, less than 10% of us read it every day.

This is why Sunday school is so important—not just for children, but for youth, and adults. My dream is that our church, as one, would fall absolutely in love with God's Word.

To read it at home, to study it at church, to hear it preached. What a wonderful difference would be made in our lives if only we really were people of the Book.

### 3. Love God.

Nehemiah 8:6(NIV) Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

All the people together loved God. By His Word they recognized the living God was among them. They had reverence and respect for Him. Their worship was genuine and spontaneous.

They lifted their hands in praise. They responded to the reading of God's Word. They bowed down with their faces to the ground and worshipped Him.

One of the great lessons we've learned from Nehemiah was that he saw the world through God's eyes. He started rebuilding the walls of the Holy City because he loved God.

Because of his love for God he stopped work on the wall until people got their hearts right and showed the compassion of God.

Then, because of his love for God, he persevered despite what must have appeared at times to be insurmountable difficulties.

If you want your Christianity to be real to you, fall in love with God. He is your Creator—your Redeemer—your Sustainer. All that you have—all that you are—comes from Him. Even your future is in His capable hands.

When you fall in love with Him, you'll see the world differently. You'll be kinder, more tolerant, more forgiving, and more generous—you'll learn to love people.

## 4. Beware of the intrusion of sin.

Nehemiah 8:9(NIV) Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

As God's Word was read, the people became aware of sin in their lives. They began to weep and cry. The Bible touched their consciences, making them aware of the ways they had disobeyed, dishonored or ignored God.

Everyone knows what sin is—even the government puts a "sin tax" on products like cigarettes and alcohol. Sin is missing the mark. Sin is not living the life God intended for us. God has instilled in each of us knowledge of right and wrong.

The Psalmist said, "Against Thee and only Thee have I sinned." Sin ultimately destroys the best God wants for your life. Sin destroys what's best in other people's lives.

God's Word revealed to the Hebrews where they had failed. When God's Word is read it can bring deep conviction of sin. In His revealed word to us He has expressed His will about how we should live our lives.

But repentance must not degenerate into a self-centered pity party, but must result in joy in God's forgiving goodness. In chapter 9 the Levites reminded the Israelites of their history:

Egypt, the wilderness, golden calf, their complaining and grumblings, their disobediences and rebellions, yet God loved and forgave them. In 9:17 the Levites said about God...

Nehemiah 9:17b (NIV) But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them.

And again in 9:31: Neh. 9:31 (NIV) But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

God's commandments are not designed to take joy out of living—but rather to give joy and fulfillment. Every command of God is for our benefit and well being. He wants the best for us.

## 5. Sincerely desire to please God.

Nehemiah 8:13(NIV) On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law.

It is now the next day. Priests, Levites, and heads of households gathered around Ezra because they wanted to gain insight into God's Word. Why? They wanted to please God. "What can we do to serve you Lord?" they asked.

The walls were finished—that was pleasing to God. Now it was time for the most important work—ministering in the Lord's name to a lost and dying world. My Christian family, even as I ask you to give to our building fund and as the renovation continues, let's not forget that we represent Christ.

We are here to restore broken homes, to reach out to dysfunctional families, to minister to the hurting and dependent, to care for divorced and single parents, to build the lives of children, and to share the love of Christ.

## Application:

The lessons of Nehemiah are very applicable to our time and place. Our community will sit up and take notice and respond when we give feet and hands to our prayers and our faith. Let us use this time to revive the joy of our salvation, the courage to stand on our Christian convictions, and to serve our world in the name of Jesus.