

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY ONE

The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah

Nehemiah had a burden on his heart. When he heard about the broken walls in Jerusalem, God tapped him on the shoulder. So he prayed for guidance. In fact, all the way through this book, you find Nehemiah on his knees in prayer.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

OUR world needs leaders . . . *good* leaders. Perhaps now more than ever. And God wants *you* to be one of those leaders.

It's true! You may not earn your living as a manager, a director, or an executive, but you still influence others—from your family to your friends, from your coworkers to your church. And whether you realize it or not, you have the power to help or hinder these people in the journey of life. In other words, *you're a leader!*

So what does it look like to be a good leader? One whose Christlike example impacts others for their good and for God's glory?

Thinkers across the world have spilled gallons of ink attempting to articulate the difference between good and bad leadership. Yet human knowledge always appears dim compared to God's wisdom. God's Word addresses leadership! A prime example is found in cupbearer turned wall-builder turned governor . . . a man named Nehemiah.



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The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah

See how Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the book about this intriguing individual:

That's the purpose of this ancient book: to equip you, to build you into the kind of leader God desires—a true leader. If you allow yourself to get caught up in the story, you will find something wonderful begin to happen. As you watch the plot develop, as you see Nehemiah's character and his project built, shaped, and tested, you will find something in your hand that wasn't there before: a brick, something with which to begin building your own character.¹

This *Searching the Scriptures* study kick-starts a deep dive into the subject of *good* leadership through the book of Nehemiah. Reliable principles and practical tips arise in every chapter. Take these lessons to heart. God is building you into the Christlike leader the world desperately needs.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Righteous character stands on the foundation of prayer. Use these next few moments to open your heart to God. Ask Him to use this study in surprising ways in your life.

Father, I acknowledge that I can only have a positive influence on others insofar as I willingly submit myself to Your lordship. As I study the life of Nehemiah, use the example of his leadership to build me into a more faithful follower of Jesus Christ. It's in His name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Every *successful* leader—no matter how big or small the following—adheres to the same principles. And these principles are evident in the life of Nehemiah as he rebuilt Jerusalem's walls and later served as the city's governor. Get a bird's-eye view of Nehemiah's leadership journey in Pastor Chuck's book chart on the following page. You can also peruse his introductory article [online](#).



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	CUP-BEARER TO THE KING	BUILDER OF THE WALL	GOVERNOR OF THE PEOPLE	
	Nehemiah 1:1–2:10	Nehemiah 2:11–6:19	Nehemiah 7:1–13:31	
	<p>Prayer Nehemiah's prayer and request</p> 	<p>"The wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun." (<i>Neh. 6:15</i>)</p>	<p>Scripture read and explained (<i>Neh. 8:3–8</i>)</p> 	<p>Lives changed (<i>Neh. 8:1–3, 9; 10:28–31</i>)</p> <p>Nation confronted and cleansed (<i>Neh. 13:10–31</i>)</p> <p>Prayer</p>
LOCATION	Susa in Persia	Jerusalem in Judah		
FOCUS	Leadership of a man		Revival of a nation	
SUBJECT	Burden	Project	Scriptures	Reforms
OBSTACLES	King	Enemies	Tradition	Compromise
VICTORIES	Release	Accomplishment	Obedience	Changes
THEME	Nehemiah's trust in the covenant-keeping God			
KEY VERSES	Nehemiah 6:15–16; 8:8–10; 9:1–38			
CHRIST IN NEHEMIAH	Suggested in Nehemiah, who leaves an exalted position to identify with the plight of his people and lead them into restoration; pictured in Nehemiah's prayerful dependence on God			

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Survey of Nehemiah



Observation: Nehemiah's Place in Israel's Story

Nehemiah comes onto the biblical scene late in the story of Israel. A lot happened in those centuries that helps us understand Nehemiah, so let's begin with a review.

Israel's Establishment

God set apart the nation of Israel for one purpose: *to bless the whole world*. As a “kingdom of priests,” Israel was meant to be a beacon whose light would draw the rest of the world into a blessed relationship with the Creator ([Exodus 19:6](#)). To do so, Israel had to faithfully keep God's covenant by obeying His law ([19:5](#)).

God didn't want to abandon His people for unfaithfulness. But acting as father, king, and judge, God laid out the blessings of obedience and the warnings of disobedience. According to [Deuteronomy 28:15](#), what discipline awaited the Israelites if they turned from God?

The following verses foreshadow what Israel would face hundreds of years into the future. In your own words, summarize the specific consequences for disobedience listed in [28:25](#), [36–37](#).



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Survey of Nehemiah

Israel's Downfall

Sadly, as time passed, these frightful warnings faded to a whisper in the eyes of the Israelites. So they pursued the self-indulgent desires of their own sinful hearts. God gave His people chance after chance to turn back. But their hearts grew ever harder. So God kept His word. In [2 Chronicles 36:17–20](#), we read of the climax of God's firm discipline.

According to [2 Chronicles 36:17–19](#), whom did God send against Jerusalem? What did they do to the people and the city?

This scene was brutal—certainly one of the lowest points in Israel's history. Yet God couldn't abandon His people, so He allowed a remnant of Israelites to survive. According to [36:20](#), what happened to these survivors?

Through this remnant, God would “give rest to the people of Israel” ([Jeremiah 31:2](#)). They would need to wait for a long time, but God promised, “I will rebuild you” ([31:4](#)).



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Israel's Restoration

The book of Nehemiah is the sequel to the book of Ezra, and Ezra picks up where [2 Chronicles 36:20](#) left off: when “the kingdom of Persia came to power.” After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the Israelites found a new source of optimism. The Persians had conquered the wicked Babylonians. And the Israelites’ new ruler, King Cyrus of Persia, was far more sympathetic to the exiles.

According to [Ezra 1:2–4](#), what proclamation did Cyrus make?

Cyrus allowed Zerubbabel to lead a company of Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. A few years later, King Artaxerxes, Cyrus’ successor to the Persian throne, followed suit and allowed Ezra to lead a second group back to Jerusalem. While Zerubbabel reconstructed the *house* of the Lord, Ezra taught the law and recommitted the people to the way of the Lord.

You see, these people had been in captivity. They had known spiritual desolation. And for the first time they saw their city showing signs of beginning anew. And what an emotional moment it must have been when Ezra said, “Let’s all stand and hear the Word of God.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Finally, Artaxerxes allowed Nehemiah to lead a third company back to Jerusalem. According to [Nehemiah 1:3](#), what report did Nehemiah receive? According to [1:4](#), how did he respond to this news?



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So began Nehemiah's leadership journey. He led not by standing strong and tall but by humbly getting *on his knees*, weeping and pleading with God to guide him as he led others in the journey to restore Jerusalem's walls to their former glory.



Interpretation: True Walls of Protection

Though the book of Nehemiah provides us with a bounty of practical leadership lessons, this account is far more than a handbook of tactics and techniques in how to lead people. Instead, Nehemiah teaches that good leadership flows from a close and consistent relationship with God.

Why was Nehemiah's heart so grieved to hear the news about Jerusalem's walls? What do walls provide for a city?

Nehemiah certainly cared deeply about the safety of his people's lives, property, and land. But he had deeper concerns. Specifically, he was worried about the Israelites' hearts. Read Nehemiah's lament in [Nehemiah 1:5–8](#). How do these words reflect God's warnings from [Deuteronomy 28:25, 36–37](#)?



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The Matter at Hand

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Nehemiah knew his Bible. He knew that Israel went into exile because of its unfaithfulness to God. And he knew that God was giving His people another chance. If Israel was to avoid facing the consequence of exile again, what would it need to do? To carry the thought further, what was Israel's *true* source of protection?

Physical walls provide great security, but they still can fall. That's why Nehemiah was interested in far more than building up Jerusalem. He wanted to build up the people too. He knew God will never be defeated. And neither will His people—so long as we commit our lives to Him and to His ways. Doing so will build up strong spiritual walls that will endure for eternity.



Application: Building Spiritual Walls

Jerusalem's walls fell because the people turned from God. So Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls *and* to recommit the people to God. Based on Nehemiah's example, Pastor Chuck has set up a four-phase building plan for any leader who wants to improve the condition of his or her spiritual walls:

- *Phase 1:* Maintain genuine concern for the condition of your walls.
- *Phase 2:* Recognize that you can't repair the walls on your own.
- *Phase 3:* Go directly to God in prayer for guidance and correction.
- *Phase 4:* Face the situation honestly. Determine to stay with the task until it is complete.



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Survey of Nehemiah

Take a moment to survey your spiritual walls. How are they looking? What aspects of your walk with God are standing strong? What elements of your character require some reconstruction? In the space below, write an honest prayer, and commit yourself to working with God to build your life into one that looks like Christ's. This firm foundation in Christ will equip you to lead others well.

Now think about those whom God placed in your circle of influence. Write their names below, and as you do, brainstorm some ways you can pray for them and how you can impact their lives for good.

The old axiom is true: good leaders are made, not born. The process is long and often painful, but if you let Him, God will build you into the leader He wants you to be. Brick by brick, He will form Christlike qualities in you that will make you a faithful, effective, and inspiring leader.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for preserving this account of Nehemiah's life in Your Word. As I study his life, build me into the leader You want me to be by cultivating Christlike qualities within me. You have the blueprints, and I trust Your plan for my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick: Timeless Lessons on Leadership* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 4.



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A Leader—From the Knees Up!

Nehemiah 1:1–11

What's your first response when a need comes to your attention? Nehemiah didn't look to his own strength. When he heard the problem, he fell to his knees and said, "Lord, this is too big for anyone on this earth. I bring it before You."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ON any journey, the first steps are most important. They set the pace for the whole expedition, and they establish the direction of travel.

If you lose your way later in the journey, you usually can get back on track with relative ease. If, however, you take a wrong step at the trip's outset, you can set yourself on an entirely wrong trajectory. Follow that path long enough, and you will likely wind up totally lost.

Few want to find themselves in a situation like that. And *no one* wants to be the one responsible for bringing others down the wrong path.

Sadly, this exact scenario happens with leaders all over the world every day. They step foot into a new project or a new role, prepared to drive the expedition with brilliant creativity, contagious enthusiasm, and unshakeable ambition. Even though they use these essential attributes as a map, they still find themselves—and their followers—lost at some point on the journey, with no sense of direction and without any destination in sight. Why does this happen so often?



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A Leader—From the Knees Up!

Nehemiah 1:1–11

Because these leaders missed a crucial first step.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will walk with Nehemiah on the first steps of his leadership journey in order to discern how every leader should begin any expedition. This essential step set Nehemiah and the people of Israel on the right trajectory—toward God and His purpose.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

For Nehemiah, prayer wasn't just essential at the outset of his journey. Rather, he communed with God every step of the way. As you prepare to step into Nehemiah's sandals, say this prayer.

*Father, I want to be faithful to You in every aspect of my life: my relationships, my work, my church.
Help me keep on the path following You, and by Your grace, use me to lead others on the same path.
In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

For seven decades, the people of Israel lived in foreign lands under the rule of pagan kingdoms. Because they lived as exiles from the land of promise, many assumed God had given up on His people. Yet God is not as fickle as His children. He always keeps His promises, and He pledged He would rescue His people from their oppressors.

God fulfilled this promise through the leadership of three great men of prayer: Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. God softened the heart of the Persian kings who allowed each to lead one company of Israelites back to Jerusalem. Each leader had a particular purpose:

- Zerubbabel: To rebuild the temple (*Ezra 1–6*)
- Ezra: To reestablish the law (*Ezra 7–10*)
- Nehemiah: To rebuild the wall (*Nehemiah 1–7*)

Rebuilding a city's wall is no small task, but Nehemiah achieved his goal by taking one step at a time. In *Nehemiah 1:1–11*, we witness how he began.



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Nehemiah 1:1–11



Observation: Nehemiah's First Step

Studying a passage of Scripture is like constructing a wall. If you neglect to follow the blueprint, the wall will fail to stand the test of time. Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method is like a blueprint for Bible study. If you prayerfully follow each step, you will build theological truths and practical applications that always remain valuable for followers of Jesus.¹

The first step is observation. As you read [Nehemiah 1:1–11](#), resist the urge to inquire about the text's meaning or application. For now, simply read the passage and ask yourself, "What do the words say?"

Nehemiah's story begins with him serving in the fortress of Susa as King Artaxerxes' cupbearer ([Nehemiah 1:11](#)). One day, his brother Hanani arrived to share news about what was happening with the exiles who had already returned to Jerusalem. According to [1:3](#), what report did Hanani share with Nehemiah?

According to [1:4](#), how did Nehemiah react to this news?



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A Leader—From the Knees Up!

Nehemiah 1:1–11

Nehemiah was concerned for both the walls of Jerusalem and the people within the walls. And the first thing he did was *pray*. According to [Nehemiah 1:6–7](#), how does Nehemiah begin his prayer? What stands out to you about Nehemiah's words?

I want you to notice within verses 6 and 7 the words “we” and “I.” The confession was not because someone else had failed. The confession had to do with Nehemiah's part in the problem. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In [1:8](#), Nehemiah reveals why he began his prayer the way he did. What did the people of Israel do that caused them to end up in exile? According to [1:9](#), what is the solution to this problem?

Finally, in [1:11](#), Nehemiah concludes with His request. In what way did Nehemiah boldly expect God to intervene in this circumstance?



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Nehemiah 1:1–11



Interpretation: Start with Prayer

Observation is the foundation of Bible study upon which interpretation stands. In this phase, we move from asking what the text says to considering what it *means*. An essential goal of interpretation is to develop timeless theological truths based on the meaning of the passage.

The very last line of this passage may seem out of place: “In those days I was the king’s cup-bearer” (*Nehemiah 1:11*). But this isn’t a throwaway detail. In fact, serving as a cupbearer was a high honor. Use your Bible study tools to learn more about this prestigious position. For a free online resource, look at [Constable’s Notes](#) available at [netbible.com](#).

What kind of influence did a cupbearer have in an ancient empire? How could Nehemiah have misused this influence to try to take control of his circumstances? What does Nehemiah’s choice to go to God first reveal about his character?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader always starts with prayer because . . .*



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A Leader—From the Knees Up!

Nehemiah 1:1–11

Nehemiah went first to God with the need. It says that he prayed. Not only did he recognize the need clearly, not only did he become involved in the problem personally, but he also brought it before God in prayer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Praying along the Way

Correlation buttresses interpretation by comparing the main passage with other portions of Scripture that discuss similar themes.

As the apostle Paul reached the end of his life, he passed the torch of ministry to his protégé Timothy, and every generation of Christian leaders is wise to heed Paul's word about the centrality of prayer. According to [1 Timothy 2:1](#), for whom are Christian leaders to pray? And how should they pray for them?

According to [2:3–6](#), why is prayer so essential for a Christian leader? How is Paul's concern instructive to Christian leaders today?



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A Leader—From the Knees Up!

Nehemiah 1:1–11

Every lesson from Paul on Christian living is demonstrated in the life of Jesus. And for Jesus, prayer was essential. What does [Luke 5:16](#) reveal about Jesus' prayer life? How often did He pray? Where did He pray? What can Christians today glean from Jesus' example?

For Jesus and Paul alike, prayer was the fuel that propelled their ministry. It kept their focus on God and kept them moving toward His purpose of bringing the good news of salvation to a desperate world. And it will do the same for Christian leaders today.



Application: The Prayer Compass

In the last step of Pastor Chuck's Bible-study method, you build personal and practical applications based on the timeless truths from interpretation. *It's the finishing touch!*

Good leaders will know intuitively when they have taken a wrong step at some point in the journey. They usually can just *feel* that something isn't right. Pastor Chuck applies [Nehemiah 1:1–11](#) by showing how prayer, like a compass, will point wayward leaders back in the right direction:

- Are you feeling lost? *Prayer clears our vision for God's purpose.*
- Are you feeling anxious? *Prayer quiets our hearts for clear direction.*
- Are you feeling impatient? *Prayer makes us wait for God's timing.*
- Are you feeling hesitant? *Prayer activates our faith for decisive action.*



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Nehemiah 1:1–11

Do you sense any of these feelings drawing your eyes away from God and His purpose? You might even feel like you're too far gone to get back on track. But with God, it's never too late. How can prayer act as your personal compass and reorient you toward God?

Nehemiah recognized that he didn't just *have* problems, but he was *part* of the problem too. Has your heart been hardened toward the Holy Spirit's gently guiding hand? What would it look like for you to follow Him as you simultaneously lead others?

As Nehemiah prepared for His leadership journey, he saw a rocky road ahead. Broken walls, sinful hearts, stubborn people, and a mighty king stood in his path. Yet these hindrances didn't cause Nehemiah to try to take command or turn back. Instead, he followed God and moved forward on his knees—not only for that first step but for every step of the way.

So don't lose sight of God. Don't leave the path. Don't grasp for control. Take that first step of faith and *pray*.



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Nehemiah 1:1–11



A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your study, write your own prayer. Are you preparing to start a new journey? A new job, a new project, a new school, a new relationship, a new home? Give it over to God, and ask Him to lead you, step-by-step.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY THREE

Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

During Nehemiah's months of waiting, he was doing more than praying. He was planning. You should pray to God. But make your plans and set your sights. Think through the hurdles, and don't be shortsighted.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT happens to the athlete who steps onto the field without practicing? Or the musician who stands in front of a crowd to perform a never-before-rehearsed piece of music? Or the teacher who walks into the classroom with no lesson plan?

Some people have enough talent to wing it in these kinds of situations . . . but they can coast on their gifting only for so long. Inevitably, the competitor will tire out. The performer will flub it. The instructor will freeze up.

Thankfully, these kinds of embarrassing moments usually are easy to avoid. How? *Through proper preparation.*

Good preparation is essential for anyone in any role, but it's *especially* important for leaders. It allows you to plan out a project's steps and anticipate the timeframe. Preparation also equips you to work well with people—both those who wish to help and those who aim to hinder you.



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Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

The book of Nehemiah provides an example of a leader who was both gifted and prepared, and his preparation served him well. Let's look at how Nehemiah prayerfully prepared for the task God had placed on his heart and learn how we, too, can prepare to carry out our roles in God's greater plan.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The best way to prepare to study Scripture is through prayer. Prayer softens your heart, quiets your mind, and aligns your desires with God's. Here's one way you can pray:

Father, only You know what my future holds, but I want to be ready to face life's circumstances in a way pleasing to You. Use my time in Your Word today to prepare me for what You have planned for me. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Nehemiah was a man of diligent preparation as well as a man of patient prayer. When he heard that Jerusalem's walls sat as a pile of rubble, he pled with God to use him to rebuild them. Yet one major obstacle stood in Nehemiah's path: the Persian king Artaxerxes. Nehemiah served as the king's cupbearer, and the king wasn't likely to let his trusted confidante take a few years off to go live in a foreign land.

Despite this reality, Nehemiah boldly prayed, "Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me" (*Nehemiah 1:11*).

One of prayer's closest companions is patience, and Nehemiah waited several months before he heard God's answer to his faith-filled prayer. And in his waiting, he prepared himself to be ready for whatever God had planned.



Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11



Observation: Nehemiah's Patient Preparation

Nehemiah 2:1–11 records Nehemiah's conversation with Artaxerxes regarding the state of Jerusalem's walls. Read these verses in a couple of different translations to gain a crystal-clear understanding of what the text says.¹

Our passage opens by pointing out that this conversation happened in the month of Nisan. Nehemiah had originally heard the report of Jerusalem's fallen walls in the month of Kislev (or Chislev). Using your *Bible study tools*, determine what months on your calendar these Hebrew months correspond with. How long did Nehemiah wait to hear the answer to his prayer?

Kislev/Chislev: _____

Nisan: _____

Time spent waiting: _____

According to [2:2](#), who initiated the conversation between Nehemiah and Artaxerxes? What did he say? How did the other man respond in [2:3](#)?

What did Nehemiah do in [2:4](#) before he made his formal request to return to Jerusalem in [2:5](#)?



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Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

According to [Nehemiah 2:6](#), what follow-up question did Artaxerxes ask after Nehemiah made his request? How did Nehemiah respond? (Note: we may not have the specific details of Nehemiah's response, but this verse shows that Nehemiah did, in fact, have a response prepared for the king.)

According to [2:7–8](#), what additional requests did Nehemiah make of Artaxerxes? How did the king respond to these requests?

So far, so good! Everything seemed to be going according to plan . . . at least, that's how it *seemed*. Yet not everyone viewed Nehemiah as favorably as Artaxerxes. According to [2:9–10](#), what happened when Nehemiah arrived at the province west of the Euphrates River? What do you think this scene might foreshadow for the rest of Nehemiah's leadership journey?



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Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

When you walk by faith, you will encounter the hostility of people who walk by sight. They are rebuked by the life of faith. They are rebuked by your faith because they don't have it. You see, opposition doesn't mean you're out of the will of God. As a matter of fact, it may reinforce the fact that you're in the will of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Preparation and Prayer

After Nehemiah heard the news of the desperate state of Jerusalem, he had several months to prayerfully plan how he would serve his people and their capital city. List all the ways [Nehemiah 2:1–11](#) reveals the humble cupbearer's preparation.

Nehemiah knew that no amount of preparation could affect the decision of Artaxerxes. That's why Nehemiah began his conversation with the king “with a prayer to the God of heaven” ([Nehemiah 2:4](#)). What is the relationship between preparation and prayer? In other words, how does prayer help you deal with circumstances that stand outside the realm of control of your own preparation?



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Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

Based on your reading of Artaxerxes and Nehemiah's interaction, how did the king view his cupbearer? What kinds of character qualities must Nehemiah have shown to have earned such a reputation in the palace? How are these characteristics evident in their interaction?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader should prepare by . . . because . . .*

I weary of people who call it “faith” when they can’t tell you their plan. Look at Nehemiah’s marvelous response. Hand-in-hand with this prayer warrior is both patience and preparation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11



Correlation: Jesus' and Paul's Preparation

Nehemiah is not the only hero of the faith who was well-prepared for the ministry God set out before him. In fact, even our Lord prepared before He began His public ministry!

In [Luke 2:41–52](#), Jesus and His family traveled to Jerusalem for Passover. During one of these visits, when Jesus was twelve years old, Mary and Joseph lost their beloved child in the city. According to [2:46](#), where did Mary and Joseph find Jesus? What was He doing?

The apostle Paul had a similar experience. After his miraculous conversion, Paul didn't immediately start out on his continent-wide missionary journey. Instead, he prepared. According to [Galatians 1:16b–18](#), what was the first thing he did after his conversion?



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Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

What similarities do you see between Jesus' and Paul's preparation? How do these examples relate to the account of Nehemiah?

Nehemiah, Paul, and Jesus all recognized that human preparation is meaningless if it isn't immersed in prayer and communion with God. Prayer aligns a leader's heart—and consequently his or her plans—with God's. In application, Pastor Chuck demonstrates this beautiful marriage of prayer and planning.



Application: Preparation Pays Off

Nehemiah's faith in God and his preparation guided every element of his conversation with Artaxerxes. Based on this example, Pastor Chuck identifies four practical lessons every prepared Christian leader instinctively knows.

1. *Prayer and waiting go hand-in-hand.*
2. *Prayerful waiting is not a substitute for careful planning.*
3. *Opposition to a plan often reinforces the will of God rather than hinders it.*
4. *Changing the heart of decision-makers is God's specialty.*



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Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

How have you seen yourself successfully prepare for a role, task, or project in the past? What role did prayer play in your preparation? What were the results of your prayerful preparation?

It's likely that, at some point in your life, you will prepare well, but things won't work out the way you had planned. Perhaps a stubborn decision-maker will stand in your way, trying to block your every move. Practically speaking, what would it look like for you to trust God in these circumstances?

As you look to the future, what lies ahead for your family, your ministry, your career? What practical steps can you take as a leader to prayerfully prepare? Write down three or four action items in the space below.



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Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

Nehemiah set his sights on a task. He prayed, and he waited. But he didn't just sit around doing nothing. He used his time of waiting to pray more and to prepare himself to serve God. Don't put yourself in a situation when you think, *I wish I had prepared for that*. You won't be able to foresee every obstacle in your path, but by preparing, you can offer yourself to God and eagerly anticipate what He will do through you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I want to live a life of service to You. I know You are always working in me to prepare me for what's coming next, but I want to cooperate with You in Your plan for me by doing what I can to plan for what's next. Give me a heart like Nehemiah's—one that has the boldness to pray and the faith to wait. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY FOUR

Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20

You know, you can have your eyes in various places in the Christian life. You can have your eyes on some person or on yourself or on your circumstances. And it will not be long before you're disillusioned because people always fail. Or you can simply put your eyes on the Director. Though you have what you might call an insignificant part, you'll play in tune. You'll never miss your cue.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LIKE a lake without water or a meal without food or a book without words, a leader without a following really is no leader at all.

Leadership is *always* relational. A leader's success is often measured based on how well he or she relates to others, serves others, influences others, and *motivates* others. Motivation fuels any team in its endeavors because no leader can accomplish anything of significance alone—be it balancing budgets, developing new ideas, exploring new opportunities . . . or building a wall.

Nehemiah set out to accomplish a mountain-sized task: to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. He knew he couldn't scale the mountain alone. He needed the help of his brothers and sisters—and they needed *motivation*.

How he motivated them in their godly work provides vital instructions for you as you seek to motivate those in your circle of influence. This *Searching the Scriptures* study identifies one simple action that, when carried out, will make all the difference in your leadership pursuits.



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Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Yes, your relationship with God should be your top priority. Yes, you should always feel motivated to grow closer to Him. But, no, it doesn't always feel that way, nor is it always easy. Yet we choose to follow Jesus even when it isn't easy.

God makes Himself present through His Word. He's with you now. He's listening. Say this prayer before you turn to Nehemiah:

Father, I want to glorify You in everything I do. That is my true motivation. Through my study of Your Word today, shape me into the God-honoring person You created me to be, and use me to motivate others in their walk with You. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

If you listen carefully to the book of Nehemiah, it will sound much like a symphonic concerto in three distinct movements, each representing one of Nehemiah's three distinct roles:

1. Nehemiah the cupbearer (*Nehemiah 1:1–2:10*)
2. Nehemiah the builder (*2:11–6:19*)
3. Nehemiah the governor (*7:1–13:31*)

Of a concerto's three movements, the second is often the most passionate and impressive. The same is true of Nehemiah. In *Nehemiah 2:11–20*, his passion for God and his impressive leadership skills sing, stirring the hearts of the people of Jerusalem to join the effort of rebuilding the city's walls.



Observation: Nehemiah Motivates the People

Begin your study by reading *Nehemiah 2:11–20*—slowly, carefully, deliberately. For now, the goal is simply to see what the text says.¹ As you work through these verses, pay careful attention to how Nehemiah, as a leader, relates to others—both friends and foes.



Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20

Private Investigation of the Scene—Nehemiah 2:11–16

After receiving King Artaxerxes' permission to leave Persia, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, trading his cup for a builder's plumb line and square (*Nehemiah 2:11*). According to *Nehemiah 2:13–15*, what was the first thing Nehemiah did when he arrived in Jerusalem? Take note of what time of the day he did this.

According to *2:12, 16*, who knew about what Nehemiah was doing? Or, more importantly, who *didn't* know?

In the time of quietness, when there was no activity, God was putting into his heart what Nehemiah should be receiving. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Open Discussion of the Need—Nehemiah 2:17–18

After Nehemiah's time alone, he was ready to face the public. According to *Nehemiah 2:17*, what observation did the builder make and what *request* did he ask?

Observation: _____

Request: _____



Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20

Nehemiah didn't let the request ring out in hollow silence. Instead, he played a tune of persuasion for the people. What reason did he offer in [Nehemiah 2:18a](#) for why the people should heed his request? According to [2:18b](#), how did the people respond to Nehemiah's plea?

Direct Criticism of the Plan—Nehemiah 2:19–20

According to [Nehemiah 2:19](#), how did Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab react when they heard about Nehemiah's plans? What did they assume was Nehemiah's motivation?

How did Nehemiah respond in [2:20](#) to this discordant criticism? What did his response reveal to be his *true* motivation?



Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20

You see, when you cast blame and criticism, you squelch motivation. When you identify with the problem, you encourage motivation! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Makings of Motivation

When he entered Jerusalem, Nehemiah didn't go straight to the town square and shout a pep talk. Rather, his approach was slower and more measured. Why is it significant that Nehemiah began this process alone? How did this time alone prepare him to motivate his people and to endure criticism from his detractors?

Nehemiah didn't have to offer any kind of *external* incentive or reward to motivate the people to join him in the wall-rebuilding efforts. Why, then, did the people want to join Nehemiah? In other words, what motivated them *internally*? How did Nehemiah cultivate this internal motivation?



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Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader motivates others by . . . because . . .*

Nehemiah simply says, “Do you see the ruins? We’re in a terrible strait. Let’s rebuild this wall.” And the remarkable thing is, they said, “Let’s build.” Why? Because under God, Nehemiah, uniquely gifted as a leader, was able to appeal to the intrinsic part of their zeal. He was able to push the button that said, “Let’s Go!” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Gospel-Centered Motivation

The church in Philippi desperately needed some motivation. The apostle Paul, their beloved friend, was locked in prison, and they were afraid he would die . . . and with him, the powerful spreading of the good news of Jesus. So Paul wrote a letter to encourage the Philippians that God would continue to use them, even if Paul died. In other words, he wrote to motivate them!

Read in [Philippians 1:3–7](#) how Paul began his letter. In what ways did Paul motivate the Philippian believers through these words? How did Paul cultivate internal motivation rather than simply offering external rewards?



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Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20

Jesus offered wise advice for Christians like the Philippians who struggled with discouragement. According to Jesus' words in [John 15:18–21](#), how should Christians react when they face opposition from the world? What does this opposition reveal about those who receive the attacks? How does this information offer motivation?

Both internal and external factors can deflate a group's motivation. So how can a godly leader boost his or her team's morale? Nehemiah modeled one simple solution.



Application: The True Source of Motivation

Whether you're alone, in public, or under attack, following this principle will foster motivation within yourself and others:

Keep your eyes on God.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll identifies three consequences of letting your eye drift away from God and His purpose:

- Take your eyes off God when you're alone, and you'll feel lonely or afraid.
- Take your eyes off God when you're in public, and you'll fall into pride or discouragement.
- Take your eyes off God when you're under attack, and you'll want to give up or bite back.



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Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20

Are you having any of these feelings today? How will keeping your focus on God allow you to find true motivation to serve Him and His purpose?

For Nehemiah, the process of motivation began with a time in deliberate solitude. He carefully surveyed his circumstances and purposefully planned his response. How can God use your time alone to prepare you to motivate and lead others? Write down some practical steps you can take.

Who in your life needs some motivation today? A fellow employee? A member of your church? A close friend? A dear family member? How can you offer motivation to this person—*true* motivation that encourages the person from within?



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Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20

A skilled archer always maintains locked-in focus. If his eyes stray from dead-center—even the slightest bit—his aim will drift, and he *will* miss the shot. Nehemiah fixed his gaze on God and never looked away, and his example motivated others to do the same. Together, they found great success because they partnered with God in what He was already doing.

And is there really any motivation better than working with God to bless the world?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I don't want to lose sight of You and Your purpose—not only for me but for the whole world. Help me stay focused on what really matters. When I'm alone, give me integrity. When I'm in public, give me humility. When I'm under attack, give me endurance. As I grow in Christlikeness, help me motivate others by my example. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY FIVE

Knocked Down, but Not Knocked Out

Nehemiah 4:1–9

The very first thing that ought to come from criticism is prayer. I'm never more effective than when I'm on my knees. It applies to your business. It applies to your home. It applies to your school. It applies to your church.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AWAG once said, “To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing.” There will always be someone ready and eager to critique the choices and character of even the most noble of people. This philanthropist should have given to a different cause. That champion could have run the race one second faster. The previous manager would have better handled the current crisis.

We all must accept the reality that we cannot escape criticism or opposition. One strategy impels us to hide behind friendly smiles and agreeable nods. Another leads us to run to the shelters of hard work and determination. Yet criticism always finds us . . . even if it's undeserved.

If you've ever held a position of influence, you know the sting of another's nitpicking critiques. It's no fun. And at times, it feels nearly impossible to overcome.

Thankfully, the Word of God speaks to this exact predicament in the example of the builder Nehemiah. Unmerited criticism bombarded this man at every point of his journey. Yet he stood tough and kept his focus on God's provision and purpose as he watched his opposition fade in the distance.



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Knocked Down, but Not Knocked Out

Nehemiah 4:1–9



PREPARE YOUR HEART

“If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” (*Romans 8:31*).

Paul penned these powerful words to a community of believers enduring a season of painful suffering. Even though this world stands opposed to God and His people, these trying seasons of suffering will one day come to an end, and Jesus Christ will return to institute an eternity of abundant joy.

Pray these words as you prepare to engage with God’s Word today:

Father, every day, I face criticism, and it’s much easier to retaliate than to rest in You and Your promises. Teach me to keep my eyes focused on You and remember Your promises even when I endure great opposition. In Jesus’ strong name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The beginning of Nehemiah’s leadership journey was smooth sailing. He heard about the broken-down state of Jerusalem’s walls, and he set his heart on restoring the city to its former glory. The support of the Persian king, Artaxerxes, was wind in Nehemiah’s sails. Yet it would not be long before this man of God faced some choppy waters.

Word of Nehemiah’s plan spread to the Gentiles living around Jerusalem, and these regional rivals didn’t want to see the Israelites reestablish themselves. When Nehemiah arrived at the city, he met Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab, and they confronted him saying, “What are you doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” (*Nehemiah 2:19*). According to *Nehemiah 2:20*, how did Nehemiah respond?



Knocked Down, but Not Knocked Out

Nehemiah 4:1–9

The criticism of these opponents wasn't enough to take Nehemiah off course, and in the following verses, we'll see him begin the construction project. However, these critics soon returned to shipwreck Nehemiah. Let's see how he handled the opposition in [Nehemiah 4:1–9](#).



Observation: Facing Criticism

The first step to understanding and applying the truths of Scripture is simple: read. Then reread. Make sure you have a crystal-clear vision of what the passage says.¹ Take some time now to read and make observations about [Nehemiah 4:1–9](#).

Initial Opposition and Reaction—Nehemiah 4:1–6

As Sanballat the Horonite walked around Jerusalem and surveyed the impressive progress Nehemiah and his men had made on the reconstruction of the wall, he grew very angry ([Nehemiah 4:1](#)). According to [Nehemiah 4:2](#), what did he say to his fellow naysayers? What quip did Tobiah the Ammonite add in [4:3](#)?

In your own words, summarize Nehemiah's prayer of response in [4:4–5](#).



Knocked Down, but Not Knocked Out

Nehemiah 4:1–9

Despite the opposition, Nehemiah and the other workers pressed on. According to [Nehemiah 4:6](#), what did they accomplish even as they overheard the jeers of their detractors?

What was Nehemiah doing? He was doing the will of God. He was building a wall around the city. His critics didn't like it. So opposition broke out. But never did Nehemiah become a bitter, angry man. He never lost his cool. He just stayed at the task.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Intensified Opposition and Reaction—Nehemiah 4:7–9

Despite Nehemiah's faithfulness to God and despite the progress on the wall, the opposition didn't let up. In fact, it intensified. According to [Nehemiah 4:7](#), who did Sanballat and Tobiah add to their ranks? According to [4:8](#), what did this group of critics intend to do?



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Nehemiah 4:1–9

According to [Nehemiah 4:9](#), how did Nehemiah react to the intensified opposition? What did he do similarly when he faced the previous wave of opposition? What did he do differently?

Critics demoralize! Leaders encourage! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Discerning Criticism

There is a difference between personal attacks and constructive criticism. It takes wisdom to know the difference. Thankfully, Nehemiah knew that his opponents' complaints had no merit. How did he know? Include some details from the passage in your answer. For some help, check out [Constable's Notes](#) available for free online at netbible.org.



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Nehemiah 4:1–9

The words of Nehemiah’s prayer may seem harsh, but they represent a type of prayer common in the psalms. They’re called *imprecatory psalms*. They sound almost vindictive, but they represent the speaker’s deep trust in God. Read the article, “*What are the imprecatory psalms?*” at gotquestions.com and summarize what you learn. How did Nehemiah demonstrate his faith in God through his prayer?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader can endure criticism and opposition by . . .*

Not all criticism is of the devil. Not all criticism is destructive criticism. But every leader has to measure whether a criticism is worth listening to. You have to determine the source plus the motive of the source. You have to listen with discernment. Sometimes, criticism is the very best thing you can respond to. Sometimes, it is to be completely ignored.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Knocked Down, but Not Knocked Out

Nehemiah 4:1–9



Correlation: Enduring Criticism

Nehemiah's experience is common for any leader, but Christian leaders, in their mission to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole world, will face a unique kind of opposition—the same kind of opposition that ultimately crucified Jesus and beheaded Paul.

Paul knew of Jesus' death, and he likely knew he was bound to face the same outcome. Yet he persevered through the resistance. In [2 Corinthians 4:8–9](#), he explained the mind-set that allowed him to withstand such intense resistance. Based on these verses, fill in the spaces below that reflect Paul's attitude worth modeling.

We are: _____

But not: _____

We are: _____

But not: _____

We are: _____

But not: _____

We are: _____

But not: _____

According to [4:10](#), what is a key result of Christian suffering? How does this truth offer encouragement amid seasons of opposition?



Knocked Down, but Not Knocked Out

Nehemiah 4:1–9

Later in Paul's life, he went to Rome—the city where he would later die—as a prisoner. During this season, he practiced what he preached in 2 Corinthians as death loomed ever closer. According to [Acts 28:20](#), what reason did Paul give for his imprisonment?

“I believe that the hope of Israel—the Messiah—has already come.” For Paul, the hope of Jesus Christ eclipsed any human opposition he would face in this life. Those who hold fast to this truth as Paul did will be prepared to endure *any* criticism or opposition.



Application: Applying Criticism

Maintaining a vibrant relationship with God is essential to enduring criticism. Yet criticism will still come, and when it does, pause and follow these three steps Pastor Chuck Swindoll developed based on Nehemiah's example.

1. *Realize that it is impossible to lead without facing opposition or criticism.*
2. *Respond to opposition and criticism by praying first.*
3. *Recognize that you may need to follow prayer with decisive action.*



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Knocked Down, but Not Knocked Out

Nehemiah 4:1–9

Each person has a different impulse when met with criticism. Some tend to completely reject the criticism along with the critic who offered it, while others try to change the critic's opinion by transforming into a people pleaser or by getting lost in their own work. Have you ever acted in these ways? Why are these kinds of behaviors tempting, but unfruitful?

How do you practically discern empty complaints from constructive criticism? How can you prepare to emulate Nehemiah the next time you face criticism or opposition?

Nehemiah didn't just pray. He prayed *and* acted. How do you sense the Holy Spirit urging you to act prayerfully on some criticism or opposition you may have recently received?



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Knocked Down, but Not Knocked Out

Nehemiah 4:1–9

Criticism is inevitable. So don't spend precious time considering how you can avoid it. Instead, focus on how you will respond *when*—not *if*—the opposition comes. Trust God. Pray to Him. And follow His leading. When you do so, you may occasionally be knocked down, but you will never be knocked out of serving Him and His purpose.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, give me the peace to accept that I will face criticism for my words, actions, and character. But also give me the wisdom to discern constructive criticism from undeserved opposition so I can grow to be a better disciple of Jesus Christ. Help me always to look to You—whether I face smooth sailing or choppy waters. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY SIX

Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23

Though they were at one time enthusiastic and energetic—very motivated—Nehemiah’s workers now grew weary and became discouraged. They lost their strength, their vision, their confidence, and even their security. But Nehemiah, overcoming his own discouragement, took up the task of curing their melancholy through a variety of God-directed means.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A HEALTHY community won’t go down easily. Occasionally, however, an infection afflicts one person, and before you know it, the illness has cascaded its way through the whole population. But if you catch the disease early enough, you can stop the infection before it spreads too far.

While this principle is true for physical health, the basic principle applies to *spiritual* health as well. And there is one particularly insidious infection that threatens to tear down any community—a family, a team, a church, a business:

Discouragement

Discouragement is a silent killer—one whose symptoms are often invisible to the naked eye. By the time you notice the signs of infection, you’re often too late to stop the rapid spread. So leaders must keep a watchful eye to identify the *causes* of discouragement. Only then can they apply the *cure* before the disease grips others.



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Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23



PREPARE YOUR HEART

How is your spiritual health today? It's all too easy to grow discouraged because life is *hard*. Relationships, finances, responsibilities, and physical health can all be sources of discouragement. You may feel a lack of strength, vision, confidence, or security today. Thankfully, God generously bestows such gifts upon His children. Offer this prayer as you prepare to turn to Nehemiah:

Father, I confess that I'm not immune to discouragement. I'm often unaware of what causes me to lose heart. As I open Your Word today, probe into my soul and show me what discourages me. I trust You, the Great Physician, to lift me up. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

One of the root causes of discouragement is *external criticism*. As Nehemiah and the people of Israel attempted to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, they stood in constant contact with virulent critique. The gentiles who lived in the regions of Jerusalem mocked this ragged crew of volunteers who attempted to fortify their city.

These critics offered comments like, “Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?” (*Nehemiah 4:2*) and, “That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!” (*4:3*). How could you *not* feel discouraged!

Thankfully, Nehemiah noticed the symptoms of discouragement early, and in *Nehemiah 4:9–23*, we see him act like a seasoned doctor, eradicating the infection from the community.



Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23



Observation: The Disease of Discouragement

Read *Nehemiah 4:9–23* two or three times using a different Bible translation each time. As you read and observe the text, get a sense of the emotion behind the words. Sympathize with the discouragement of the people. Feel Nehemiah’s words of encouragement resonate in your soul.

Identifying Discouragement’s Causes—Nehemiah 4:9–12

The workers’ discouragement grew evident when they lamented, “We will never be able to build the wall by ourselves” (*Nehemiah 4:10*). According to this verse, what two reasons did they give for thinking this?

1. _____
2. _____

According to *Nehemiah 4:11*, how did Nehemiah’s opponents plan to ramp up their opposition? How did the Israelites feel when they heard about this plan in *4:12*?

Applying Discouragement’s Cure—Nehemiah 4:13–23

Nehemiah knew that God was greater than the threats of the enemies. He also realized that he needed to be actively involved in carrying out God’s plan. So he “placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas” (*Nehemiah 4:13*).



Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23

Nehemiah wanted his people to be prepared for an attack from their enemies, but he also needed them to remain confident in God. What encouragement did he offer the people in [Nehemiah 4:14](#)? Summarize Nehemiah's exhortation in your own words.

Nehemiah first handled discouragement by pointing people to God, yet as we see time and again in this book, Nehemiah was a man of prayer *and* preparation—of faith *and* action. According to [4:15–18](#), what practical steps did Nehemiah take to address the concerns of the people?

Nehemiah recognized that the wall was vulnerable to attack. With the workers spread out across the whole perimeter of Jerusalem, even a small force of soldiers could fight its way into the city with little resistance. According to [4:19–20](#), how did Nehemiah prepare the people to handle this potential threat? Take special note of his refrain of hope at the end of [4:20](#).



Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23

According to [Nehemiah 4:21–23](#), what additional measures did Nehemiah take to ensure the wall was completed in a timely and safe manner?

The opposition was so great that, before long, discouragement set in. No matter how hard Nehemiah tried to correct the problems, they just got worse. They multiplied and magnified as time went on. Leaders must be prepared to deal with a problem like that.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Diagnosing Discouragement

Interpreting a passage of Scripture involves uncovering gems of spiritual truth after digging through the text through observation.¹ This account is instructive as it teaches followers of Jesus across time how to diagnose and treat the disease of discouragement.

What factors ultimately caused discouragement among the Israelites building the wall? What had the people lost in terms of personal motivation, team morale, or faith in God?



Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23

What did the Israelites' behavior reveal about their faith?

In what ways did Nehemiah rally his disheartened workers? In what ways did these *cures* correspond with the *causes* of discouragement? In other words, how does strengthening faith weaken discouragement?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader can combat discouragement by . . . because . . .*

Just before the door of a new opportunity opens all the way, I seem to slump into discouragement. I'm hesitant to move through the door. Yet God graciously boots me in the seat of my pants, and I find myself on the other side rejoicing. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23



Correlation: The Disciples' Discouragement

As Jesus' original disciples walked with their Teacher, their morale resembled a leaf in the wind. In one moment, their faith soared, and in the next, it seemed to blow away with the faintest breeze of opposition.

In one particular instance, Jesus drew a crowd of 5,000 men plus their families. When he saw the people and their spiritual and physical hunger, “he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd” ([Mark 6:34](#)). The disciples knew Jesus could meet the people's spiritual needs, but they grew discouraged when they considered their physical needs.

According to [Mark 6:35–37](#), what reasons did the disciples give for their discouragement?

Despite the squabbling of His disciples, Jesus wouldn't allow Himself to be discouraged like His students. According to [6:38–44](#), how did Jesus meet the physical needs of the crowd?



Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23

What kind of attitude would have remedied the disciples' discouragement at the outset of this episode?

The disciples neglected an essential principle of the Christian life: God “is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think” (*Ephesians 3:20*). No source of discouragement is too big for God to handle. And this truth is essential to the application of *Nehemiah 4:9–23*.



Application: Defeating Discouragement

Pastor Chuck Swindoll identified five common cures that can heal a community of some of the worst cases of discouragement:

1. *Direct people's attention to the Lord.* He is the only source of true security.
2. *Unify people around the same goal.* Clear vision keeps you from losing your way.
3. *Encourage people to maintain balance.* Each task must receive the attention it deserves.
4. *Provide people with a rallying point.* A community that gathers often stays strong.
5. *Occupy people with service to others.* As you meet others' needs, you build confidence.



Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23

As you consider your neighborhood, your workplace, your church, do you sense discouragement infecting your community? What do you think is causing these feelings?

Which of the five points above can act as the cure for the discouragement caused by your specific circumstances? What practical steps can you take to apply this cure to your own life and so set an example for others?

While discouragement is a pandemic in our world today, we can rise above it. Jesus Christ offers His followers abundant joy and everlasting hope. Though you may feel sick with discouragement, one day, those feelings will be cured for good.

Take heart in that truth today.



Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I want to lead a passionate life of service to You. Yet I know when discouragement plagues me, I feel that passion faltering. Give me the wisdom to identify any causes of discouragement in my soul. Give me the faith to allow You to treat me before my poor attitude infects others. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY SEVEN

Love, Loans . . . and the Money Crunch

Nehemiah 5:1–13

God is pleased when we handle our money wisely. The wise handling of our saving, our investing, our spending, our giving . . . God is pleased with that.
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT comes to mind when you hear the word *money*? The generous philanthropist who gives millions to fill the bellies of hungry children? The greedy miser who lives to line his pockets with more and more cash? Perhaps your thoughts about money are more personal: saving for that one special treasure, dealing with ever-increasing inflation, or paying next month's bills!

Yes, money acts as the fuel for both greed *and* generosity, to meet both wants *and* needs. It's one of the most powerful tools in the world. But money is just that . . . a tool.

Since God is King of creation, our money isn't truly ours. It's His. We're simply stewards—no matter how much God has allotted to you. Some use their wealth wisely, while others waste it.

So how can we faithfully use the money God has given us?

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will wrestle with this relevant question by exploring Nehemiah's godly money-management. Every coin he spent and saved reflected his faith in God.



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S07
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Love, Loans . . . and the Money Crunch

Nehemiah 5:1–13



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Regardless of the number you see when you look at your bank account, you are truly spiritually rich because of the love and grace God has lavished upon you. Offer this prayer of gratitude before you open His Word today:

Father, I know I'm often tempted to grab for more, but I know You have already given me everything I truly need. Remind me of this truth today. Spur me on to use the wealth You have given me to serve You and others. In Jesus' generous name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Nehemiah traveled from Susa to Jerusalem with a single goal in mind: to rebuild the city's walls. His resolve and determination remained steady throughout the project. Sadly, the same could not be said about his fellow Israelites.

The morale of Nehemiah's workers rose and fell quickly like a balloon in a violent storm. In one moment, Nehemiah would offer a powerful prayer before the people, and they would soar with confidence in their God. And in the next, a silly insult from a gentile bystander would cause them to fall in despair.

In *Nehemiah 5:1–13*, another gust of discouragement threatened to sink the morale of the builders: *money*.



Observation: Financial Fault Lines

Nehemiah 5:1 states, “Some of the men and their wives raised a cry of protest . . .” The people of Jerusalem were ready to go on strike! Why? We find out in *5:1–13*. As you read these verses, identify the different groups of speakers, and take note of what they say. Pay special attention to the emotion behind their words.



Love, Loans . . . and the Money Crunch

Nehemiah 5:1–13

The Workers' Protest—Nehemiah 5:2–5

Nehemiah's fellow builders had good reason to protest the work on the wall. In *Nehemiah 5:2–5*, they offered three specific complaints for their faltering morale. Record each complaint in the spaces below.

First (5:2): _____

Second (5:3–4): _____

Third (5:5): _____

The Leader's Response—Nehemiah 5:6–13

How did Nehemiah *feel* when he heard the complaints of his people in *Nehemiah 5:6*?

For good reason, Nehemiah didn't immediately act on his feelings. Rather, "after thinking it over," he addressed the problem directly, with a perfect blend of wisdom and courage. What specific group did Nehemiah address in *5:7*? _____

In your own words, summarize the main points of Nehemiah's rebuke in *5:7–9*. What specific behaviors did Nehemiah condemn?



Love, Loans . . . and the Money Crunch

Nehemiah 5:1–13

According to [Nehemiah 5:11](#), to what specific action did Nehemiah call these offenders?

What promise did Nehemiah's audience make in [5:12](#) after hearing their leader's convicting words? According to [5:13](#), what did Nehemiah warn would happen if they did not keep their promise?

You know when you ought to get mad? When God's Word is broken. That ought to make you so mad . . . mad at anyone who breaks it, even yourself. It ought to make you righteously indignant that God's beautiful pattern is violated. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Malicious Money Management

Widespread famine. Burdensome taxes. Soaring inflation. *Who ever said the Bible is irrelevant to our world!* If these kinds of troubles deflate our faith in God today, then it's no wonder they did the same to the Israelites in Nehemiah's day. In interpretation, we look at the circumstances of these historical figures to glean evergreen theological principles based on their thoughts, words, and deeds.¹

In [Nehemiah 5:6](#), the chief builder plainly states, "When I heard their complaints, I was very angry." From a basic reading, the reason behind Nehemiah's anger seems obvious: the nobles and officials were exploiting their Jewish brothers and sisters.



Love, Loans . . . and the Money Crunch

Nehemiah 5:1–13

While this is a practical and valid reason to be upset, there was a more *theological* reason behind Nehemiah's righteous indignation. Read [Exodus 22:25](#); [Leviticus 25:35–40](#); and [Deuteronomy 23:19–20](#). What specific behaviors did the Torah prohibit in these passages? How did the nobles and officials in Nehemiah's day fail to heed this instruction?

How did the nobles' and officials' handling of money contrast with that of Nehemiah? See specifically [Nehemiah 5:10](#), and if you want to look ahead, check out [5:17–18](#). What does their behavior reveal about their faith in God—or lack thereof?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader handles money wisely by . . . because . . .*



Love, Loans . . . and the Money Crunch

Nehemiah 5:1–13

When an error, omission, or sin surfaces, determine to stop the wrong. Make specific plans to correct the wrong immediately, regardless of the cost. And when you declare your plans for correction in a promise before God, realize the seriousness of your promise.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Cash and the Kingdom

Jesus knew that thoughts and worries about money assaulted the minds of His listeners—both then and now—so he had a *lot* to say on the topic. His teaching often feels cold and challenging, while remaining warm and encouraging.

What difficult words did Jesus offer in [Matthew 6:24](#)? Considering these verses, whom did Nehemiah ultimately serve? And to whom were the nobles and officials truly enslaved?

The apostle Paul expounds upon these words in [1 Timothy 6:10](#). Based on a *careful* reading of this verse, what is one idol that causes people to wander from “true faith.” How did this idol lead Jerusalem’s nobles and officials to treat their Jewish brothers and sisters so detestably?



Love, Loans . . . and the Money Crunch

Nehemiah 5:1–13

Picking up where He left off, Jesus went on to match conviction with comfort. What did He say regarding the topics of worry and needs in [Matthew 6:31–33](#)? To what extent did the people in Nehemiah's day neglect this truth?

He will give you everything you need. How easy it is to forget these powerful words! Yet this reality sets the foundation for a Christian's wise and faithful handling of money.



Application: Wise Wealth

By looking at the negative example of the Jewish nobles and officials and the positive example of Nehemiah, Pastor Chuck Swindoll determined four application points on the wise handling of wealth:

1. *God is pleased with wise handling of our money.* Realize that everything you own ultimately belongs to Him.
2. *Prolonged personal sin takes a heavy toll on the public work of God.* Resist those private temptations.
3. *Correcting wrong in our lives begins with facing it head-on.* Rebuke sinful behavior when it surfaces—both your own sin and, with all gentleness, the sin of others.
4. *Correction is carried out most effectively when we make a promise to God.* Remember to let your yes be yes and your no be no ([Matthew 5:37](#)).



Love, Loans . . . and the Money Crunch

Nehemiah 5:1–13

As you consider how you've spent your money lately, would you say you've stewarded your money wisely? Evaluate your most recent bank statement or last month's budget. What percentage of your money did you spend on your *needs* versus your *wants*? How much did you give to meet *others'* needs?

What steps can you take to please God more fully with your wealth? Perhaps you can sell or donate some of your excess possessions. Maybe you feel led to say no to that one special gadget, trip, or piece of jewelry you've been saving for. God even calls some to downgrade their homes or cars. These choices create more financial flexibility that allows people to support churches, missionaries, or Christian nonprofits. Write down in the space below some ideas of practical steps you can take.

God not only smiles upon the wise handling of our *treasures* but of our *time* and *talents* as well. With these two additional categories in mind, look again at Pastor Chuck's four application points. What would it look like for you to use the time and talents God has graciously given you to bless others and to be a force for *good* in the world?



Love, Loans . . . and the Money Crunch

Nehemiah 5:1–13

There's no question . . . money is a *sensitive* topic. That's why Scripture addresses it head-on! Nehemiah's strong words may feel personally challenging or convicting. But that means the Word of God is doing its job. As the apostle Paul said, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right" (2 *Timothy* 3:16).

So don't lose heart! Remember that every good and perfect gift comes from our gracious God above (*James* 1:17). Let's give those gifts back to Him in a posture of gratitude and worship and watch Him use our wealth as a tool to impact the world for good.



A FINAL PRAYER

As you wrap up today's study, write your own prayer in the space below:

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY EIGHT

How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

As soon as Nehemiah accepted that appointment as governor, he was hit with the same four major areas of testing that come with every promotion: privileges, policies, projects, and—as always—people. What was the key to his success in surviving this onslaught? In one word: integrity.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

YOU'RE climbing the vertical face of a rocky mountainside. Slowly, you ascend, one careful move at a time. As you firmly set your feet and push yourself up, your hands clutch onto newly discovered crevices in the stone. Looking up toward the sun, you take a deep breath. Then you reset your feet and repeat . . . again and again.

After some time, you look down to find that the once massive trees now appear small. The sensation of accomplishment floods your heart. Fresh adrenaline pumps through your veins and propels with fresh energy. *What a thrill!*

Yet, with each move, sweat makes your fingertips grow slicker, and fatigue makes your legs feel shakier. The ever-increasing tug of gravity pulls harder and harder. You realize the higher you go, the easier it is to fall . . . and the *harder* you'll hit the ground if you do.



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S08
1

How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

The journey of a rock climber is much like that of a leader. The ascent into leadership is *thrilling*. Yet as a leader's influence increases, so do the temptations that can result in moral, personal, or organizational failure. And when a leader slips, the consequences of that hard fall can damage not only the life of the leader but also the lives of everyone he or she touches.

The best climbers spend countless hours training and preparing to avoid the fall so they can stand tall and unscathed at the mountain's summit. Leaders should prepare well too. This *Searching the Scriptures* study acts as a part of your training regimen to prepare you to keep moving even when the weight of responsibilities feels too heavy to bear.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Even the most noble leaders will find their grip slipping when they face the temptations that come with the perks of increased influence, such as fame, wealth, and power. Yet only those whose hearts are aligned with God's will be able to use their influence as a force for good. Say this prayer to draw close to Him before you open His Word today:

Father, I have seen countless men and women fall to the temptations that come with leadership. Yet I want to live a life that glorifies you—regardless of the scope of my influence. Through my study of the Scriptures today, cultivate in me a heart of integrity so I can serve You and others well. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Nehemiah 5 is a study in contrast:

- Good people skills vs. poor people skills
- Generous money management vs. greedy money management
- Strong leadership vs. weak leadership



How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

Read [Nehemiah 5:1–5](#) and summarize what made Nehemiah’s builders so upset. How did the wealthy and powerful Jews misuse their influence?

The clout of leadership proved too great for these affluent Israelites, and the temptation to abuse their privileges caused them to fall and subjected them to Nehemiah’s firm rebuke.

In [5:14–19](#), Nehemiah’s actions support his words. When this chief builder was promoted to governor of Jerusalem, he displayed how a leader can resist the temptation of increased influence and so use the benefits of leadership to serve others.



Observation: Nehemiah’s Promotion

Pastor Chuck Swindoll always begins his study of Scripture with observation. He reads a passage slowly and repeatedly until he can identify every detail of the passage. Read [Nehemiah 5:14–19](#) in this way. As you read, ask yourself one central question: “What does this passage say?”¹

What promotion did Nehemiah receive in [5:14a](#)?



HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

According to [Nehemiah 5:14b](#), what perk did someone in Nehemiah's position generally receive? What did Nehemiah do with this benefit?

According to [5:15](#), how did the previous people who held Nehemiah's position act?

According to [5:16–17](#), how did Nehemiah's behavior differ from that of his predecessors?



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How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

At two points in this passage, Nehemiah identified *why* he acted the way he did in light of his promotion. What reasons did he offer in *Nehemiah 5:15* and *5:18*?

Nowhere does Nehemiah's heart reveal itself more beautifully than in the midst of his promotion. His relationship to the Lord was so unshaken that, when temptation arrived, Nehemiah said, "How could I do that? My walk with God will be affected. I dare not yield."
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Threat of Influence

What specific kinds of temptations assaulted Nehemiah as soon as he received his promotion to governor? How have these kinds of temptations historically affected leaders or those of great influence?



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Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING
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STUDY

How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

Why did Nehemiah prefer to feed his Jewish brothers and sisters using food from his own stores rather than the food stipend offered by the Persian government? What does this behavior reveal about his faith in God? For some help wrestling with these questions, look at [Constable's Notes](#) available online for free at [netbible.org](#).

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader handles increased influence well by . . . because . . .*

The promotion of every child of God occurs because of the Lord's goodness. Promotion doesn't come because a person is in the right place at the right time. Promotion doesn't come because a person is gifted or educated or experienced or well-traveled or well-trained. Promotion comes primarily because God in His goodness says to you, "I wish to exalt you at this time." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19



Correlation: Humble Exaltation

When it came to topics of leadership and influence, Jesus' teaching contradicted the common “wisdom” of the world. According to [Matthew 20:25](#), how do the rulers of the world tend to use their influence?

Conversely, how are citizens of the kingdom of heaven to use their influence, according to [20:26–27](#)? Why does this behavior seem counterintuitive? Why is it ultimately better?

How did the Jewish leaders of Nehemiah's day act like the rulers of the world Jesus described? By contrast, how did Nehemiah exemplify the values of the kingdom of heaven?



How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

Reflecting on the life of Jesus, the apostle Paul wrote in *Philippians 2:6–8*:

*Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

Jesus had all the influence imaginable, yet He forsook the privileges and humbled Himself. As a result, “God elevated him to the place of highest honor” (*Philippians 2:9*). And God will so exalt us when we use what He has given us to humbly serve others.



Application: The Products of Promotion

Based on his study of *Nehemiah 5:14–19*, Pastor Chuck identified four areas in which a leader or a person of great influence might be tempted to act in a self-serving manner rather than in a selfless, God-honoring way. Nehemiah showed integrity in his handling of each of these four realms of leadership.

1. Privileges. *Don't abuse them.*
2. Policies. *Don't neglect them.*
3. Projects. *Don't ignore them.*
4. People. *Don't forget them.*



HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING
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STUDY

How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

Have you ever received a major promotion or some other kind of personal exaltation? In what ways did you see God working to offer this gift to you? And in what ways did you use your expanded influence to serve Him and His purposes?

In what ways do leaders in your cultural context tend to compromise their integrity and abuse the perks of their position? Have you ever felt tempted to misuse your influence in this way? What gospel-centered truth can you recall to yourself to help you resist such temptation?

Certain elements of leadership are simply unavoidable. A leader must work within the systems of his or her organization. A leader must stay on top of the role's responsibilities. A leader must maintain healthy relationships with every member of the team. Which areas of leadership do you tend to avoid? What would it look like for you to face these elements of your role in a Christlike manner?



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Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING
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STUDY

How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I admit that the temptation to use the privileges of my influence to serve myself over others is great. During these moments, help me be like Nehemiah. Give me strength to use my influence as a force for good. Wrap the cord of integrity around me and never let it go. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY NINE

Operation Intimidation

Nehemiah 6

I'm convinced that the number one enemy of unity is the tongue—not drink, not drugs, not poverty, not even a weak pulpit. It's the tongue. Using words well requires wisdom.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE conventional “wisdom” of the world often tries to downplay the damage words can cause. Using expressions like, “Sticks and stone may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” seem to offer a sense of security. *Remember that talk is cheap, and you'll be okay!*

Sadly, this is an illusion. Words are not purely innocent. Scripture paints the true picture about the danger of the tongue: “And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself” ([James 3:6](#)). *Strong words!*

Yes, mere words can set someone's life ablaze in a tempest so fierce that it consumes everything . . . absolutely everything . . . and Satan uses this fact to his advantage.

After all, with the simple question, “Did God really say . . . ?” the sly serpent sparked the fire of sin—a fire that still burns in the hearts of humanity this very day ([Genesis 3:1](#)). Like their forefather Satan, enemies of God will do *anything* to stop His work in the world. This certainly includes the crafty misuse of words through gossip, deception, manipulation, and intimidation.



Operation Intimidation

Nehemiah 6



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Nehemiah's firm faith equipped him to extinguish his foes' lies with the truth of God. He could only do this because of his close relationship with God. Say this prayer to grow closer to Him today:

Father, I recognize that Your enemies want to stop me from serving You with my whole heart. Through my study of Your Word, give me the discernment and the determination to hold fast to Your truth, even amid the most searing attacks. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Nehemiah prayed, planned, and worked for several months to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. And in [Nehemiah 6](#), his goal was finally in sight! Nehemiah's team had completed building and fortifying the walls. One last step remained: to "set up the doors in the gates" ([Nehemiah 6:1](#)).

All throughout Nehemiah's journey, Jerusalem's local gentile rivals attempted to set up roadblocks every step of the way. Now that Nehemiah could clearly see the final destination, these gentiles ramped up their opposition. In [Nehemiah 6](#), we read about a series of attacks and Nehemiah's faithful and wise response to each plot.



Observation: The Power of Speech

Up to this point in the narrative, Nehemiah's conflict with his gentile adversaries has felt like an intense sword fight. The gentiles attempted to swing at Nehemiah, and he dodged it. They'd strike again, and he'd block. Swipe and deflect. As the wall neared completion, the critics leveled a volley of strikes in one final push to defeat Nehemiah.



HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK
Timeless Lessons on Leadership
STUDY NINE

Operation Intimidation
Nehemiah 6

As you read [Nehemiah 6:2–19](#), fill in the chart below. In the lefthand column, describe each plot Nehemiah’s critics used in an attempt to stop him from completing the wall. Then, in the righthand column, record how Nehemiah responded to these attacks with faith and wisdom.

Verses	Critics’ Attack	Nehemiah’s Response
<i>Nehemiah</i> 6:2–4		
<i>Nehemiah</i> 6:5–9		
<i>Nehemiah</i> 6:10–14		
<i>Nehemiah</i> 6:16–19		

Despite the effort of his opponents, Nehemiah emerged victorious: “So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated” ([Nehemiah 6:15–16a](#)).



Operation Intimidation

Nehemiah 6



Interpretation: Violent Words

Nehemiah's enemies used verbal weapons like gossip, deception, manipulation, and intimidation. In what ways did these rivals distort the truth? How did Nehemiah confront the lies with the truth?

The schemes of Nehemiah's enemies carried *real risk*. Nehemiah could have lost his position, his own life, or the lives of the people under his charge. How was Nehemiah able to discern these threats? What did his actions reveal about his walk with God?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader can withstand verbal attacks by . . . because . . .*



Operation Intimidation
Nehemiah 6

It is the most thrilling experience in the world to watch God come to your rescue when you've been helpless. Ever experience that? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

 **Correlation: Protection from Temptation**

Satan has been using the same playbook since the beginning of time. The tactic he used against Adam and Eve was the same he used against Nehemiah . . . and the same he used against Jesus, the very Son of God. Read an account of this scene in [Matthew 4:1–11](#), and fill in the chart below as you read.

Verses	Satan's Attack	Jesus' Response
<i>Matthew</i> 4:3–4		
<i>Matthew</i> 4:5–7		
<i>Matthew</i> 4:8–10		



Operation Intimidation

Nehemiah 6

In what way did Satan distort the truth to Jesus? How did Jesus match the deception with the truth of Scripture?

Even though Satan failed to sway Jesus, he doesn't stop in his endeavor to lead Jesus' followers into sin today. The apostle Paul wrote about this battle in [Ephesians 6:11](#) when he said, "Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil." According to [6:16](#), what attribute is essential to block Satan's fiery arrows? How does this specific attribute allow a believer to extinguish searing verbal attacks?

It is impossible to do the will of God and walk by faith without attack. How do you withstand the attack? The answer is discernment, a sensitive spirit to God, and a teachable, willing heart. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Operation Intimidation

Nehemiah 6



Application: Listening with Wisdom

Any servant of God will, like Nehemiah, eventually face the hot fires sparked by the tongue. Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers three steps for extinguishing the flames before they spread too far and cause too much damage:

1. *Calmly deny the charge.* A loving rebuke is always the best response.
2. *Put the blame where it rightly belongs.* Stop the rumor mill with facts.
3. *Take your pain to God.* Find comfort in Him who knows the truth.

Have you ever been the victim of deception, manipulation, gossip, or intimidation? How did God carry you through this season and ultimately carry out His plan? How did you witness the truth overcome the lies?

Even after a verbal conflict is resolved, you may continue to feel the burn of the words. How can the God of truth treat these wounds and cool the sting? What are some practical steps you can take to bring your pain to God and allow Him to begin the process of healing you?



Operation Intimidation

Nehemiah 6

Passages like [Nehemiah 6](#) offer an excellent opportunity for self-examination. How have you been using your words lately? Have they been more honest or dishonest? Have they been helping or hindering the work of Christ in the world? In what ways can you use your words in an ever-increasingly God-honoring way?

Most of the time, your body will heal from physical wounds, but words might cause emotional damage that stays with you for the rest of your life. Do you carry those scars with you today? Bring them to God, our Great Physician. Allow Him to apply the cooling salve of truth to your soul, and experience the relief that only He can offer.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, forgive me for the times I have burned others with my words. I know that others will inevitably do the same to me. When they do, prepare me to match any lies with Your truth so Your good work in this world won't be hindered. Give me the wisdom and faith to do this well. I ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.



HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY TEN

Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12

Nehemiah made plans to revive the authority of the Scriptures in the minds of all the citizens of Jerusalem. The testimony of God's Word had been silent far too long. The beginnings of spiritual revival were now taking place. And the potential for revival is always present in our own lives, by the way, if we just know where to look.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WIELDING a hammer, a nail, and a piece of parchment, the ex-monk marched up to All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany. As he pounded his *Ninety-five Theses* into the church's door, Martin Luther publicly confronted the Pope's abuse of power and mishandling of God's Word.

The church had lost its way, and Luther intended to set it back on the road to righteousness. His act of protest on October 31, 1517, sparked the Protestant Reformation and the return to the truth that people become right with God by grace *alone* . . . through faith *alone* . . . in Jesus Christ *alone*.

Yet a spark without kindling will fizzle out. So Luther offered more than a single piece of parchment. He pointed the church back to the source of truth that the papacy had misused for so long, and he spread the fire of the reformation by putting the Bible into the hands of the people.

Previously, German Christians couldn't make sense of their Latin-language Bibles. But in 1522, Luther published a translation of the New Testament in the common German tongue, and the Bible that was once chained, literally, to the pulpit was set free. Now *anyone* could access the truth. In the following years, the flames of revival swept across Europe, and people turned to Christ like never before.



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Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12

The work of Luther in sparking and spreading the Protestant Reformation demonstrates two realities about revivals:

1. God's Word is clearly and broadly proclaimed.
2. God's people are energetically and spiritually mobilized.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will turn back the wheel of time to see these two principles in action in an ancient reformation—one where the great leader Nehemiah sparked a vibrant, worshipful revival among the people of God who had drifted from Him for far too long.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Often, revivals begin in small ways—in the heart of one individual who has a deep desire to know God more fully, to love Him more deeply, to serve Him more passionately. Pray that God would stir your own heart as you open His Word:

Father, as You remind me of the truth of Your Word, draw me closer to You. Spark a revival in my heart that will spread to those around me so we can be a community that loves and serves You well. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

At first glance, the book of Nehemiah appears to tell a story about a community rallying together to build a wall. While this is true, the book addresses other important themes too. That's why the book doesn't end at [Nehemiah 6:15](#): "So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun." In fact, Nehemiah completed the wall just about halfway through the book!

Nehemiah cared about the physical safety of the city of Jerusalem, but what mattered more to him was the spiritual security of the Israelites' souls. In [Nehemiah 8:1–12](#), Nehemiah traded his blueprints for a scroll and went to work rebuilding the spiritual walls of the people of God.



Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12



Observation: A Revival in Jerusalem

As you read and observe [Nehemiah 8:1–12](#), place yourself in the sandals of one of the workers in Jerusalem . . .

For the past several weeks, you and your family have been working from dawn until dusk to rebuild your allotted portion of the wall. Your muscles are sore. Your body is bruised. Your hands are calloused. And your soul is relieved to be done with the job.

Yet one morning, your neighbor tells you everyone is gathering in the city square by the Water Gate. *Not more work!*

According to [8:1–2](#), who gathered together all the people, and why did he do it?

Proclamation of God's Word—Nehemiah 8:3–8

According to [Nehemiah 8:3](#), what happened that day at the city square?



Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12

As Ezra unfurls the scroll, you lean and listen in. *What's he reading? Some decree from Persia?* After a few moments, Ezra's words strike your heart as you realize what he's reading.

I recognize this. It's the law of Moses . . . the Word of the Lord!

From childhood, you've known the stories about Abraham and Moses and David. You've celebrated the Sabbath. You've even memorized a few prayers. But no one you've known has had access to the *whole* Law. As Ezra reads, you realize how much of God's story you hadn't known.

In reverence and awe, you stand. Waves of others rise with you ([Nehemiah 8:5](#)). When Ezra finishes reading, you and your brothers and sisters shout, "Amen! Amen!" and bow in worship to God ([8:6](#)).

Yet the revival is just getting started. According to [8:7–8](#), what essential role did the Levites play in this revival?

Mobilization of God's People—Nehemiah 8:9–12

Not only did you just *hear* more of the Word than you had ever heard before, but you also now *understand* it more than you ever thought possible. But in an instant, your shining excitement fades under the shadow of guilt and shame as you realize all the ways you've failed to obey God.

According to [Nehemiah 8:9–11](#), how did Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites provide comfort to the people?



Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12

According to [Nehemiah 8:12](#), how did the people respond to the exhortation of the spiritual leaders?

Go and celebrate! When you hear these words, you sigh in relief. Now that you have access to God's Word, you can know Him and serve Him better than you ever had before. You smile, stand up, and join the celebration.



Interpretation: Scripture and Revival

The public proclamation of Scripture resuscitated the spiritual life of a community that had been lifeless for decades. Why is hearing (or reading), understanding, and applying the Scriptures essential to the Christian life? What would a walk with God lack without His Word?



Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12

The people of Jerusalem wept after hearing the proclamation of the Word of God because they realized they had failed to keep His commandments. Despite this reality, why did Nehemiah and the other leaders want the people instead to rejoice? For some help, check out [Constable's Notes](#) available for free at [netbible.org](#).

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader shows concern for others' spiritual lives by . . . because . . .*

We must have balance. The people of Jerusalem had emotion—spontaneous emotion. They expressed their love and praise to God, not caring, thinking only of the Lord God and of how much they loved Him. But at the same time, there was the teaching ministry of the Word. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Another Revival in Jerusalem

Hundreds of years after Nehemiah's death, *another* revival took place in Jerusalem. A few weeks after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven. But He promised not to leave His followers alone. He would give them the Holy Spirit.



Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12

The arrival of the Spirit prompted the apostle Peter to open the Scriptures to explain to his Jewish brothers and sisters the eternal significance of these events. The climax of the sermon is recorded in [Acts 2:32–39](#). What truths about Jesus did Peter proclaim based on his exposition of God’s Word in [2:34–35](#)?

No revival is complete without the mobilization of God’s people. According to [2:41–47](#), how did the community respond to Peter’s sermon? What similarities does this scene share with the revival recorded in [Nehemiah 8:1–12](#)?

We are in a famine. Frankly, it’s difficult to find faithful exposition of the Scriptures today. I do not say that out of judgment. I say that out of an ache in my heart. People all over the world are hungry for the teaching of God’s Word. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12



Application: Personal Revival

Studying Scripture isn't an end in itself. God's Word not only informs the head but touches the heart and instructs the hands. This is why application is essential to Bible study.¹ Nehemiah knew that the people of Jerusalem needed to understand and apply the Scriptures, and Pastor Chuck Swindoll demonstrates how we experience revival when we do the same:

- No life is complete without a spiritual dimension.
- No spiritual dimension is complete without scriptural input.
- No scriptural input is complete without personal obedience.
- No personal obedience is complete without great rejoicing.

Which of the four reminders above is especially important for you in your current season of life?

Rejoicing is a practice and a privilege, a duty and a delight, the fuel and the destination. How can you work at the discipline of rejoicing to ensure your spiritual life doesn't grow cold?



Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12

God wants His people to live vibrant lives. Yet when the fire dims, revival is necessary. Are you in need of personal revival today? Scripture will be the spark. Obedience will be the fire. And your life will offer a warm glow of joy that will draw others to God.



A FINAL PRAYER

As you close your time in God's Word, write your own prayer in the space below:

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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S10
9

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY ELEVEN

The Fine Art of Insight

Nehemiah 8:13–18

You can have a knowledge of Bible facts. Up in your head, you can have it. You can spend decades in a Bible-teaching church and have no insight. You can have truth spelled out in a teaching fashion, systematically, book by book, verse by verse, and not gain insight. Insight comes in a different way.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IMAGINE awaking up one morning with a new ache in your lower back. You try to sit up, but your body won't bend that way. You slowly wiggle yourself out of bed and creep to your phone to call your doctor. After you finish listing the symptoms—that seem to increase by the minute—she says, “I'm referring you to a specialist. He's one of the best in the country!” *Great!*

You call the orthopedist and start to give the rundown of your symptoms again. After a few seconds, he interrupts you. The pain should go away on its own. No treatment needed. *Great!*

Yet after a few days, not only is the pain far greater than it was before, but it has spread to your upper back and to your neck, too. So you reach out to the orthopedist again. This time, he admits he made a mistake in the initial diagnosis. *Not great!*

What happened here? Though this top doctor possessed all the knowledge needed to help you, he failed to demonstrate *insight*—failed to put his knowledge into action. Without taking time to understand your symptoms, lifestyle, and medical history, he couldn't accurately diagnose the problem and then prescribe an appropriate treatment plan.



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The Fine Art of Insight

Nehemiah 8:13–18

Insight is an essential element for the healthy Christian life. With insight, we respond to what we learn from Scripture to live in a way that resembles Christ and glorifies God. This *Searching the Scriptures* study will reveal how you can put your Bible knowledge into action to lead a godly life.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Gaining insight requires hard work, steady patience, and a willing spirit. Yet you will never gain insight by sheer effort alone. *True* insight always comes from God alone, and He graciously offers it to us to spur us on to Christlike living. Say this prayer, asking God to give you insight as you open the Scriptures today:

Father, I need You to show me the right way to live. I need You to give me insight. As I look to the example of Nehemiah, help me put into action my knowledge of Your Word so I can master the art of insight. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The book of Nehemiah is about *reconstructing* the walls of Jerusalem and *re instructing* the people who lived within the walls. For the first half of the account, Nehemiah mobilized Jerusalem's citizens to complete the walls. He then turned his focus to eternal matters.

Along with Ezra the scribe, the priests, and the Levites, Nehemiah instructed the people of Jerusalem in the law of Moses. For decades, the Israelites had been exiled from their home, and for many of them, this was their first substantial exposure to the Word of God.

How would they respond to what they learned? Let's turn to [Nehemiah 8:13–18](#) to find out!



The Fine Art of Insight

Nehemiah 8:13–18



Observation: The Pursuit of Insight

Read [Nehemiah 8:13–18](#) slowly and carefully. Then reread it, looking for details you may have missed initially. Repeat this process until you can't uncover any more details. If we don't clearly understand what Scripture says, we won't be able to glean insight from its teachings.¹

According to [8:13](#), why did the heads of the households gather around the priests, the Levites, and Ezra the scribe? Look at several different Bible translations to get a sense of the people's desire.

According to [8:14–15](#), what ancient Israelite custom did the present residents of Jerusalem newly discover based on their close reading of the Law of Moses?

How did the people respond in [8:16](#) to what they had learned?



The Fine Art of Insight

Nehemiah 8:13–18

According to [Nehemiah 8:17](#), what kind of attitude did the people assume as a result of these events?

Celebrating the Festival of Shelters didn't end the Israelites' journey toward insight. It was just the beginning. Each day of the weeklong feast, "Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God" ([Nehemiah 8:18](#)). The people were hungry to grow in their knowledge of God. And as they nourished themselves on His Word, they practiced the first step of gaining insight.



Interpretation: The Product of Insight

The arts of interpretation and insight are close companions. Without a proper understanding of the meaning of a passage of Scripture, we won't be able to appropriately respond to its teachings.

Look up [insight](#) in a dictionary or two and define it in your own words. What is the relationship between insight and knowledge? What role does God play in the giving of insight? For some help, look up [wisdom](#) in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* available for free at biblestudytools.org.

The Festival of Shelters was one of three Jewish festivals that required all male Jews to gather in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to God ([Deuteronomy 16:16](#)). This festival wasn't another routine gathering. It was one of the highlights of the year—a time for remembering God's promises and celebrating His faithfulness!



The Fine Art of Insight

Nehemiah 8:13–18

Read about the Festival of Shelters in [Leviticus 23:33–44](#). What specific event did this festival celebrate? Why is this festival an occasion for rejoicing—as we see [Nehemiah 8:17](#)?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader can gain insight by . . .*

There are three products of insight: personal effort despite difficulty, willingness to change despite tradition, and great rejoicing despite circumstances. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Perseverance of Insight

The Word of God tells the story of creation. The hero of this account is Jesus Christ. Every biblical book ultimately points to Him and His work as Redeemer and Lord. So without Him, every spiritual insight is incomplete.



The Fine Art of Insight

Nehemiah 8:13–18

Acts 8:26–40 tells of an Ethiopian eunuch who couldn't make sense of the book of Isaiah. The Holy Spirit immediately sent Philip to offer a generous dose of insight. According to *8:31*, what did the Ethiopian eunuch say when Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (*Acts 8:30*)?

Philip interpreted the passage from Isaiah and explained how it reveals "the Good News about Jesus" (*8:35*). How then did the Ethiopian eunuch respond in *8:36–38* to what he had learned?

In what ways does this passage overlap with *Nehemiah 8:13–18* in the demonstration of true spiritual insight?



The Fine Art of Insight

Nehemiah 8:13–18

God doesn't drop insight out of a cloud into your head. It comes from the Holy Spirit and through a sound understanding of the Bible. Every insightful Christian I've known has pored over this Book . . . many of them not even engaged in vocational Christian service.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: The Practice of Insight

Gaining insight is like mastering an art. You can't simply learn insight from reading a textbook. Rather, you must practice putting your knowledge into action under the right conditions. Pastor Chuck Swindoll identifies five conditions necessary for learning the fine art of insight:

- *It takes the right amount of time:* structured, scheduled, consistent
- *It takes the right people:* pastors, mentors, teachers
- *It takes the right attitude:* humility, teachability
- *It takes the right source:* God's Word
- *It takes the right response:* wholehearted obedience

Though true insight ultimately comes from the Holy Spirit, we must cooperate with Him as He enables us to let our knowledge flow from our heads to our hands. As you reflect on your own circumstances, which of the conditions above do you need to work on to deepen your insight?



The Fine Art of Insight

Nehemiah 8:13–18

The people of Jerusalem didn't gain their insight in isolation. No, they did it together! What role does the community of believers play in the cultivation of insight? What practical steps can you take to pursue insight with your local community of believers?

In the Christian life, it can be easy to become content with knowledge alone. Yet spiritual insight demands we put our knowledge of God, Jesus, and the Bible into action. What element of your Christian knowledge do you sense the Holy Spirit prompting you to put into action?

Practicing the art of insight is no simple task. It's a slow process, a difficult process. Yet to be able to put your knowledge of God into action to serve Him and others is one of God's greatest gifts. So keep working. Keep studying. Keep praying. And God, the giver of all insight, will guide you toward a life that honors Him.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving me Your Word—the most valuable source of insight. Help me understand Scripture better every day so I can know You more closely, love You more deeply, and serve You more passionately. I pray in the wonderfully profound name of Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY TWELVE

Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39

When you pray, keep these four elements in mind. Spend a period of time in praise, a period of time in thanksgiving, a period of time requesting of God specific things, and then a period of time committing to God the day that is before you.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ANY war camp must vigilantly guard the lines of communication. If a plan leaks, the consequences can be disastrous. So soldiers can't freely make phone calls or send text messages the way civilians can. They can, however, write *letters*. Letters are essential for both those stationed at war and their loved ones at home. They keep the flames of relationship glowing.

Sometimes, families will send dozens of letters without ever receiving a response. The wait is agonizing as they wonder how their friend, their child, their spouse, or their parent is doing. After months of daily checking the mailbox, imagine how light their once-heavy hearts must feel when they finally reach in to find an envelope with the soldier's handwriting on the front.

Sometimes, God is like that caring parent, eager to hear from His children who are far from their heavenly home. Prayer is often like a wartime letter—our lifeline that allows us to praise Him for His holiness, to thank Him for His graciousness, to ask Him to meet our needs, and to commit ourselves to Him.

Prayer keeps the fire of your relationship with God hot. This *Searching the Scriptures* study explores how.



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S12
1

Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39



PREPARE YOUR HEART

It may have been some time since your last concentrated prayer. You may even feel ashamed that you don't talk with God more. But He doesn't want you to feel that way. He is eager to talk with you because He loves you. He wants you to respond, not out of duty but because of your delight in Him. If you'd like, use this prayer to help spark a conversation:

Father, thank You for always being there for me, for always caring, for always being eager to listen. Forgive me for the times I've ignored You. I love You, and I want our relationship to flourish. Use my time in Your Word today to draw me closer to You. In Jesus' caring name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

For several decades, the Israelites lived in exile. Not only did they live *physically* far from the land of their religious heritage, but their hearts remained *spiritually* far from God as well. Nehemiah led the people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls, but his *true* goal was to restore the hearts of the people and to rebuild a community who would be faithful to their God.

Two foundational practices for the people of God have always been engaging with His Word and prayer. In *Nehemiah 8*, Nehemiah and the other Jewish leaders reignited a passion for the law of Moses, and then, in *Nehemiah 9*, the people responded in fervent prayer.



Observation: The Prayer of the Penitent

After hearing the proclamation of the Word of God, the people of Israel grieved because they realized how deeply they had disobeyed God. So they “confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors” to Him (*Nehemiah 9:2*). They did this for *three hours* (*9:3*)! Then they turned to Him in prayer.



Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39

The bulk of the Levites' prayer in *Nehemiah 9:5–38* tells the story of Israel. But Pastor Chuck Swindoll identifies four elements of this prayer: *requests*, *praise*, *commitment*, and *thanksgiving*. Scan through the prayer and match each of these four elements with its corresponding verses in the spaces below. (Note which part of the prayer receives the most attention.)

9:5–6: _____

9:7–31: _____

9:32–37: _____

9:38: _____

According to the prayer's introduction in *9:5–6*, why is God worthy to be praised?

Even though the people of Israel were in a miserable situation, still under the occupation of the Persian government, they began their prayer by saying, "God, there's no other like You." That's the place to start prayer, looking up. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Levites then moved into the heart of the prayer in *9:7–25*. As you read, take note of some of the key things the Levites said God had done for the people of Israel in each act of their story.



Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39

The Levites continued in [Nehemiah 9:26](#) with the grim phrase, “But despite all this” Now, read [9:26–31](#) and summarize how the Israelites had responded to all these things God had done for them throughout their history.

As the prayer concluded in [9:32–37](#), the Levites made their appeal to God. What aspects of God’s character did this prayer emphasize?

In [9:38](#), the people made “a solemn promise” to God. Then, [10:1–27](#) lists the names of all the leaders of Jerusalem who signed the document and committed themselves to this promise. According to [10:28–31](#), what promise did they make?



Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39

Praise, thanksgiving, requests, commitment. These four ingredients seasoned this powerful prayer of the Israelites. For millennia the people of God have used these ingredients to offer powerful prayers whose aromas are pleasing to God.



Interpretation: Powerful Prayer

The prayer recorded in [Nehemiah 9](#) will always be valuable for the people of God because it demonstrates powerful, effective prayer and models how we can say them. Why is prayer an essential element for a godly life?

In each section of the Israelites' prayer, they appealed to God's faithfulness, to His covenant, and to His promises. What role do these elements of God's character play in prayer?



Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader prays effectively by . . . because . . .*

Praise is an unusual and an unpopular practice, so we're confused about it. Praise is leaving self out of the way and being occupied in adoration of God. That's praise. Let your praise be heard constantly. May it be a daily, regular, consistent practice. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: A Path for Prayer

Since prayer has always been a high priority for the people of God, Jesus knew His disciples would be eager to hear His thoughts on the topic. They didn't even need to ask. In Jesus' first sermon in the book of Matthew, Jesus directly answered the question, "How do I pray?"

The prayer Jesus demonstrated in [Matthew 6:9–13](#) can be easily memorized and daily used. It also represents an outline for prayer that can adapt with your circumstances. In the spaces below, fill in the basic idea behind Jesus' words in each verse of His prayer. The first one is filled in for you.

6:9: Praise to God the Father

6:10: _____

6:11: _____

6:12: _____

6:13: _____



Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39

How does the prayer of the people of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day address similar concerns to the Lord's Prayer?

Jesus answered the *how* of prayer, and later Paul would answer the *when* of prayer. According to [1 Thessalonians 5:16–18](#), when is the appropriate time for followers of Jesus to pray? What does this mean? What kinds of attitudes appropriately accompany prayer?

For Jesus, communion with His Father was always His top priority. Now, let's turn to application where we'll consider how we can pursue a more dynamic prayer life.



Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39



Application: Practicing Prayer

Take some time to reflect on your prayer life. Then, in the space below, write down an assessment. How often do you pray? How much time do you spend in prayer? What do you tend to say when you pray? Do you feel yourself drawing closer to God because of prayer?

Next, use that assessment to motivate you to lean into your relationship with God and His grace. Thankfully, Nehemiah shows us where to start. Pastor Chuck Swindoll calls it “four-dimensional prayer.” In every prayer, we should . . .

- *Look up* to God in praise for who He is.
- *Look back* and remember God’s faithfulness with thanksgiving.
- *Look around* at the present circumstances and make requests known to God.
- *Look ahead* and commit to pursuing God, no matter what the future holds.

How can incorporating four-dimensional praying into your life lead to a more dynamic walk with God?



Four-Dimensional Praying

Nehemiah 9; 10:28–31, 39

What would it look like for you to cultivate a habit of regular prayer? Many believers like to wake up early to pray. Others like to get on their knees before they go to bed. Some pray at the beginning of every hour. Write down a few ideas of your own and *commit* to doing one of them every day for the next seven days.

God loves you. You are His child, and He enjoys hearing from you. He wants to maintain a warm and thriving relationship with you. So run to our Father's open arms in prayer today. And tomorrow. And each day moving forward. Eventually, you will look back and marvel at how much God has done in you, for you, and through you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Put into action what you've learned in this study by writing your own four-dimensional prayer in the space below:

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY THIRTEEN

Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

The people of Jerusalem built a verbal monument that said, “This is our promise to You, O God! This is our constitution. We do not care if anyone else in the world lives by this. We will live by it. It will be our guide. We will be distinct.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

TIME. It's one of life's great equalizers. Every single person on earth shares the same twenty-four-hour days—regardless of age, gender, race, or class. So each morning, every person must answer the same question . . .

What will I do with the time God has given me today?

Another way to ask this question is, *Does the way I spend my time reflect what I value most?* It's easy to identify our top priorities. Our walk with God and our relationships with family members typically sit at the top of most people's priority lists.

Yet, sadly, some people's calendars don't reflect their values. Instead of filling their days by spending time with God and loved ones, they give their precious free time away to less important things. How easy it is to get sidetracked!

Thankfully, Scripture helps us set our priorities straight and put the first things first. The book of Nehemiah demonstrates how we can identify the most important priorities and align our lives around them.



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S13
1

Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prayer is an essential spiritual discipline for a follower of Jesus. It is a practical way to strengthen your relationship with Him. Offer this prayer before you open your Bible today:

Father, I want to give You the time You deserve so I can grow closer to You. As I study Your Word, realign my heart to Yours and reorder my priorities. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Revival was breaking out in Jerusalem.

When Nehemiah completed the walls, the city gained a renewed sense of identity. It was *God's* city. The city's residents, then, needed to rediscover their identity as *God's* people. Ezra and the other religious leaders sparked this spiritual resurgence by teaching the people the law of Moses. For many, this was their first substantial exposure to the Word of God.

This encounter with Scripture gripped the hearts of the people of Jerusalem, so they committed themselves to obeying God. They said, "In view of all this, we are making a solemn promise and putting it in writing" (*Nehemiah 9:38*). *Nehemiah 10* records the content of this promise.



Observation: Promised Priorities

Nehemiah 10:1–27 lists the names of all the priests, Levites, and other leaders of Jerusalem who swore to uphold the promises of this new constitution. Take a moment to read this list and imagine writing your own name on the list of the faithful people of God.



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Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

Then, in [Nehemiah 10:28](#), the rest of the city gathered as a community to commit themselves to God. According to [10:29](#), what essential promise did the people of Jerusalem make to God?

In the spaces below, summarize the specific ways the people of Jerusalem promised to commit themselves to God in [10:30–39](#). At this point in the Bible-study process, don't get too bogged down in the details. You'll be able to explore the far corners of these verses in the interpretation phase.¹

[Nehemiah 10:30](#)

[Nehemiah 10:31](#)



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Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

Nehemiah 10:32–33

Nehemiah 10:34–39

The whole story of Nehemiah provides a powerful testimony to the importance of preceding any decision with careful thought and prayer and then following through with decisive and definite actions. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10



Interpretation: Holy Priorities

The promise of this ancient document was a promise to be holy. After all, in the law, God specifically said, “You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (*Leviticus 19:2*). What does it mean for God to be holy? What does it mean for the people of God to be holy? Look up the term *holy* in Baker’s *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* and summarize what you learn.

Reread the document of promise in *Nehemiah 10:30–39*. In what practical ways did the people of Israel commit themselves to holiness in the following spheres of life? For some help interpreting the finer details of the passage, look at *Constable’s Notes*, available for free at netbible.org.

- Privately in the home
- Publicly in society
- Communally in the place of worship



Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader sets right priorities by . . . because . . .*

When Nehemiah made a promise to God, he was terribly serious. Think about that for a minute. I'm concerned that too many Christians today fail to take God seriously.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Kingdom Priorities

The call to follow Jesus is a call to declare Him as Lord—to place Him above everything else. In His earthly ministry, Jesus addressed this topic from many angles, yet in one instance He specifically addressed the topic of rightly ordered priorities.

According to [Matthew 6:33](#), what did Jesus tell His disciples to seek first—above all else? What will result for those who heed Jesus' command? (To answer these questions, review [6:31–32](#) for context.)



Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

Food, water, and clothing certainly are important. After all, if you go too long without any one of these, you'll face serious physical danger. Yet Jesus cares about His followers' spiritual well-being too. What do these words from Jesus reveal about the priorities of the kingdom of heaven? In what ways did the people of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day embrace these priorities?

The apostle Paul later reaffirmed Jesus' words through his own testimony. Paul was "a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one!" (*Philippians 3:5*). He even "obeyed the law without fault" (*3:6*). Anyone would be eager to boast about such an impressive resume. But not Paul. He had his priorities straight.

According to *Philippians 3:7*, how did Paul view his personal accolades in light of Christ's work in his life? According to *3:8*, how did this reality reshape the way he viewed his priorities?

The kingdoms of the world invite us to pursue poor priorities like prominence, power, pleasure, and prosperity. But these upside-down values will upend a life. For citizens of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus must be the top priority. Set Him at the top, and everything else will fall into place. In the application section, we will consider how.



Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10



Application: Proper Priorities

We live in an age of conformity—one where the world pressures us into embracing backward priorities—values that will ultimately harm us. Pastor Chuck shows how we can stand strong against the cultural current and move toward godly priorities.

- Serious thought and planning must precede any significant change.
- Written plans confirm right priorities, making them less likely to be forgotten.
- Loss of distinction and conformity to the world go hand-in-hand, while priorities reinforce a distinct mission.

What are your top priorities in your current season of life? How do your priorities as a disciple of Jesus Christ differ from those of your current cultural context?

How does the way you spend your time reflect these priorities?



Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

What practical steps can you take to order your life in a way that embraces God's holiness and sets you apart from the world? Commit yourself to one action item. Then write it down on a piece of paper and place the note where you will see it regularly.

Jesus calls His followers to seek Him above everything else. If you set your priorities straight and put first things first, you will naturally sail against the cultural current. And others may not like that. Resist the pull of the siren's song of conformity and keep your eyes on Jesus. His way may be different from the ways of the world . . .

But His way is far better.



A FINAL PRAYER

As you close your time in God's Word today, write your own prayer of commitment to God.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY FOURTEEN

The Willing Unknowns

Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11

If you are gifted in an area that will never reach the spotlight, don't worry about it. The public may never know of your ministry, but that has nothing to do with final rewards. God sees you, and He will reward you.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

We love our heroes—those women and men who take center stage and whose lives tell never-to-be-forgotten stories. Whether they're pastors, performers, or politicians, these stars wow the world with their skill and strength, their wisdom and wit, their charisma and character. When these heroes act as a force for good, they receive a chorus of well-deserved applause.

While the spotlight illumines these remarkable people and their heroic deeds, the performance would ring hollow without the massive cast and crew working behind the scenes. Pastors lean on their mentors and families. Performers rely on their trainers and instructors. Politicians depend on their cabinets and constituents.

These supporters choose to reject the spotlight in order to contribute to something beyond themselves. These “willing unknowns” find joy in working hard, in serving others, in doing the job no one wants to do—even if they receive no recognition or praise.

Many followers of Jesus feel inadequate if they don't teach the Bible or work in a church or serve as an evangelist. Yet God doesn't call everyone to serve in these kinds of public roles. He does, however, call all of us to labor for Jesus using the resources and abilities He has given us. Doing so may not earn us applause from people, but such heroic acts please our heavenly Father.



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S14
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The Willing Unknowns

Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11



PREPARE YOUR HEART

John the Baptizer recited the motto for the willing unknowns who work for the kingdom of God: “He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less” ([John 3:30](#)). As you reflect on these words, write a prayer expressing your desire to serve God as a willing unknown.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

If you were simply to look at the title of the book of Nehemiah, you would naturally assume he was the hero of the story. In reality, though, the book celebrates *all* the people of God who willingly participated in His work. Though the spotlight follows some of these people more closely than others, Nehemiah pays honor to all those who enabled such remarkable tasks.

After Nehemiah concluded his role as the foreman of the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem, the city’s residents faced a new problem. According to [Nehemiah 7:4](#), what was this problem?

Nehemiah wouldn’t be able to solve this problem on his own. He needed some willing unknowns. In [Nehemiah 11](#), they entered the scene.



The Willing Unknowns

Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11



Observation: Volunteering to Serve

At first, [Nehemiah 11](#) may seem like a pointless list of names, but it shows how the people of Jerusalem chose to participate in the work of God. Without observing the text and carefully determining what it says, the beautiful truths of the passage would never emerge.¹ Read [Nehemiah 11](#) slowly and carefully. Pay special attention to what these willing unknowns did.

According to [11:1–2](#), how did the Israelites repopulate the city of Jerusalem? What group of people were commended in [11:2](#)?

[Nehemiah 11:3–9](#) lists the names of the people who uprooted their lives to resettle in Jerusalem. We know very little of these volunteers, but Nehemiah chose to include their names in this account to honor their faithfulness to God. Imagine being related to one of these willing unknowns and being able to say, “That was my great-grandfather!” *What a privilege it is to play a part in God’s drama!*

According to [11:10–14](#), what particular roles did the priests who resettled in Jerusalem play? See especially [11:12](#).



The Willing Unknowns

Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11

According to [Nehemiah 11:15–18](#), what particular roles did the Levites who resettled in Jerusalem play? See especially [11:16](#) and [11:17](#).

According to [11:19](#) and [11:22](#), what additional role did these willing unknowns play?

Those who moved into the city willingly gave themselves to the ministry of the Lord. They faithfully supported His work with their talents and gifts. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



The Willing Unknowns

Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11



Interpretation: Serving One Another

The new citizens of Jerusalem made great sacrifices to participate in God's plan, even though no one sounded the trumpet for them. To summarize, these willing unknowns chose to . . .

- Move into the city (*Nehemiah 11:2*).
- Work within the temple (*11:12*).
- Work outside the temple (*11:16*).
- Support the ministry in prayer (*11:17*).
- Guard the city's gates (*11:19*).
- Serve through singing (*11:22*).

Though Nehemiah is the main character of this account, the restoration of Jerusalem couldn't have happened without the contribution of these great-hearted people. Why were each of the above contributions essential to the renewal of the city of God?

The willing unknowns of Nehemiah's day lived the lives of *servants*. They volunteered to set aside their own desires and comforts to meet the needs of others and to participate in the plan of God.



The Willing Unknowns

Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11

Look up the term *servant* in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, and summarize what you learn. Then, read [Mark 10:42–45](#) and [Philippians 2:3–11](#) and describe how the willing unknowns who resettled in Jerusalem embodied a spirit of Christlike service.

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader can serve as a willing unknown by . . . because . . .*

Your name may never make it in the lights, but if you're a follower of Jesus, you're a leader in the work of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Recognition from God

When Jesus took on human form and entered the drama of God's creation, He revealed Himself to be the true hero of history. So those who follow Him receive the spotlight of glory from Him and reflect it back to Him. He is the originator of it all and the purpose for it all—even when doing good deeds. Jesus addressed this issue in His Sermon on the Mount.



The Willing Unknowns

Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11

According to [Matthew 6:2](#), in what manner do the “hypocrites” carry out the noble act of giving to the needy? What kind of *present* reward do they receive?

According to [6:3–4](#), in what manner are faithful followers of Jesus to give to the needy? What kind of *eternal* reward will they receive?

The apostle Paul demonstrated the importance of willing unknowns through the image of the body of Christ. What theological principle does [1 Corinthians 12:18–22](#) reveal about the necessity of willingly serving Jesus as a member of His body?

Jesus is the head of the body. Without the hands and feet, the body of Christ can’t move and work in the world. That’s where we come in. We serve, and Jesus gets the glory.



The Willing Unknowns

Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11



Application: Willingly Entering the Unknown

If Nehemiah could speak to us today, he might highlight three points from *Nehemiah 11* for us to apply:

- A person's gift makes him or her valuable but not necessarily popular.
- Every labor done in love is remembered by God—never forgotten.
- A believer's final reward in heaven will be based on personal faithfulness, not public applause.

Do you ever wonder, *Can God really use me?* The answer is *absolutely!* You may not have a public skill like teaching, but God has still given you distinct spiritual gifts that He wants you to use to serve Him and others. In what areas has God uniquely gifted you? In what ways can you use these God-given abilities to serve Him—even if you don't receive any recognition for it?

Who are the willing unknowns in your life? Write down the names of some of the people in your home, at your church, at your work, or in your neighborhood. What can you do to practically acknowledge their work and thank them for their necessary contributions?



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The Willing Unknowns

Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11

Do you want to be a willing unknown? Those who don't know Jesus would usually say no. The flesh loves the recognition, the praise, the spotlight. But the applause of people is temporary. For those who serve Jesus behind the scenes, God bestows rewards that will last for eternity.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for preserving the example of these willing unknowns in Your Word. Give me the humility to serve You from the background for Your glory. Though the call of human praise is strong, give me the desire only to hear You say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” ([Matthew 25:21](#)). I pray these things in Jesus’ glorious name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”



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S14
9

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY FIFTEEN

Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47

The secret to our daily happiness cannot depend upon our external circumstances. True joy must depend upon daily contact with and love for the Lord Jesus Christ, who is preeminent over all.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHO doesn't want to be happy? For many, personal happiness is their sole pursuit in life. Yet, frustratingly, happiness is often a slippery goal—like a wet bar of soap that leaps right out of your hand. Though we seek happiness, all too often it feels like we live in an entirely *unhappy* world.

Every day, we deal with financial insecurity, relational friction, broken bodies, or emotional trauma. More than this, war tears apart nations and families. Natural disasters wreck homes and communities. Famine starves innocent children. Disease kills loved ones. Realities like these thwart the pursuit of happiness, making that trite platitude, “Don’t worry! Be happy!” an unrealistic mockery.

But what if God doesn’t call us to be happy? What if, instead, He wants to see our lives overflow with *joy*?

This *Searching the Scriptures* study looks at an ancient community who lived joyous lives despite enduring burdensome realities. Their example demonstrates how we, too, can experience joy in an unhappy world.



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S15
1

Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do you face unhappy circumstances today? Do the burdens of life weigh heavily on your soul? Bring these concerns to God. Jesus Himself said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. . . . For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light” (*Matthew 11:28, 30*). Allow Him to give you joy as you say this prayer:

Father, I know You are the source of true joy. Though my happiness may come and go, I know You never change. Remind me of that truth as I open Your Word today. May I forever rejoice in Your goodness. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

God called Nehemiah to move from the palace in Persia to live in the ruined city of Jerusalem. Amid this challenging transition, Nehemiah set his mind on two tasks: to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and to recommit the people of Jerusalem to serving their God.

Despite strong pushback at every turn of the journey, Nehemiah accomplished exactly what he set out to do. The city had walls again. The people had agreed to follow God again. And the people had resettled into the city. Now, it was time for dedication and *celebration*.



Observation: Dedication of the Wall

The dedication of the new wall of Jerusalem is recorded in *Nehemiah 12:27–47*. As you read, put yourself in the city. Feel the excitement of the moment. Hear the instruments playing and the voices singing. Experience the joy of a people wholly committed to God. Placing yourself in the scene helps you observe what the text says.¹



Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47

According to [Nehemiah 12:27](#), what role did the Levites play in the “joyous occasion” of this dedication ceremony? According to [12:30](#), what did they do before they carried out this task? Why is this sequence of events important?

Nehemiah explained that he “led the leaders of Judah to the top of the wall and organized two large choirs” ([Nehemiah 12:31](#)). One group proceeded to the south ([12:31](#)) and the other to the north ([12:38](#)). Then, they all “played and sang loudly” together ([12:42](#)). *What a sight!* According to [12:31](#), why did Nehemiah organize these two choirs?

According to [12:43](#), in what other way did the people of Jerusalem express their joy? What kind of far-reaching effects did this ceremony have?



Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47

According to [Nehemiah 12:44, 47](#), with what kind of support did the people of Jerusalem contribute to the ministry of the priests and Levites? Why did they respond in this manner?

How does [12:45–46](#) situate the events of this dedication ceremony within the broader story of Israel?

In these verses, we find much more than the dedication of a wall. We find people whose hearts were really rejoicing. Just imagine what the people living outside the city must have thought when they looked up. On this broad wall came dozens—maybe hundreds—of people making music to their God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Dedication of the People

This passage simply exudes joy! You can almost hear the music rising off the page. As the people of God reflect on His faithfulness, they simply can't resist praising Him.



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STUDY FIFTEEN

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Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47

What is joy? In what ways do joy and happiness resemble one another? In what ways do they differ? What is the source of true joy? What are some results of joy? Feel free to look at a [Bible dictionary](#) (like Baker's *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* available for free at [biblestudytools.com](#)) to help you engage with these questions.

Ultimately, the people of Jerusalem faced largely unhappy circumstances. In light of the broader context of the book of Nehemiah, what reasons would the people have had *not* to act joyfully? Why were they able to maintain an attitude of joy regardless of their circumstances?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader can lead a life characterized by joy by . . . because . . .*



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S15
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Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47

I don't want us to be proverbial ostriches, who stick our heads in the sand and smile our way through hard times. I want our hearts to be light as we see things from God's perspective. I don't think our heavenly Father, the Lord of this earth, has yet come to a place of frustration. The things of this earth are marching toward His divine, perfect plan regardless of the scars we now bear. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Dedication to Christ

As the cross loomed over Jesus, He gathered His disciples for a final meal and a final lesson. He made the purpose of this lesson clear: “I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” ([John 15:11](#)). The disciples likely heard this and wondered, *How can I be joyful when You've told us You are about to die?*

Jesus answered this question in [John 16:16–22](#). Summarize Jesus' message in your own words.

In this statement, Jesus explained the eternal nature of joy when He said, “So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy” ([16:22](#)). What is the relationship between Jesus' resurrection and true joy?



Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47

The book of Philippians demonstrates joy in action. In [Philippians 2:2](#), the apostle Paul used almost the same expression Jesus did in [John 15:11](#): “Make my joy complete . . .” (NASB). According to [Philippians 2:2–4](#), in what ways did Paul want the Philippian believers to complete his joy? In what ways does true, Christ-centered joy act as the fuel for these kinds of behaviors?

Jesus came to offer us joy—*complete* joy. The good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection provides us with eternal life, everlasting hope, and endless peace. Because we know that Jesus will return to conquer Satan, sin, and death and to redeem creation, we can truly *rejoice* for all He has accomplished.



Application: Dedication to Joy

Based on his reflection of the topic of joy, Pastor Chuck developed a set of timeless principles, which the people of Jerusalem in Nehemiah’s day clearly demonstrated:

1. An atmosphere of happiness should surround God’s people.
2. Music is one of the most expressive ways to communicate joy.
3. A joyful spirit will have far-reaching effects on others.
4. Joy is not dependent upon outward circumstances but upon inward focus.



Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47

As you reflect on your own life, what reasons has God given you to rejoice? Write down some sources of *true joy*, not mere happiness.

What are some practical ways you can communicate your joy in worship? The people of Jerusalem rejoiced in song. List two or three practical ways you can rejoice.

In what ways have you seen the joy of the body of Christ either draw in nonbelievers or encourage other believers? How do you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to serve others through your own joy?



Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47

Though happiness is often elusive and temporary, joy remains steady and abiding. This blessed gift of God is the product of that hope that God will redeem this broken, sinful, and messy world. This joy ultimately allows us to smile . . . even amid the unhappiest of circumstances.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I rejoice in You and in You alone. I rejoice because You loved me enough to send Your Son to die in my place. I rejoice because He rose from the dead and now offers me new life. I rejoice because He will return to defeat Satan, sin, and death. I rejoice because I will live with You forever. Thank You. Help me never to forget the reasons for my joy. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY SIXTEEN

Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13

My Christian friend, there may be convictions God has given you today. And if God has given you conviction in certain areas, you had best carry them out. You had best have the gristle that's necessary to say, "No, I will not do this!" or, "Yes, I will continue to do that!" There will always be individuals who will want to change your standard to fit theirs. I'm saying to you—the answer is to take the problem by the throat.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE book of Nehemiah is a masterclass on leadership. The book's main character demonstrates leadership skills at every turn of his journey: strategic foresight, relational savviness, financial integrity, bold determination.

Yet, more importantly, Nehemiah reveals the essential character qualities a godly leader must possess. Pastor Chuck Swindoll summarizes well these characteristics in the conclusion of his book on Nehemiah's leadership:

I think it is significant that the final scene in Nehemiah's book portrays him on his knees asking God for grace. He had fought hard for the right, but he had kept his heart soft before the Lord. What a magnificent model of leadership. He was a man of honesty, conviction, and devotion.¹



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Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13

Honesty. Conviction. Devotion. These are the kinds of qualities that will allow a Christian leader to make an impact—an *eternal* impact—for the good of others and for the glory of God. In the final pages of his namesake book, Nehemiah demonstrated these three attributes as he prayerfully confronted the most pervasive and sinister problem humanity has ever faced.

Sin.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Say this prayer as you prepare to engage God through His Word today:

Father, I want to make a difference in this sin-saturated world. As I study the life of Nehemiah today, cultivate in my soul honesty, conviction, and devotion so I can serve You and others with all I am and all I have. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Prior to the events recorded in Nehemiah, this great leader of Israel served in Persia as a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. When Nehemiah heard about the destroyed walls in Jerusalem, he felt God tugging on his heart, urging him to go to the land of his ancestors to help his people.

So Nehemiah received permission from the Persian king to depart for Jerusalem. During his time in the Promised Land, Nehemiah successfully reconstructed the walls of Jerusalem and reinstructed the people in the law of Moses. Because of the effort led by Nehemiah, both the city and the people within its walls were rededicated to God.

Now that Nehemiah's job was done, he returned to Persia to serve again under Artaxerxes (*Nehemiah 13:6*). Yet a few years later, when he returned to the city he once helped revive, he discovered that the people had torn down so much of what he had worked so hard to build up.



Observation: Confronting Jerusalem

During his return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah learned that the people had strayed off the course of obedience to God. In *Nehemiah 13*, the skilled leader confronted four issues in order to set the people's sights back on God. As you read this chapter, take note of the problems Nehemiah addressed. In the interpretation phase, we will consider why these actions were so detestable.²



Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13

A Compromising Companionship—Nehemiah 13:4–9

According to [Nehemiah 13:4–5](#), what did Eliashib the priest allow Tobiah to do?

According to [13:8–9](#), how did Nehemiah respond to these circumstances?

A Financial Fiasco—Nehemiah 13:10–14

According to [Nehemiah 13:10](#), in what ways were the people of Jerusalem mistreating the Levites?



Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13

According to [Nehemiah 13:11–12](#), how did Nehemiah respond to these circumstances?

A Secularized Sabbath—Nehemiah 13:15–22

According to [Nehemiah 13:15–16](#), in what kinds of activities were the people of Jerusalem engaging on the Sabbath?

According to [13:17–22](#), how did Nehemiah respond to these circumstances?



Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13

A Domestic Disobedience—Nehemiah 13:23–31

According to [Nehemiah 13:23–24](#), what did Nehemiah realize about the people of Judah and their children?

According to [13:25–29](#), how did Nehemiah respond to these circumstances?

The book of Nehemiah concludes with the central figure saying, “Remember this in my favor, O my God” ([Nehemiah 13:31](#)). In fact, three other times in this chapter, Nehemiah requests God to “remember” these moments ([13:14](#), [22](#), [29](#)). Through these words, Nehemiah demonstrated his detestation of sin, his personal faithfulness to God, and his trust in God’s sovereign power.



Interpretation: Confronting Sin

You might read this passage and think, *Isn’t Nehemiah overreacting?* These actions of the people of Jerusalem may seem insignificant, but they ultimately reveal a lack of faith in God.



Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13

Using a Bible commentary, dig into the details of this passage until you unearth the reason Nehemiah reacted so intensely to each of these four problems, and state specifically why each action was sinful. Feel free to use [Constable's Notes](#), which is available at netbible.org.

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader should deal with sin in the community by . . . because . . .*

Nehemiah faced the sin in his community head-on. He dealt with sin severely. Yet he also worked toward permanent correction. And he always followed it up with prayer.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Confronting Hypocrisy

Like Nehemiah, Jesus cares deeply about the condition of the heart of His brothers and sisters. He wants them to face sin in the community head-on, but He wants people to assess their own actions before confronting the sin of others.



Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13

What command did Jesus give in [Matthew 7:1](#)? What rationale did He offer for this command in [7:1–2](#)?

In [7:3–5](#), Jesus further explained His previous command. What images did He use in His explanation? In your own words, summarize Jesus' point in these verses.

Sometimes, it feels difficult to identify the speck of wood—those small, subtle sins—in our own eyes. Thankfully, God has given the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin. According to [2 Timothy 3:16](#), what is the primary means the Holy Spirit uses to convict us of our sin?

It's remarkable that we don't always know what to get mad about! We get mad at the other guy. But we ought to get mad at ourselves—at our own sin. When we get angry at the sin of others, God says, "Wait a minute! Take that up with Me. Let's look at this thing from My viewpoint." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13



Application: Confronting Problems with Grace and Truth

No community—non-Christian or Christian—will ever be totally free from combative friction caused by sin-driven selfishness. Thankfully, Nehemiah demonstrated three principles for how a Christian leader can serve a community fraught with this problem:

1. *Dealing with sin demands honest observation.* You can't solve a problem you can't define.
2. *Honest observation must be matched with fearless conviction.* The people of God must maintain a steady confidence in what they believe.
3. *Fearless conviction must be tempered with deep devotion.* Jesus came from the Father full of truth *and* grace ([John 1:14](#)).

Jesus taught us to correct our own sin before confronting the actions of others. Is there a selfish sin that you've allowed to fester in recent weeks? If so, develop an action plan based on the principles above that you can use to repair what's been damaged and to return to the right path.

As you prayerfully consider the communities to which you belong—your home, your neighborhood, your church, your workplace—are there any sins you sense the Holy Spirit is leading you to confront? What would it look like for you to address these concerns with grace and truth, with gentleness and courage, and with honesty and conviction?



Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13

Nehemiah was a great leader—an *exemplary* leader. Yet he was still an imperfect human. When he left Jerusalem, the people returned to their sinful ways. Even after his fierce confrontation, Israel continued in its sinful way of life until the long-awaited Messiah finally arrived.

No human leader—no matter how skilled—can fully and decisively remedy the sin that controls each human heart. Only Jesus Christ can do that. So look to Jesus today as you trust Him to deal with the problem of sin—both in the present and in eternity. He is our Savior, our Lord, and our leader whom we follow on this journey from earth to heaven.



A FINAL PRAYER

Say this prayer from Pastor Chuck to close your time in God's Word today:

Father, amid the struggles and obstacles and anxieties of life, remind us that we cannot handle this on our own. This is Your work. So we turn to You, like Nehemiah did, and ask for courage, for conviction, for guts to address sin and then—by Your grace—to turn from it. Grant us victory we've not known before. We claim this today, and we trust You for the outcome. In the name of our Savior, Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick: Timeless Lessons on Leadership* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 232.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY SIXTEEN

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THE
SCRIPTURES

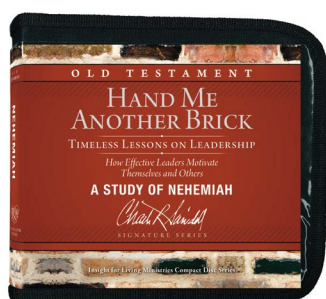
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Taking Problems by the Throat

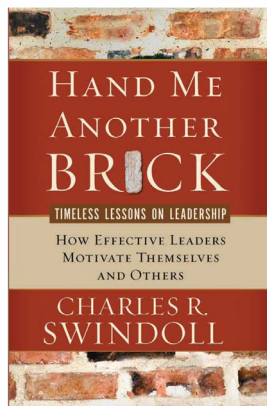
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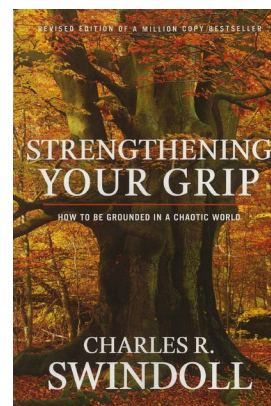
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