

SERVING GOD WITH DETERMINED FAITH - I

Mourn Over Spiritual Needs

"When I heard this,
I sat down and wept.
I mourned for days,
fasting and praying
before the God-of-
Heaven."
- Nehemiah 1:4

Bible Truth:

*A burden is foundational for
ministry in the Kingdom.*

Life Impact:

*You will do what is right,
regardless the personal cost,
only when your heart is
broken over what breaks
the heart of God.*

The Book of Nehemiah begins with an enormous challenge that Nehemiah could have received with despair but instead received with prayer. The majority of the book contains Nehemiah's personal memoirs of how he accomplished, by God's gracious hand, what God had put in his heart to do (notice 2:8, 12, 18, 20; 4:15, 20; 6:16; 7:5). As such, the book provides practical insights into how one builds strength of character and nurtures greater faith in an extraordinary God.

Welcome

Where is "home" for you? How long have you been away from your roots? When were you last homesick? What was that like?

Word

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4. Beforehand, share any background information you think would be helpful in placing the passage in its historical context. Just be certain to allow plenty of time for discussion, encouraging each member to participate. [See accompanying leader's notes.]

1. In these opening verses, Nehemiah is confronted by some disturbing news. What report did he get from Hanani and the men of Judah? How might the events of Ezra 4:7-24 relate to Nehemiah's concern?
2. How does Nehemiah respond to this news (v 4)? Why was Nehemiah so burdened? Do you find Nehemiah's anguish surprising? What does this say about his relationship with God?
3. Do you have any past experience of tragedy or distress when you responded in a similar manner? Explain.
4. Upon hearing some devastating news, Nehemiah sat down and wept. Then for days he mourned, while also fasting and praying (v 4-11). What do you learn from Nehemiah in this opening chapter? When confronted with distressing news, do you tend to despair over what is? Accept what is? Or pray for what *should* be? Why is that?
5. God presented Nehemiah with a challenging situation which changed his life and caused him to exercise faith and step out in ways he had never done before. Why is having "a burden" so foundational to ministry? What situation is weighing most on your heart at the moment?

Worship

Suggestions: When was the last time you felt a godly burden over the sin of the world? Over your own sin? Tim Woodroof says, "*We sometimes treat sin as a hard fact of life, but don't anguish much over it.*" Read **Psalm 51:16-17** and sing related songs, for example: Create In Me; 662-All to Jesus I Surrender; 791-On Bended Knee. Pray about the situations that were shared in your group. Read the accompanying article, the parable about Sadhu Singh, and pray that the Lord would give each of you a burden for His work at Southeastern.

Works

This week, reflect on your response to the last question, "*What situation is weighing most on your heart at the moment?*" Are you burdened enough to pray? To fast? To act?

Leader's Notes – Mourn Over Spiritual Needs (Lesson One)

Background:

Even though the Book of Nehemiah appears in the first half of the Old Testament in our English Bibles, it—along with Ezra and Ester—records events from the end of the Old Testament history, starting in 445 B.C. Almost 150 years earlier, the Babylonians had captured the southern kingdom of Judah. Even though God allowed this captivity as judgment for the Israelites' disobedience (1 Kings 9:1-9), He also promised to restore them to their land (Jeremiah 25:11).

After the Persians overthrew the Babylonians, they allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their land. The people went back in three groups. First, in 538 B.C., about forty to fifty thousand Jews returned under Zerubbabel's leadership (Ezra 1-6). With aid from King Darius of Persia, they were able to rebuild the temple, which was completed in 515 B.C. In 479 B.C. Ester became queen of Persia and thwarted an evil plan to destroy the Jewish people. About twenty years later (458 B.C.), Ezra led the second expedition of about five thousand people to Jerusalem (Ezra 7-10). Although they accomplished some good, fourteen years passed with no progress made on rebuilding the city wall.

That's where the story of Nehemiah begins. Nehemiah leads a third group of people back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, whose distress was most likely not due to the Babylonians' initial destruction of the walls (2 Kings 25), but rather the episode recorded in Ezra 4:7-23 in which the Jews were ordered to cease their rebuilding.

Discussion:

Question 2: The book of Nehemiah begins in Susa, the winter capital of the ancient Persian Empire. Nehemiah was born in captivity, and yet his parents must have instilled in him a great appreciation for his spiritual roots, because his heart beat for a city he had never seen. Many of those living in Jerusalem had grown accustomed to the situation. And yet, upon hearing the news Nehemiah responds—not out of nostalgia, but genuine anguish. Nehemiah was burdened for two reasons:

- God's name was disgraced—The welfare of the city reflected on God Himself. Jerusalem was known as the place where the God of Israel dwelt. "In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel. His tent is in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion." (Psalm 76:1-2). The glory of Jerusalem reflected on the glory of God. Nehemiah was burdened because of his great concern for the reputation of the God he served.
- God's people were discouraged—The broken wall said something about the condition of the people. After so many decades, people were still living as exiles. They had gotten used to ruins. They weren't thriving, but only surviving. Even Nehemiah's opponents were quick to recognize his concern for the people's welfare: "They were very disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites." (Neh. 2:10)

Question 5: Why are these opening verses so important? Because until you find someone who mourns over ruins, you can't start to rebuild walls. Only when our hearts are broken over the things that break the heart of God will we do what is right. And until that happens, we won't. Nehemiah could not escape the fact that the city of God lay in ruin while he lived in luxury. Nehemiah saw the situation with godly eyes and it grieved his heart and moved him both to action and dependence upon God. Without a burden, our willingness to allow God to use us, regardless the cost, will be greatly diminished.

Leader's Notes (Continued) – Mourn Over Spiritual Needs (Lesson One)

Parable:

The parable of Sadhu Sundar Singh, a Hindu convert to Christianity, who became a missionary in India.... One late afternoon Sadhu was traveling on foot through the Himalayas with a Buddhist monk. It was bitter cold, and with night coming on, the monk warned Sadhu that they were in danger of freezing to death if they did not reach the monastery before darkness fell.

Just as they were traversing a narrow path above a steep precipice, they heard a cry for help. Down the cliff lay a man, fallen and badly hurt. The monk looked at Sadhu and said, "Do not stop. God has brought this man to his fate. He must work it out for himself. Let us hurry on before we, too, perish." But Sadhu, the Christian, replied: "God has sent me here to help my brother. I cannot abandon him."

The monk made off through the whirling snow, while the missionary clambered down. The man's leg was broken and he could not walk. So Sadhu took his blanket, made a sling of it, and tied the man on his back. Then, bending under his burden, he began a body-torturing climb. By the time he reached the narrow path again, he was drenched with perspiration.

Doggedly, he made his way on through the deepening snow. It was dark and now it was all he could do to follow the path. But he persevered, and though faint with fatigue and overheated from exertion, he finally saw ahead the light of the monastery.

Then for the first time, Sadhu stumbled and nearly fell. But not from weakness. He had stumbled over some object lying in the road. Slowly he bent down on one knee and brushed the snow off the object. It was the body of the monk, frozen to death.

Years later a disciple of Sadhu's asked him, "What is life's most difficult task?" Without hesitation Sadhu replied: "To have no burden to carry."