



# *Glorifying God* **TOGETHER**

## **DISCUSSION GUIDE**



# *Glorifying God*

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

6 Sessions  
in the Book of Nehemiah

This is an abbreviated version of  
**Rebuild: A Study by Kathleen Neilson and D.A. Carson**  
in partnership with The Gospel Coalition

Questions and notes are original for FMC  
unless otherwise quoted



# INSTRUCTIONS FOR *Group Leaders*

This material is divided up into 6 (50 minute) sessions. Feel free to shorten or adjust this study as appropriate to your group.

There is a VIDEO OPTION for this series. Each video is a teaching lesson lasting between 12 and 15 minutes. These videos can be found at [www.firstmennonitemorton.org/small-groups/](http://www.firstmennonitemorton.org/small-groups/) or on the FMC APP.

If you chose the VIDEO OPTION, you will be directed to omit some of the questions and Scripture reading for the sake of time.

## GROUP *Reminders*

- 1) Pray and invite people into your group.
- 2) Provide food/drink to make everyone comfortable.
- 3) Look over the questions ahead of time to be prepared.
- 4) It's ok to say, *"I don't know. But I'll look that up later."*
- 5) Have a few extra Bibles around in case anyone is without.
- 6) Don't be afraid of silence.
- 7) It's ok to ask 'talkers' to give others a chance to share.
- 8) Pray together. This may be one of the most important elements!



# The Book of Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah is the final story of God's gathered people before the 400 years of prophetic darkness. Although Malachi is the last book in the Bible, he and other prophets, were speaking during the time of Nehemiah's leadership. If you were only to follow the *narrative story* of the Old Testament, Nehemiah would be final chapter with a sad, unsatisfying ending.

## The Backstory

After King David and his son Solomon had established a powerful monarchy for God's people, the Israelite nation soured. Due to disobedience, they split into northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms. During this time of "the kings," they were often ruled by very ungodly men who embraced demonic idolatry and perpetuated social injustice. The Lord removed His protective power from Israel and the north was captured and resettled – first by the Assyrians and then the Babylonians. Eventually, the southern nation of Judah was also overthrown. God's people were exiled to Babylon and the temple in Jerusalem was burned to the ground. (The prophets Daniel and Jeremiah recount some of these painful, historic moments.)

Around 538BC, the Persian King Cyrus was prompted by the Lord to let God's people return to rebuild Jerusalem (see Isaiah 45:1-6 and Ezra 1:1-4). Three waves of exiles returned over the course of several years. The first wave was led by Zerubbabel (recounted in Ezra 1-6). The second wave was 70 years later and led by Ezra (see Ezra 7-10). The third wave came shortly thereafter and was led by Nehemiah.

## *The Leader*

Nehemiah was an administrative governor who was appointed by God to oversee the rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem. But He wasn't just concerned about rebuilding a city, he also sought to rebuild a community. He desired to lead the disoriented remnant of Israelites to appreciate the beauty of God's word and apply it to their new lives in Judea. His account powerfully displays the faithfulness of God and the diligence required to cultivate a God-centered community amid various trials.

Welcome to the book of Nehemiah.

# Action

## WEEK 1 | NEHEMIAH 1-2

### OPENING:

Every community has past which serves as a foundation to their present reality. Israel's past is recounted in Nehemiah 9.

Think of your family history (short-term or long-term). What are some traditions, people or events which have shaped the 'culture' of your family?



### READ:

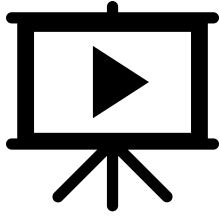
**Nehemiah 9:6-31** and pay attention to the variety of ways that God's people actions are described.

### DISCUSS:

- 1) What do you observe about the history of God's people?
- 2) Re-read verse 26. What was their attitude towards God?
- 3) How do you think those events would have impacted family life and social priorities?
- 4) How does your own story relate to Israel's experience?

### SAY:

Nehemiah was a prominent and trusted assistant to the Persian king when he learned about the physical and spiritual condition of God's people living in Jerusalem. Instead of ignoring their poverty or dismissing their spiritual condition, he passionately interceded in prayer on behalf of his kindred.



**OPTIONAL VIDEO:** Watch “Action” (14:41)

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What stands out to you from the video?
- 2) Skip down to the reading from Nehemiah 2:11-20.



**READ:** Consider Nehemiah’s prayer in **Nehemiah 1:4-11**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What is included in his prayer?
- 2) What do you think was happening in Nehemiah’s mind and soul?
- 3) What events have caused you to pray most fervently?
- 4) Why do you think it’s important to pray before responding to a situation with evokes strong emotions?

**SAY:**

After weeks of prayer, Nehemiah was prompted by God to ask the Persian king to be released back to Jerusalem to oversee a rebuilding project. Surprisingly, his request was granted. Nehemiah considered this to be the “*good hand of God*” (2:8).



**READ:**

Nehemiah’s assessment of Jerusalem in **Nehemiah 2:11-20**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What do you notice about his actions and his words?
- 2) How did he respond when he was jeered?
- 3) What does his response tell you about his faith?
- 4) Nehemiah seems to demonstrate both humility and courage. What do you think are some Biblical ‘secrets’ to living this way?

## **SAY:**

We don't have the same calling as Nehemiah had. However, each of us have a role to play within our community (whether it be in our families, church, workplace or neighborhood).

## **DISCUSS:**

- 1) Which circumstances weigh heavy upon your heart? (Share only if you want.)
- 2) What has the Lord shown you through Nehemiah's example?
- 3) How do you keep God's sovereign power and goodness in mind when facing difficult situations?

## **CLOSING:**

Read **Ephesians 6:10-18**.

- 1) What do you believe the Lord is asking of you this week through these verses or our discussion?



*Pray* WITH ONE ANOTHER

Date & location for next meeting: \_\_\_\_\_



# Laboring

## WEEK 2 | NEHEMIAH 3-4

### OPENING:

What are some various group projects that have you been part of throughout your life (in work, family, neighborhood, etc.)? What did you learn about that experience?



### READ:

Learn about the condition of the city in **Nehemiah 2:17-18, 7:4.**

### DISCUSS:

- 1) What project was Nehemiah hoping to accomplish?
- 2) Take a few moments to skim over Nehemiah chapter 3 and circle or highlight all of the ‘gates’ mentioned. What do those gates tell you about this city?

### SAY:

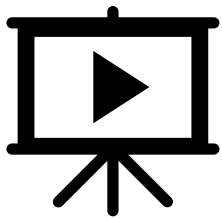
*“Nehemiah’s plan apparently divided the several miles of wall into 41 sections, listed counterclockwise in chapter 3, beginning and ending with the Sheep Gate (see 3:1,32). The exact location of all the towers and gates is not known, but many have suggested diagrams and sketches of what the rebuilt wall looked like. Various excavations have uncovered portions of Nehemiah’s wall, and it has long been accepted that the eastern side of the rebuilt wall was moved closer in and higher on the ridge overlooking the Kidron Valley than the original wall.” – Kathleen Nielson, D.A. Carson*



**READ:** Silently read **Nehemiah 3:1-12**. Don't worry about the hard Hebrew names. Pay attention to the other details.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What details do you notice about these people?
- 2) Which people mentioned do you think could have been 'exempt' from such tedious and difficult work?
- 3) When have you seen someone serve in an unexpected way?
- 4) What did this tell you about their hearts and/or priorities?



**OPTIONAL VIDEO: "Laboring" (12:43)**

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What stands out to you from the video?
- 2) If you desire, you may skip down to the reading from 1 Corinthians 12.



**READ:**

Read about the opposition in **Nehemiah 2:19, 13:4-5, 13:28**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What does the Bible say about those who opposed the rebuilding?
- 2) In what ways were they connected to positions of power in the city?



**READ:**

Read about their strategy in **Nehemiah 2:19-20, 4:1-4, 4:7-8**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What strategies did they use to hinder the work?
- 2) What do their strategies say about their hearts?
- 3) In what circumstances are you tempted to employ the same tactics?



### **READ:**

Christians are called to collectively lay down our swords and bows when enemies strike. Read about the different gear we use when ‘community building’ gets difficult in **Ephesians 6:10-20, Romans 12:9-21.**

### **DISCUSS:**

- 1) How does this passage remind you of Jesus’ life and work?
- 2) Which areas of your community (family, faith, work, local, etc.) needs the most attention this week?

### **SAY:**

Although the work is different, each of us are called to be ‘builders’ of the church and help to expand the Kingdom of God.



**READ:** Consider the teamwork mentioned in **1 Cor. 12:12-31.**

### **DISCUSS:**

- 1) What are some common themes between this passage and the work being done in Nehemiah 3-4?
- 2) What are some of the joys and challenges of working with others?
- 3) How does this challenge us out of an ‘independent’ mindset and into an ‘inter-dependent’ mindset?
- 4) Why do you think God expects us to work with others?
- 5) What do you believe the Lord is asking of you?

*Pray* **WITH ONE ANOTHER**

Date & location for next meeting: \_\_\_\_\_



# Fearing God

## WEEK 3 | NEHEMIAH 5-6

### OPENING:

- 1) Think of a time when you felt cared for by someone outside of your family. What happened?
- 2) Think of a time when you felt truly neglected? What happened?
- 3) Which would you prefer: having full cupboards but not receiving any love from anyone OR barely scraping by but having an abundance of emotional and spiritual support from others?
- 4) Why do you think loving support and care is so important?

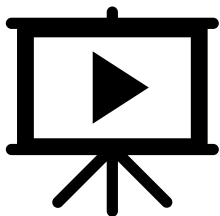


### READ:

Learn about the injustices happening within the city in **Nehemiah 5:1-8**.

### DISCUSS:

- 1) What conflicts arose among God's people?
- 2) How does this demonstrate a cycle of poverty?
- 3) How do you think you would have responded?



### OPTIONAL VIDEO: "Fearing" (12:50)

### DISCUSS:

- 1) What stands out to you from the video?
- 2) If you desire, you may skip down to 'Background 2.'

## READ BACKGROUND 1:

*“Deuteronomy 15:12 allows for a Hebrew man or woman to be sold into service to repay debts—although there is provision made for freeing all such persons every seventh year, and they are to be sent away furnished generously with provision. “As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him” (Deut. 15:14). Leviticus 25:35-43 also allows for such service but commands above all brotherly love and care for those of God’s people in need. Here lies the people’s offense, which Nehemiah had not initially recognized, and to which he responds with dramatic action.” - Kathleen Nielson, D.A. Carson*



### READ:

God had given commands about how to care about one another, especially during a crisis in **Lev. 25:35-40 and Deut. 15:12-15.**

### DISCUSS:

- 1) Compare those passages with Nehemiah’s response in Nehemiah 5:8-9. What do you think Nehemiah was trying to emphasize?



### READ:

Now look at both Nehemiah’s response AND the people’s response in **Nehemiah 5:6-15.**

### DISCUSS:

- 1) What are the various steps that Nehemiah asks the people to take?
- 2) What do you think motivated him?

## READ BACKGROUND 2:

Nehemiah’s enemies rose up again in chapter 6 to accuse and harm him. They believed that Nehemiah was going to pronounce himself as king and lead the Jews into revolt. They even went as far as to try to trap and kill Nehemiah in the middle of the night.



**READ:** Learn about this strategy of opposition in **Nehemiah 6:10-14**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What did fear motivate Nehemiah's enemies to do?
- 2) Think back to chapter 5, what did fear motivate the impoverished Israelites to do?



**READ:**

Jesus addresses the topic of fear in **Matthew 10:26-33**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) How does an active *reverence and awe for God* put all other 'fears' in perspective?
- 2) How do you see that at work in Nehemiah's life?
- 3) How did Jesus show reverence for God over the 'threats' of others?



**READ:**

Consider the confidence and connections of **Hebrews 10:19-25**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What does this passage tell us about the life of the Christian?

**APPLICATION:**

- 1) In what settings are you most tempted to 'fear others' or 'circumstances' over a joyful reverence for our powerful God?
- 2) What has the Lord shown you through this study today?

*Pray* WITH ONE ANOTHER

Date & location for next meeting: \_\_\_\_\_



# Coming Together

## WEEK 4 | NEHEMIAH 7-8

### OPENING:

- 1) When you were in high school or college, what various activities or elements helped to cultivate relationships and a sense of community?
- 2) What are some activities or elements that you use now to cultivate community among friends or family?
- 3) Why do you think it's helpful for people to gather around a central event or activity (commonly referred to as relational 'glue')?

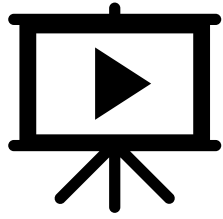


**READ: Nehemiah 4:1-6, Nehemiah 7:1-4**

### DISCUSS:

- 1) What was the central 'glue' which helped to cultivate community in Jerusalem in Chapter 4?
- 2) How have you experienced the 'bonding power' of a project?
- 3) What qualities was Nehemiah looking for in the next governor?
- 4) What concerns did he have for the city?

**READ BACKGROUND 1:** Ezra the Scribe had taken a census of the people who had first returned from Babylonian exile. The total was 42,360 (Ezra 2:64). This same list which Nehemiah recalls. Sadly, it was a very small number (around 2%) in comparison to all the Jews who were previously exiled. As we look at Nehemiah 7, we may be tempted to just skim these hard to pronounce names, but it is important to observe that individual people mattered just as much, if not more than, to God than the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.



### **OPTIONAL VIDEO: “Coming Together” (13:15)**

#### **DISCUSS:**

- 1) What stands out to you from the video?
- 2) If you desire, you may skip down to Neh. 8:1-13.



**READ:** Go back in history to **Ezra 7:1-10**.

#### **DISCUSS:**

- 1) What does this tell you about Ezra the Scribe?
- 2) What were some of his desires or priorities?
- 3) How are those desires helpful for Godly leaders to possess?



**READ:** Imagine being part of the gathering in **Neh. 8:1-13**.

#### **DISCUSS:**

- 1) What do you observe about this large assembly of people?
- 2) What was central to their gathering?
- 3) What other elements were part of their gathering?
- 4) How did the people respond?

**READ BACKGROUND 2:** *“There are actually two days of Bible study and worship in chapter 8. As you observe them both, notice carefully all the details you can. Notice who attends these gatherings: on the first day “men and women and all who could understand,” and on the second day the heads of families, who need even more study in order to lead their families according to God’s Word—as they proceed to do in the ensuing Feast of Booths.*

*Notice how long these gatherings last, and the order of events—especially the steps in the teaching process on the first day. First the book is read. Then (perhaps during various pauses in the reading) the Levites apparently move among the people helping them to understand (see 8:7-8). This help probably involved translation of the Hebrew, as most of the people at that time would have spoken Aramaic. But it also involved explanations: “giving the sense” in verse 8 suggests the work of exposition, section by section of the text. What a beautiful picture of God’s people gathered to study God’s Word, under teachers who are prepared to help them understand.” - Kathleen Nielson, D.A. Carson*



**READ:** Consider the public celebrations among God’s people as recorded in **Nehemiah 8:17-18**.

### **DISCUSS:**

- 1) How does this scene remind you of the church?
- 2) What is similar or different?
- 3) How does feasting on God’s Word and feasting on good food help to bond God’s people together.
- 4) What can you do to keep these elements central in your gatherings?
- 5) What else has the Lord shown you through this study?

*Pray* **WITH ONE ANOTHER**

Date & location for next meeting: \_\_\_\_\_



# Responding

## WEEK 5 | NEHEMIAH 9-10

### OPENING:

- 1) Share a story from your childhood of a time when you got caught doing something you weren't supposed to.
- 2) What are some common responses when *adults* get caught doing something wrong?
- 3) Why do you think humans usually respond in that way? What does that tell you about the human heart?



### READ:

Imagine what it would have been like to experience the scene described in **Nehemiah 9:1-5**.

### DISCUSS:

- 1) How long was the worship service in verse 3?
- 2) What was the posture of the people during this time?
- 3) Why do you think they were behaving that way?

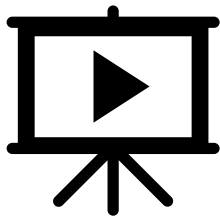


### READ:

Consider what God says about the Bible in **Hebrews 4:12-13**.

### DISCUSS:

- 1) What does this say about God's Word?
- 2) Share about a moment in your life when God's Word pierced you, either in a convicting way or a healing way.



### **OPTIONAL VIDEO: “Responding” (14:59)**

#### **DISCUSS:**

- 1) What stands out to you from the video?
- 2) If you desire, you may skip down to Background.



**READ:** Consider a brief portion of Israel’s history as recorded in **Nehemiah 9:22-26**.

#### **DISCUSS:**

- 1) How do these verses describe God’s faithfulness to Israel?
- 2) How did God’s people respond once all of their physical needs were met?
- 3) What was their attitude towards God’s message and/or messengers?
- 4) Do you think there was a connection between material abundance and spiritual idolatry? If so, why?



#### **READ:**

In Nehemiah’s prayer (**Nehemiah 9:32-33**), he took time to praise God.

#### **DISCUSS:**

- 1) How is God described in those verses?
- 2) Why do you think those attributes of God are helpful to keep in mind, especially when we realize the severity of our sin?

#### **READ BACKGROUND:**

*“We read in Nehemiah 9:2 that “the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners.” This was done out of a desire to obey the law they had been reading. Ezra had previously and passionately addressed this issue specifically in relation to intermarriage with unbelievers (see Ezra 9).*

*It is important to understand this separation not as a matter of racism or cultural arrogance. It was a matter of preserving God's covenant people as a "holy seed" (Ezra 9:2) set apart for God, from whom God's Promised One would come. Foreigners who put their faith in Israel's God were welcomed."*

*Then... "Chapter 10 lays out the promises made by the people to God, to walk in renewed holiness and obedience to the Law. You will see that the great majority of them relate to maintaining the temple system, with its priests and Levites and offerings and sacrifices. This is not because Nehemiah was a stickler for ceremonial law. It is because he recognized that the center of Old Testament law is the temple system, the God-ordained means by which sinners were brought back into right standing with God." - Kathleen Nielson, D.A. Carson*



**READ:** Consider **1 John 1:5 – 2:5** together.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) How does this passage enlarge your understanding of confession?
- 2) What role does Jesus play in leading us out of our sin?



**READ:** Confession led to a response in **Nehemiah 10:30-33**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What are some of the commitments that God's people made?
- 2) Why is it important not just to admit that wrong has been committed, but to make a change in how you live?
- 3) How are some of Israel's commitments still relevant for us?

*Pray* **WITH ONE ANOTHER**

Date & location for next meeting: \_\_\_\_\_



# Celebrating

## WEEK 6 | NEHEMIAH 11-12

### OPENING:

- 1) What events do you consider to be truly joyful?
- 2) What do people typically do when they are full of joy?
- 3) What role does music often play in either feeling or expressing joy?



**READ:** Consider some songs of joy found in **Psalm 95:1-6** and **Psalm 96:1-6**.

### DISCUSS:

- 1) What habits of worship are mentioned?
- 2) How is joy described and/or expressed in these verses?
- 3) What do these verses tell us about corporate worship?

### READ BACKGROUND 1:

*“In rebuilding the wall and the people, Nehemiah aims ultimately to bring the people back inside and to bring life and worship back to this holy city. Back in Nehemiah 7:4, right after the wall was finished and as he was appointing guards and gatekeepers, Nehemiah showed his concern: “The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt.” So chapter 11 brings the repopulation program, for the job is not done. Nehemiah aims to restore the city of David and the center of God-ordained sacrifice, thus truly ending the exile by bring God’s people back to the place of communion with Him.”*

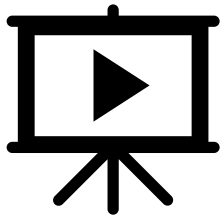
- Kathleen Nielson, D.A. Carson

**READ:**

Consider the social dynamics in **Nehemiah 11:1-2**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What does the ‘casting of lots’ tell you about repopulation?
- 2) Why do you think people were reluctant to move into the city?
- 3) How does moving/resetting test a person’s faith?

**OPTIONAL VIDEO: “Celebrating!” (13:13)****DISCUSS:**

- 1) What stands out to you from the video?
- 2) If you desire, you may skip down to Background 2.

**READ:**

Consider the priests actions in **Nehemiah 12:30**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) Why did the priests go through rites of purification before the dedication ceremony?
- 2) How has Jesus fulfilled our need for such rituals?
- 3) Is there value in ‘cleansing our heart’ before gathering for praise and worship with other Christians? Why or why not?



**READ:** Learn about the joyful responses of God’s people in **Nehemiah 12:27-29, 31, 38, 43**.

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) What did this gathering look and sound like?
- 2) What was the ‘heart-posture’ of the people? How do you know?
- 3) How is this reflective of worship services now?

**READ BACKGROUND 2:** *“Nehemiah 12 concludes with institutionalization, that is, with setting up structures necessary for the continuity of such worship as we have seen. We’ve noted in earlier chapters the intentional and even orchestrated leadership at the helm of these gatherings... We notice here not only carefully structured provision for worship, according to the Law. We also notice joy (see 12:44). The benefit of all the great gatherings that have taken place must not be left behind; that benefit must instead be consolidated and carried on, in the more measured but still joyful rhythm of ongoing daily life and worship.”* - Kathleen Nielson, D.A. Carson



**READ:** Learn about the systems which were established in **Nehemiah 12:44-47.**

**DISCUSS:**

- 1) Why do you think these systems were necessary?
- 2) Do you think there is value in organization and structure behind worship gatherings now? Why or why not?
- 3) If each person is to bring a ‘spirit of joy’ into a place designed for worship, how do you prepare your heart each Sunday morning?
- 4) Why do you think God deserves vocal praise?

**FINAL DISCUSSION:**

- 1) What has God shown you over these various studies in Nehemiah?
- 2) What specific ways are you seeking to put those into practice?
- 3) Is there anyone in your life who could benefit from this study? If so, consider doing this study with them!

*Pray* **WITH ONE ANOTHER**