



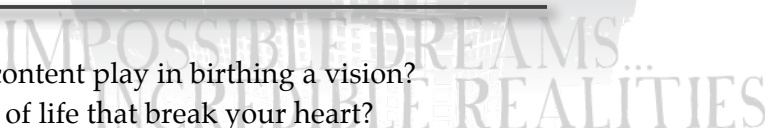
# NEHEMIAH

The Birth of a Vision

**Read this story to your group, then discuss it based on the questions below:**

Three weeks ago, a friend of mine stood before the leadership board of our church. His ministry team had just verified that 300 Muslims on a remote island had accepted Christ. We were ecstatic with joy yet stunned as the man began to weep. When we asked him why he was crying, he said, "Because there are two million more who are still lost." We were content with the three hundred. He was not. It is his holy discontent that impassions him to keep reaching just one more until the job is done.

What about us? Are we content with the way things are? Holy discontent will not allow us to sit idly by in a perishing world. Holy discontent brings with it God's very own passion and promise of completion.

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- ❖ What role does discontent play in birthing a vision?
  - ❖ What are the issues of life that break your heart?
  - ❖ How does your faith intersect with your discontentment?

## Study the Scriptures

Study and discuss the following passage with your group as you delve deeper into the issue of birthing a vision out of discontent:

### Nehemiah 1:1–11 NLT

<sup>1</sup> These are the memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacliah.

In late autumn of the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. <sup>2</sup> Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had survived the captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been burned."

<sup>4</sup> When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Then I said, "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands, <sup>6</sup> listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! <sup>7</sup> We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, laws, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.

<sup>8</sup> Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you sin, I will scatter you among the nations. <sup>9</sup> But if you return to me and obey my commands, even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honored.'

<sup>10</sup> “We are your servants, the people you rescued by your great power and might. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please grant me success now as I go to ask the king for a great favor. Put it into his heart to be kind to me.” In those days I was the king’s cup-bearer.

## Questions for Discussion

- ❖ What might we infer were the assumptions Nehemiah had about Jerusalem before talking to Hanani?
- ❖ Why was he concerned with how things were going in Jerusalem?

In order to better understand Nehemiah’s reaction to Hanani’s news we need to unpack some of the background of the Jewish people.

## Background

One thousand years after the time of Moses the nation of Israel and the Jewish people were in a desperate state. Their nation had been dispersed. The city of Jerusalem had been completely conquered by the Babylonians, and the once-glorious temple of Solomon had been destroyed.

When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, they deported almost everyone from the city and the region. When the Jews were deported to Babylon, they began to make homes for themselves there - they settled down, and many still followed the God of their Fathers, but they did it from Babylon, with no desire to return to the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, they were given the opportunity to return to their homeland. Out of the some two or three million Jews deported from the land, only 50,000 decided to return. That's only something like 2%! But they did return, and in the days of Ezra, they rebuilt the temple and laid a spiritual foundation for Israel once again. But fifteen years after the book of Ezra ended; almost 100 years after the first captives came back; some 150 years after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, the walls of the city of Jerusalem were still in rubble. It wasn't that people before hadn't tried to rebuild the walls. In Ezra 4:6-23, we see that some 75 years before, they had tried to rebuild the walls, but were stopped by their enemies. No one thought this obstacle could be overcome, so the walls lay in ruin.

- ❖ How does the background shed light on Nehemiah’s reaction?
- ❖ Why did so few Jews return to Jerusalem?
- ❖ What was different about Nehemiah’s heart toward Jerusalem?
- ❖ Reread verses 5–11. What can we learn from his prayer?

*Leaders Note: Nehemiah acknowledges who God is, humbly confesses personal and corporate sins, confidently claims God’s promises and boldly asks for his blessing.*

## Additional Thoughts

*David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible – Nehemiah prays with a heart ready to do something. Nehemiah concludes by asking God’s blessing when he speaks to the king of Persia about this matter. Nehemiah was going to do something about the sorry state of Jerusalem’s walls and people, and he knows without God’s intervention, he can do nothing. This is a prayer of a man of action, not a sideline critic. Nehemiah does not pray “God, make it all better” or “God, get someone moving on this problem”; instead, his prayer is “God, use me to make it better.”*

## Life Application

Nehemiah's concern for Jerusalem was not recent. We can assume that the city had been on his heart and mind for years. His holy discontent however, was revealed when his assumptions collided with the reality of the situation. And it was this holy discontent that gave birth to his vision for the future.

Finding your holy discontent doesn't require rocket science. All it takes is your candid input to a handful of probing statements. Grab your laptop, pad of paper or your journal and complete the twenty-one sentence starters offered in the following guided personal reflection exercise, paying close attention to the thoughts and emotions elicited as you go.

Nehemiah couldn't stand the condition of Jerusalem.

Mother Teresa couldn't stand extreme poverty.

For Martin Luther King Jr., it was racism.

Now it's your turn ... what is it for you?

- ❖ Other people have told me—and I see it in myself—that I seem to be passionate about...
- ❖ When I consider the world around me, I can't stand to see...
- ❖ If I had to pinpoint two or three things I've experienced that probably cause me to feel this way, they include...
- ❖ In my heart of hearts, I think it's unacceptable when...
- ❖ I have no category for...
- ❖ I don't think God intends for certain things to be true, such as...
- ❖ I don't want to live in a world where...
- ❖ I refuse to stand by and watch the unfolding of...
- ❖ When I consider situations that have catalyzed "self-discovery" in my life, they include...
- ❖ What I learned about myself on the heels of those experiences is that I...
- ❖ In the course of everyday life, I tend to gravitate toward people who...
- ❖ I tend to gravitate toward roles that leverage my...
- ❖ I feel most satisfied and fulfilled when I'm focused on...
- ❖ The most heart-wrenching experiences I've endured include...
- ❖ The reason they wrecked me is that...
- ❖ If I had to name one passion pursuit that makes my heart beat fast, I'd say it is...
- ❖ There are certain experiences that always seem to increase my energy and zest for living. They include...
- ❖ Certain people have the same effect. They include ones who...
- ❖ I think part of the reason God put me on the earth is to...
- ❖ If I could make a difference in one aspect of the world and knew that I would not fail, it would be...
- ❖ It might seem silly or insignificant, but one world-changing dream I've always seemed to carry is to...
- ❖ Is it possible to look like a Christian – or even claim you are a Christian—and yet not be truly saved? How? Explain.

**Going Deeper:** If your group is in need of an extra challenge, consider this additional passage and question:

Read Ezra 4:1–23

- ❖ What are the differences between the building effort described in Ezra and the rebuilding vision of Nehemiah?