

Chapter 15

Relationship with Society: Facilitating Lasting Change

DEBRIEF

Have group members share how they did with last week's "Respond" step and repeat the memory verse as they arrive.

Open with prayer for the Spirit to illuminate the group during the study.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Because of Israel's continual disobedience, God disciplined Israel by allowing the Babylonians to force much of the Jewish population into exile and slavery. God's temple was destroyed. Nearly 80 years after the 70-year exile ended, Jerusalem's city wall was broken down and its gates had been destroyed by fire. This meant that Jerusalem's citizens were vulnerable to attack. The city was in a situation of shame, and *shalom* needed to be restored.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king of Persia at this time. *A cupbearer was a high ranking officer whose duty it was to serve drinks to royalty. Because of potential plots to poison the king or his family, this person had to be completely trustworthy.*

When he received news of Israel's shame, Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted and prayed. As he prayed, God put it on his heart to restore Jerusalem's city walls and gates. He took great risk to ask King Artaxexe for a leave of absence to restore the city and for timber for the gates of the wall from the king's forest. The king said yes (chapters 1-2).

Nehemiah could have been seen as an outsider by the local people, so he needed to build trust with them. Once he got God's vision for the work by riding around the walls alone (2:12-16) he shared that vision with the local people and rulers who were most impacted by the state of the wall.

¹⁷ So I said to them, "You see the trouble that we're in: Jerusalem is in ruins, and its gates are destroyed by fire! Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we won't continue to be in disgrace." ¹⁸ I told them that my God had taken care of me, and also told them what the king had said to me. "Let's start rebuilding!" they said, and they eagerly began the work.

Many responded eagerly. The rest of the book describes many of their successes and trials.. As competing rulers made it more difficult for them to build, they recruited their

families to help, worked even harder, and had to act as soldiers. In the end, they were successful (Chapter 7). They restored not only the wall, but also the people's dignity, their spiritual walk with God (Chapters 8-10), and the purity of the temple (Chapter 13).

In this, our final study, we will learn from Nehemiah's values and his process of inviting partners into God's work.

HEAR THE WORD

Listen to this recording of Nehemiah 3 in the NIV: (5:04 minutes).

<https://www.biblegateway.com/audio/mclean/niv/Neh.3>

Nehemiah Chapter 3 (CEB):

¹ Then Eliashib the high priest set to work with his fellow priests and built the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set up its doors, then dedicated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred and as far as the Tower of Hananel.

² The people of Jericho built next to them, and Zaccur, Imri's son, built next to them. ³ The children of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and set up its doors, bolts, and bars. ⁴ Next to them Meremoth, Uriah's son and Hakkoz's grandson, made repairs. Meshullam, Berechiah's son and Meshezabel's grandson, made repairs next to them, and Zadok, Baana's son, made repairs next to them. ⁵ Next to them the people from Tekoa made repairs, but their officials wouldn't help with the work of their supervisors.

⁶ Joiada, Paseah's son, and Meshullam, Besodeiah's son, repaired the Mishneh Gate; they laid its beams and set up its doors, bolts, and bars. ⁷ Next to them repairs were made by Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, and the people of Gibeon and of Mizpah, who were ruled by the governor of the province Beyond the River.

⁸ Uzziel, Harhaiah's son, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs next to them; and Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs next to him. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. ⁹ Next to them Rephaiah, Hur's son, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. ¹⁰ Next to them Jedaiah, Harumaph's son, made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush, Hashabneiah's son, made repairs next to him.

¹¹ Malchijah, Harim's son, and Hasshub, Pahath-moab's son, repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. ¹² Next to them Shallum, Hallohesh's son, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, along with his daughters. ¹³ Hanun and the people

of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate; they built it and set up its doors, bolts, and bars. They also repaired fifteen hundred feet of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate.

¹⁴ Malchiah, Rechab's son, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set up its doors, bolts, and bars.

¹⁵ And Shallum, Col-hozeh's son, ruler of the Mizpah district, repaired the Spring Gate. He rebuilt and covered it, and set up its doors, bolts, and bars. He also built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the King's Garden, as far as the stairs that go down from David's City.

¹⁶ After him, Nehemiah, Azbuk's son, ruler of half the Beth-zur district, repaired from the point opposite David's tombs as far as the artificial pool and the Warriors' House. ¹⁷ After him, the Levites made repairs: Rehum, Bani's son, and next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district. ¹⁸ After him, their relatives made repairs: Binnui, Henadad's son, ruler of half the district of Keilah. ¹⁹ Next to him, Ezer, Jeshua's son, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the Angle. ²⁰ After him, Baruch, Zabbai's son, thoroughly repaired another section from the Angle to the door of the house of the high priest Eliashib. ²¹ After him, Meremoth, Uriah's son and Hakkoz's grandson, repaired another section from the door to the back of Eliashib's house.

²² After him, the priests from the surrounding area made repairs. ²³ After them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their house. After them, Azariah, Maaseiah's son and Ananiah's grandson, repaired beside his house. ²⁴ After him, Binnui, Henadad's son, repaired another section from the house of Azariah to the Angle and to the corner. ²⁵ Palal, Uzai's son, repaired from the point opposite the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him, Pedaiah, Parosh's son, ²⁶ and the temple servants living on Ophel made repairs up to the point opposite the Water Gate to the east and the projecting tower. ²⁷ After them, the people of Tekoa repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

²⁸ From the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each one opposite his own house. ²⁹ After them, Zadok, Immer's son, made repairs opposite his own house. After him, Shemaiah, Shecaniah's son, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. ³⁰ After him, Hananiah, Shelemiah's son, and Hanun, Zalaph's sixth son, repaired another section. After them, Meshullam, Berechiah's son, made repairs opposite his own room. ³¹ After him, Malchiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Parade Gate, and as far as the upper room at

the corner. ³² And between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

OBSERVE (What does the passage say?)

1. Read quietly and prayerfully through the text after listening to the audio. Share with others in the group the questions that come to your mind. Answer each others' questions from the text and the context.
2. What different kinds of people did Nehemiah recruit (vocation, status in society, gender, place of birth)?
3. Consult a map of Israel during the time of Nehemiah and identify from where the workers came.

INTERPRET and APPLY (What does the passage mean to the original readers and what does it mean for me/us?)

4. Why do you think Nehemiah considered it important to include the names, vocations, locations, and family status of his co-laborers in such detail? How would you describe his strategy for rebuilding the wall?
5. What do you learn about the kind of disciple God uses from this story? What characteristic(s) of Nehemiah would you like to see more of in your life?
6. What do you learn from this story about how outsiders can facilitate change to advance the shalom of the Kingdom in situations where they are not insiders?

Take a couple of minutes to pray about and jot down thoughts, as we consider the next question:

7. What situation that needs change, right here and now, or after graduating, is God putting on your heart? What is a first step you can take to begin the change process? Who might partner with you to bring this change about?

RESPOND

Practice: Inviting Partners

Share with the group what you wrote in response to Questions 6 and 7.

As we saw from this study, change comes when people partner together. This week, prayerfully share vision for the work God has put on your heart with a potential partner. Tell what you have been learning about God's desire for shalom and about Nehemiah's experience and ask him or her to pray about joining you.

Whether your vision is for something in your host or home country, you can begin by praying regularly together and asking God for a plan, as Nehemiah did. If the person you ask says "Yes," set a time to pray, even if it's just over the phone or by video call.

If you are returning home but don't know a Christian insider with whom you could partner, ask the Lord to give you a group of people to pray with you about finding a partner back home. This could be someone in the group or at your church.

If you are remaining for the next term, consider seeking partners to continue one of the RESPOND steps started or suggested earlier or volunteering to help facilitate the next group of students who go through the guide.

Memory Verse: Nehemiah 2:17-18 (NIV)

"So I said to them, 'You see the trouble that we're in: Jerusalem is in ruins, and its gates are destroyed by fire! Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we won't continue to be in disgrace.' I told them that my God had taken care of me, and also told them what the king had said to me. 'Let's start rebuilding!' they said, and they eagerly began the work."

Memorize this verse in English and in your heart language now.

CLOSING

Close in prayer for each other about growing in a certain area to imitate Nehemiah, about gaining a vision for change and recruiting partners who are insiders for this work.

Your group may also want to celebrate finishing the series with food, worship and sharing what God has done in your lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chloe Papke was first exposed to people from around the globe while attending Oberlin Conservatory which, at the time, the student body was nearly 30% international. Now, she is an avid traveler and lover of cultural differences and has close friends on every continent. She came to faith as a student in InterVarsity and has worked with IVCF ever since. Many of her favorite experiences have been developing

international leaders in mostly American fellowships and helping American students to become more globally-minded. Chloe has directed numerous Urban Projects, an Abolitionist Plunge, and several Global Urban Treks to Egypt where she has developed the leadership of a number of Egyptian students. Chloe is currently InterVarsity's International Student Ministry Associate Director for Strategic Projects and holds a Master's of Arts degree in Theology and Islamic Studies from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Fuller Seminary. She particularly enjoys her chaplain work with a local Muslim Student Association and writing about peacemaking between people of different religious faiths. When she is not working, she loves road biking and spending time with her daughter.

Facilitator's Notes

Objectives of the Study

- To learn how we as outsiders can facilitate among people who are insiders through Nehemiah's story.
- To see how God can use our obedience to bring about change that increases shalom.
- To observe characteristics of a disciple in Nehemiah that aid in change and internalize a desire for God to produce those characteristics in us.

Notes on the Questions

Introduction: Summarize this material briefly emphasizing Nehemiah's prayerfulness and, reading aloud the verses from chapter 2:17-18, which will become the memory verse.

Question 2: What kinds of people did Nehemiah recruit (vocation, status in society, gender, place of birth.)?

1. Ruling leaders: from Persia, from surrounding areas and cities, from Jerusalem
2. Gender: Men and women
3. Religious leaders: local priests, high priest, priests from surrounding regions, Levites, temple servants
4. Families: sons and daughters, grandchildren
5. Vocations: perfumers, goldsmiths, merchants, gatekeepers

Question 3: Try to bring in a Bible with a map or share an online map with the group. The Common English Bible has an excellent map. Looking at a map of Israel during the time of Nehemiah, identify where the workers came from.

1. NW (Gibeon)
2. N (Mizpah)
3. NE (Jericho)
4. S (Beth-haccarem, Tekoa)
5. SW (Beth-zur, Keilah)

Question 4: There was a great diversity: social classes, occupations, men and women, locations of those coming in to work. This diversity better represents the whole people of God and could lead to greater unity later on. Unlike Nehemiah, those listed were all insiders, having lived in the area all their lives. Nehemiah could draw on their knowledge of the situation and not be accused of forcing change as an outsider. This long list suggests that Kingdom change comes as a community listens to and partners with the Lord. Nehemiah 's strategy was to prayerfully recruit and work alongside a diverse group of knowledgeable insiders who would partner together and with the Lord to bring change.

Question 6: Nehemiah was prayerful, courageous, full of faith, humble, and dependent on the Lord.