



NEHEMIAH

Assessing the City

Read this passage to your group, and then discuss it based on the questions below:

“Changing the world around you doesn't necessarily have to start in changing the world abroad. If God has given you a passion for sharing His love with people, there is no formula that insists you make a missions trip to a distant seaboard. Perhaps we've become too hypercritical of ourselves to reach out to our own community. Too many times we compare ourselves with those who are receiving national or international acclaim or recognition for their achievements. The celebrity-style spotlight often leaves us feeling inadequate or inefficient in our own efforts to serve God. Instead, we should funnel the inspiration that comes from that attention into our own hearts and what God is doing through us to change the world around us.” Sam Gualtieri, *Re-Thinking Our World View*

- ❖ How has church culture created this idea that international missionaries are some how better than other Christians?
- ❖ Do you agree with the 3rd sentence? Explain.
- ❖ Why would God want to use you to “change the world around us”?
- ❖ How would viewing yourself as a Domestic Missionary affect your life?

Birth of a Vision Follow Up

- ❖ What has God revealed to you about your holy discontent?
- ❖ What are the needs that God is drawing your group towards?

Recap vs. 2:1–10

While serving the king as cup bearer, Nehemiah faithfully and courageously asks for time away to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah shrewdly requests “royal protection” as he travels through the western provinces toward Jerusalem.

He also requests that the king allow him access to the royal forest for rebuilding materials.

God’s Spirit is evidenced in that Nehemiah receives all that he requested and is brought safely in to Jerusalem.

Nehemiah draws the ire of Sanballat and Tobiah—two nearby leaders—who are angry about his plans to help Israel. (These guys play key roles later on in the account.)

Study the Scriptures

Study and discuss the following passage with your group:

Nehemiah 2:11–16 NLT

¹¹ Three days after my arrival at Jerusalem, ¹² I slipped out during the night, taking only a few others with me. I had not told anyone about the plans God had put in my heart for Jerusalem. We took no pack animals with us, except the donkey that I myself was riding. ¹³ I went out through the Valley Gate, past the Jackal's Well, and over to the Dung Gate to inspect the broken walls and burned gates. ¹⁴ Then I went to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but my donkey couldn't get through the rubble. ¹⁵ So I went up the Kidron Valley instead, inspecting the wall before I turned back and entered again at the Valley Gate.

¹⁶ The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the religious and political leaders, the officials, or anyone else in the administration.

So often we get the cart before the horse. We tend to sit within our own comfort looking at problems from the outside, and then determine what answers would make the greatest difference. Nehemiah demonstrates his wisdom by first investigating the needs before creating a plan to solve it. He takes the time to assess reality before barreling head long into a strategy of rebuilding.

It is neither heroic nor smart to take bold, uniformed action to further a vision — regardless of the source. And, on the flip side, it is not evidence of lack of faith to ask the hard questions wisdom dictates you ask. Andy Stanley, Visioneering

- ❖ Why was it important not to tell anyone what he was doing?
- ❖ What did Nehemiah gain from his nighttime inspection?
- ❖ How can you wisely investigate your holy discontent?

Please play the video clip from the website, and then respond to the questions.

- ❖ What were some of the images or lyrics that jumped out at you?
- ❖ Where is it hardest to see the Kingdom of God in our city?
- ❖ Where is God at work in Arvada?

Context to the Story

Nehemiah was heartbroken for Jerusalem because of his close relationship with God. What broke God's heart, broke his. Greater than the physical ruin of Jerusalem, was the spiritual apathy that had taken hold in the people's lives. Not long before, Ezra and those that came with him had rebuilt the Temple. Yet by the time Nehemiah arrives the people had hardened their hearts to the practices of temple worship. The sacrifices and ordinances were often abandoned. Or worse, were observed by just "going through the motions." This, as much as the disrepair of the city, broke God's heart.

Study the Scriptures

Study and discuss the following passage with your group:

Isaiah 58:1–12 NLT

¹ “Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Tell my people Israel of their sins!

² Yet they act so pious! They come to the Temple every day and seem delighted to hear my laws. You would almost think this was a righteous nation that would never abandon its God. They love to make a show of coming to me and asking me to take action on their behalf. ³ ‘We have fasted before you!’ they say. ‘Why aren’t you impressed? We have done much penance, and you don’t even notice it!’ “I will tell you why! It’s because you are living for yourselves even while you are fasting. You keep right on oppressing your workers. ⁴ What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me. ⁵ You humble yourselves by going through the motions of penance, bowing your heads like a blade of grass in the wind. You dress in sackcloth and cover yourselves with ashes. Is this what you call fasting? Do you really think this will please the LORD?

⁶ “No, the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned and to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn. ⁷ I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help.

⁸ “If you do these things, your salvation will come like the dawn. Yes, your healing will come quickly. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind. ⁹ Then when you call, the LORD will answer. ‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply. “Stop oppressing the helpless and stop making false accusations and spreading vicious rumors! ¹⁰ Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as day. ¹¹ The LORD will guide you continually, watering your life when you are dry and keeping you healthy, too. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. ¹² Your children will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as the people who rebuild their walls.

Questions for discussion

- ❖ What is God’s emotional state as He speaks to Israel?
- ❖ How would you summarize and restate the sentiment of this passage?
- ❖ What stands out from verses 6 and 7?
- ❖ If we give our hearts and lives to caring for others, what does God promise in return?
- ❖ What is one action point for you and your group that has come out of this study?

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

Read James 2:14–26

- ❖ What is the balance between faith and action?