

OFFICERS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
NEIGHBORHOOD BIBLE STUDIES
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

Bible Discussion Guide
Nehemiah 1

L: Do not discuss the references listed for background study in parenthesis. Suggest that the attendees may want to look these scriptures up for themselves. We are embarking on discussions of the book of Nehemiah.

The setting: The book covers roughly the last century of Old Testament Jewish history (about 538-433 BC). It take place in the time following the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire by Persia in 539. One of the first actions of Cyrus, king of Persia (559-530), was to repatriate the peoples exiled by Babylon (II Kings 25) and allow them to reinstate their national gods. The Jews were among those repatriated. (For background study, see Isaiah's remarkable prophecy, Isaiah 44:26-28 and 45:1-13). The 10 Northern tribes, carried away to Assyria (II Kings 17) were never returned.

The man: Nehemiah, the book, contains the personal memoirs of Nehemiah the man. He was a man of prayer. He also was a man of leadership and action, fearless and courageous. He was a spiritual man, a man of God. There is no written criticism of his character.

The following information may be useful for fitting this study into a time and event perspective:

King	Event	Prophet
Cyrus, 559-530 BC	The return from exile. Ezra 1	End of Daniel's life.
Cambyses, 530-522 BC	Not mentioned	
Darius I, 522-486 BC	The temple rebuilt.	Haggai and Zechariah
Xerxes I, 486-465 BC (Ahasuerus)	Ezra 4:6. The king who made Esther his queen and Mordecai his grand vizier.	
Artaxerxes I 464-423 BC	Ezra 4:7-23; 7:1ff; Nehemiah 2:1. The king who sponsored the return of Ezra and of Nehemiah. Jerusalem rewalled. Reforms	Malachi

Background scripture: To get a feel for how the Jew felt about his homeland, read (Ps 137).

L: Nehemiah describes the 3-stage return of the people of Judah to Jerusalem:

1st: The main party, who returned with Zerubbabel in 538/7.

2nd: The party that returned with Ezra 80 years later in 458.

3rd: Nehemiah's party returned in 445; i.e., about 93 years after the party with Zerubbabel had returned. Ezra's group had been there 13 years. No wonder that they were discouraged. They had not yet built the wall around Jerusalem as a defense. They were completely vulnerable and exposed in the midst of a hostile people.

L: Have everyone silently read Nehemiah 1.

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L: "Someone read 1:1-3"

L: What are the facts of this scripture?

1a. Written by Nehemiah, 1b. In Chislev (Dec 5-Jan 3), 1c. Shushan or Susa - Capital of Elam, winter residence of the Persian king; 2a. Hanani (abb. for Hananiah), probably a blood brother, 2b. inquiry about Jews who had survived captivity and the state of Jerusalem; 3a. Survivors who are there are in great distress and reproach, 3b. Wall of Jerusalem are broken down and the gates have been burned.

L: In religious terms, what would you call Nehemiah: A concerned layman.

L: What does his profession approximate in U.S. military terms? aide-de-camp to the king as well as trusted adviser.

L: Nehemiah had a plush job and a bright professional future, why would he be concerned about the Jews? He apparently was not so ego centered that he was not concerned about his Jewish people. His concern reflected a quality of leadership that extends beyond self to duty, honor and country. For him it was obviously a matter of heart. He was a man of prayer and God had touched his heart about these things.

L: "Someone please read vv 4-11"

L: "What was Nehemiah's response to the news in V. 4?"

a. He wept and mourned for many days, b. He fasted and prayed rather than consulting others (he sought God's answer first)

L: "What do these responses indicate about Nehemiah?" a. His personal relationship with God was such that he focused seriously on God at this time of concern. He felt great personal concern and responsibility and consulted God as naturally as a starving man would drink water.

L: "Let's use the acronym ACTS which represents the parts of a whole prayer to analyze Nehemiah's prayer:

A	- Adoration & Praise	-5b (love) -5a, 10
C	- Confession	-6c, 7
T	- Thanksgiving	-10
S	- Supplication: Petition (for self) Intercession (for others)	-6a, 11 -6b, 8-9

L: v. 11, who is "this man?" the king

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L: "According to 2:1, Nehemiah presents his problem to the king in the month of Nisam (Apr 13 - May 11). What is the time period between 1:1 and 2:1?" about 4 months

L: "Do you suppose he fasted and prayed for 4 months?" Possible, but it would have been difficult to do that for the whole period without alerting the king in light of his profession. Probably there was continuous prayer with periodic fasting or perhaps he gave up solids as his fast. One can fast systematically, such as one meal per day, etc. It is possible that he started with a period of fasting and continued in prayer.

L: "What qualities do you detect in Nehemiah?"

- a. Truly a servant's heart (a willing and proficient cupbearer).
- b. A godly man who believed in immediate and long-term prayer and fasting when faced with a problem.
- c. Patient - he was willing to wait for God's answer and direction (God's time).
- d. He had a personal relationship with God such that he expected God to answer.
- e. He felt empathy and compassion for his people (v.4)
- f. He knew the "Word of God"
- g. He was trustworthy - totally trusted by the king
- h. He knew how to deal with his guilt and sin (confession). L: "Someone read 1 John 1:9" the provision of God to the Christian for dealing with sin and guilt.

L: "What qualities of Nehemiah do you wish were true of your life?"

L: "What event do the Jews look back to for assurance of God's concern and provision for them?" Moses as the prophet of God... the Passover... and the parting of the Red Sea.

L: "What do Christians look to?" The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and his invitation to be Lord of our lives
(Rev 3:20).

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Guide #2

Nehemiah 2:1-10

Bible study discussion guide

Introduction: As cupbearer, Nehemiah served as taster of the king's wine and as guardian of the royal apartment. Persian reliefs reveal the importance of the office by placing the cupbearer in attendance upon the king before the bearer of the royal weapons and just behind the crown prince.

A prime qualification for intimate royal servants was a good personal appearance and joyful attitude.

The scene beginning at chapter 2 is wine after dinner...

L: Someone read Neh 1:11b-2:8

L: How would you short title this section of scripture if it were a newspaper article? "Nehemiah's petition is granted", etc.

L: Why would the king notice Nehemiah's demeanor? Because of their close relationship and it was the task of the cupbearer to exhibit an uplifting attitude and joyful demeanor.

L: How would you interpret "sadness of heart (v2)? depressed

L: Why would Nehemiah be "very much afraid?" If he displeased the king, he wasn't fired, he was beheaded... he knew too much about the king's private affairs.

L: Note the careful avoidance of naming Jerusalem in v 3. Look at Ezra 4:21-22 (The king had stopped the work at Jerusalem). The careful statement (v3) of concern about the poor state of the burial place of his ancestors would strike responsive notes of empathy of a Persian king.

L: Without preceding statements of empathy, the answer to the question of v4 has potentially threatening results. Nehemiah acts according to his normal manner as a spiritual man --- he prays before answering... for what? words, direction, wisdom, protection... etc.

L: What are the elements of his answer and how do you interpret them (v5)?

1. "If your majesty is pleased with me... ?~ He knew how the king felt about him.
2. "willing to grant my request?" The key point...
3. "let me go?" The difficult part.
4. "so I can rebuild the city?" - a city the king had stopped work on because of perceived problems and threats to local officials by the Jews.

L: What were the king's responses (v8) and what do they indicate about his relationship with Nehemiah? He was a valued employee whose absence would be a significant loss, etc.

L: What is the importance of Nehemiah's request in vv 7-8?

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1. Travel protection without taxation and physical threat from local officials. The governors could refuse passage through their land and reconstruction of Jerusalem.

2. The king's forest (in Lebanon) was the primary source of heavy timbers required for the rebuilding of the walls and gates.

L: What does the last statement of V 8 indicate? As a spiritual man, Nehemiah recognized the importance and actions of God in his behalf.

L: Some read vv 9-10.

L: Sanbal'lat was probably a Babylonian who had been moved to Israel during the initiation of the exile of the people of Israel. Tobiah, from Moab, a servant of the Persian king and another non-Jew who resented the Jews.

L: How would you feel about the rising population and influence of Jews if you were an influential non-Jew in Jerusalem at this time in history?

L: What is Jerusalem to a Jew? The holy city. Center of the Jewish world. The place of the seat of God. The place of the heart of the Jew, their capitol, important to their identity as a nation.

L: What qualities characterize Nehemiah as a spiritual man? He was a man who consulted God about all things and who believed all good things come from God. He believed God answered prayer and he relied on Him (diligently and momentarily) to provide answers and support.

L: What is the difference in how Nehemiah depended on God and how you do it?

L: Some read Col. 2:6.

L: What would you do to "walk in Christ?" Live moment by moment, act by act with Christ as Lord (ruler/pilot) of my life.

L: Some read Romans 8:1. How do you interpret the meaning of "walking in the flesh" versus "walking in the spirit?" Flesh -relying on self for self to gain power for self and the things of this world. Spirit-walking with Christ as Lord, constant in prayer, tuned-in, daily reading/studying the Bible (God's word) and obeying its admonitions. Living with goals such that I am daily growing to be "more conformed to the image of Christ" - the important life goal of every Christian.

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Guide #3
Discussion Leader's Guide
Nehemiah 2:11-20

Introduction: The name "Nehemiah" means "comfort of Jehovah (God)." As cupbearer to the Persian King, Nehemiah was in a position of trust and confidence as one of the king's advisers. He has received God's leading and the king's blessing and support to travel to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls and gates of this city which is so central to the identity of the Jews with God and as a national entity. The city walls lie in ruins and is representative of the state of the Jews spiritually and nationally. Let's first look at the facts:

L: Someone please read Nehemiah 2:11-20.

L: Now, please read vv 11-15 silently, to yourselves.

L: How would you short title this section? "Nehemiah Inspects Walls of Jerusalem", etc....

L: Summarize the facts. Nehemiah rests 3 days. Then, mounted on an animal, Nehemiah inspected the walls secretly at night with a few men who were not mounted.

L: Why were the other men not mounted? To avoid raising suspicion. A small party of men, with only one mounted, would not attract attention. For the servants with him, Nehemiah being mounted was expected of a man of authority and power.

L: What do you suppose Nehemiah did for the first 3 days (vv 11)? Probably, evaluated the general situation (Politically, physically, economically and socially).

L: Why do you suppose he did his evaluation of the wall at night with just a few servants? His primary mission at this point (1st objective) was to rebuild the wall. He looked over the ground carefully himself. The few men with him provided protection from dangerous elements.

L: How do you interpret the way this spiritual man of action approached his task in light of the fact that he had God's leading and the king's support? In chapter one and the first half of chapter two he has modelled praying before acting and "walking in prayer." Now, he models careful planning combined with religious vision, faith, authority. He does not alert his opposition or his followers until he has carefully evaluated the situation and formulated his plan.

L: Based on these facts, how would you evaluate Nehemiah as a man? A wise man, etc....

L: How would you incorporate what you have learned in this section in your own life?

L: Someone read vv 16-18.

L: How would you short title these scriptures? "Nehemiah makes an Important Announcement," etc....

L: What does he do in V 17? He gives his direction to the rulers

(local officials: non-Jewish deputies in the city), Jews (specified classes of Jewish leaders), and the nobles (freemen, Persian nobles, politicians, bureaucrats, etc. who governed the people directly); i.e., he uses the existing chain-of-command (both formal and informal).

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L: What do you note about his direction? Worded as an invitation to join him... "let us..."

L: They had become discouraged and failed at his task to this point. What do Nehemiah's words of vi 8 do for his invitation? He had a testimony of God's leading and the king's support. He was a man of authority who exhibited the necessary leadership to rally the people to action. Remember, at this point, they are volunteers.

L: What are the elements of leadership that provides Nehemiah with such confidence that he is able to inspire these people to action? He depends on God and has waited for God's leading.. ..and he has the king's authority and support.

L: How do the words of Jesus in Rev 3:20 apply to us as a promise of blessing compared to God's leading and blessing of Nehemiah? Jesus offers us a similar relationship and blessing that Nehemiah enjoyed with God.

L: Let's discuss Acts 1:8 in light of this promise. Someone read Acts 1:8. How do we receive this "power of the Holy Spirit?" By accepting Jesus as Lord (John 1 :12...remember "believe" means "to adhere to, rely on and to trust in.")

L: How should we live our lives to enjoy God's direction and blessing as Nehemiah did? By reading and studying the Word of God (the Bible), by walking in prayer (in the spirit) and by our obedience to God.

(Points to discuss if there is time or questions: (In relation to the "Word of God" (the Bible), by walking in prayer (in the spirit) and by our obedience to God. (In relation to the "Word of God" see hearing: Rom 10:17, reading Deut 17:19 & Rev 1:3, studying:

Prov 2:1-5 & 2 Tim 2:15, memorizing: Psalms 119:11 & Matt 4:4,7,10 and meditating:

Joshua 1:8). (Hindrances to prayer: unconfessed sin: Isa 59:1,2 & P55 66:18; Remedy:

1 John 1:9) (Walking in Prayer: Rom 8:1, Acts 6:4, Luke 18:1,1 Thess 5:17) (Obedience to God: John 14:21,23)

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Guide #4

Nehemiah 1 & 2

(Have the group read Nehemiah 1 and 2 silently)

Introduction: According to the prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah... among many), because of the sins of the Jews God had used the rulers of Assyria to disperse the Jews of the Northern kingdom (Israel) into exile and eliminate the nation of Israel. In like manner the southern kingdom (Judah) was conquered by Babylon and all of the leaders banished into exile. The people of the northern kingdom are never heard from again. Many of the Jews maintained their worship and faith in God even in those circumstances. It may be even more to Nehemiah's credit that he had not joined the Persians in worship of their Gods in light of the fact that he held a very responsible political office next to the king as his "cupbearer." At the start of the book of Nehemiah we read about a man who was a highly successful professional who was living the "good life."

Let's review what we know about Nehemiah....

Look at 1:1-4 When Nehemiah learned of the state of the people in Jerusalem and the state of repair of the city walls he mourned, fasted and prayed. Why would a busy, important and successful professional react in such a way? He was a devout/godly Jew. Jerusalem is the heart of the nation of the Jews. It is also the location of the temple, the primary residence of God, as far as the Jews were concerned. In some ways it was the center of the hope of bringing the nation of the Jews back together.

What do you suppose Jerusalem represents to the Jews of Israel today?

What is the difference between the traditions and beliefs of the Jews and the Christians concerning the primary place of worship of God? Review John 1:12, Rev 3:20 and 1 John 5:12,13. According to these verses, where does God reside for the Christian? The Holy Spirit resides in our hearts. The very acts of our lives can be acts of worship because He resides in us.

Was there any difference in the way Nehemiah approached God and the way we individually should approach Him? None. But we will later look at how we can maintain our relationship with God.

Note Nehemiah's prayer in Neh 1:5-11. In v 5 he opens with praise. What effect does praising God have on us? We affirm God for who He is as our sovereign Lord and master. Prayers of praise and adoration serve to remind us where God really should be as sovereign of the universe. (Read and discuss Ps 33:1, 34:1, 35:28, 50:23 and 148:14).

In vv 6 and 7 Nehemiah prays a prayer of confession. Someone read Ps 66:18 and Prov 28:13. What effect does unconfessed sin have on our relationship with God? God will not hear our prayers.

What is the remedy according to Prov 28:13 and 1 John 1:9? To confess and forsake (repent/turn from) our sins.

Note Neh 2:4-7. What is the significance of the king's blessing in light of Nehemiah's request in 1:11? Answered prayer. Does God even have control of The monarch's thoughts? Is it possible that thoughts we consider as "stray thoughts" may be communicated by God through the Holy Spirit who indwells us? If so, what should we do about stray thoughts? How does this relate to Romans 12:2?

In any event, Nehemiah's prayer is answered. The king obviously looks upon Nehemiah as a very trusted person, a man of ability and one he would go out of his way to support significantly.

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Someone read Nehemiah 2:17-20. What is the basis of Nehemiah's statement in v 20... "The God of heaven will give us success"? Isn't this a bit presumptuous? No. It is based on faith and 2. He knew he was in God's will (See other examples in Numbers 14:8, Ps 3:6, 20:7, 23:4, 27:3 and Isa 12:2).

Don't you find this particularly interesting in that 12 years earlier Ezra had returned to Jerusalem with 1,750 men plus women and children (Ezra 8:1-20) and treasure worth a king's ransom (Ezra 8:26,27). According to Ezra 4:6-23 it appears that his adversaries had persuaded the king to stop Ezra's efforts at rebuilding the city wall. The city lay unrepaired and needed a new decree from the king to permit rebuilding of the wall. Nehemiah was thus able to continue to the city with a new, royal mandate to accomplish the work that Ezra had been forbidden to do.

What does this story say about how God uses each of us in special ways to accomplish His will? Does this relate to God's message in 1 Cor 12:4-7?

How should we apply this principle in this little community of our Bible study group? Each one has his/her own important and special role and contributions to the community.

Does Nehemiah's example reveal to us that God may use unusual people in unusual ways to accomplish His will?

How may our abilities be used to accomplish His will in the routine of our daily lives? By walking in prayer and study of the Word, listening for his words and direction.

Read John 14:21. What is the criterion and what is the promise? criterion: The one who obeys... Promise: I will make myself manifest to him.

Why do you suppose God chose Nehemiah to do this work? He was in communication with God. God had empowered him with the ability. He was in the right relationship with the king to be used as God's spokesman to accomplish His will.

What are the ways that God revealed Himself to Nehemiah in chapters 1 and 2? See 1:4 and 2:6-9 and 18. God gave Nehemiah the burden (desire to restore the wall of Jerusalem 1:4), the blessing of the king (2:6), the king's support (2:7-9), the people to do the job (2:18) and confidence (2:20).

The first question of the old Westminster catechism is: What is the chief end (purpose) of man? The answer: To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Do you see that as your chief purpose in life? What right does God have to expect such a thing? He is the sovereign creator.

What was the key to Nehemiah's relationship with God? He was a godly (spiritual) man. God was obviously his Lord... first in his life. He was a man of compassion and prayer (1:4 and 2:4), He knew God's Word (1:5, 8-9) and he was man of faith.

If the main purpose of man/woman is to be "daily more conformed to the image of Christ," in what ways do you see that Nehemiah was like Christ? He was servant to God and the people. He prayed significantly as did Christ. He had great compassion for the plight and needs of the people.

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Jesus promises the Christian "life more abundantly." Did Nehemiah have an abundant life? Explain. Nehemiah was fulfilled in doing God's will....

Jesus says in Acts 1:8 "After the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be my witnesses even to the uttermost parts of the earth." Was this true of Nehemiah's life? yes...

What do you suppose was the key to Nehemiah's relationship with God? He was a godly (spiritual) man. He was a man of compassion and prayer (1:4 and 2:4). He knew God's word (1:5, 8-9) and he was a man of faith (2:20).

Are these essential elements for the life of a spiritual man today?

Are they God's expectation of us? Read Matt 21:18-22.

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Discussion Guide #5 Nehemiah 3

Silently read Nehemiah 3 noting the type of people involved in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

Note that there was a complete circuit of the city wall in a counterclockwise fashion from Sheep Gate to Sheep Gate.

Why do you suppose such a long monotonous list is included for future generations to read? 1. To be an inspiration, 2. God takes note of individuals, 3. To credit the careful division of labor and efficient cooperation of many individuals and groups which resulted in the rapid completion of this "great work."

Do you know how long it would take to win the world to Christ if every Christian won one person to Christ per year? 33 years.

Do you think it is possible for you to win one person to Christ this year?

How would you proceed to accomplish that? 1. By making a commitment to do that, 2. By learning how to present the gospel in such a way as to challenge someone to accept Christ as Lord, 3. By bathing my goal in prayer, 4. By praying for some specific person to accept Christ, 5. By inviting and encouraging a specific person to come to this Bible study and continuing to pray for their salvation and/or spiritual growth.

What effect could our group have on the population at Fort Leavenworth if we deliberately embarked on such an effort and prayed for each other daily?

Back to Nehemiah:

What type of people joined in rebuilding the wall? priests, perfumers, goldsmiths, merchants, rulers and even women.

What factors are evident that contributed to the builder's interest and enthusiasm in rebuilding the wall? 1. They were all Jews (heritage - v 2b) and 2. They worked near their own homes, businesses or places of employment (pride of residence - v 2a), and a special calling (vv 31-32).

It is interesting to note that neither Ezra nor the men of his party are mentioned specifically.

What factors of Nehemiah's personality must have been apparent to inspire this response from this diverse population? He must have been a charismatic (inspiring/motivating) leader.

Let's look at another person in scripture who had an even greater effect on people. Someone read Mark 1:1-5.

What previous training did John the Baptist have to prepare him for this work? None that we know of.

Where did he come from when he appeared at the Jordan proclaiming his message? Out of the wilderness.

How long before this event were vv 2 & 3 written? In Isaiah, about 700+ years before this event.

How many people were attracted to hear John's message (1:5) "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem."

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What effect did John's message have on the people? "They were confessing their sins and coming forward to be baptized."

What unique experience did John have that prepared him to have this effect on people? (See Lk 1:15) He was "...filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb." He spoke with unusual power and authority (See Acts 1:8).

Is there a connection between this unusual experience and what happened in Luke 1:39-41? . . . apparently John was filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born. His response while yet in the womb probably came through the Holy Spirit.

What happens when we receive this same Holy Spirit? Acts 1:8.. we receive power from God.. .we become channels of His blessing to others.. .we become witnesses to the power of God in a person's life.

Do we need this power? It is God's desire for us _ His will for our lives. Our chief purpose in life is to glorify God. We cannot accomplish this without being filled with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8).

Do you suppose Nehemiah had the indwelling Holy Spirit? Yes.

What is the major potential spiritual difference between the normal Christian of today and the normal Jew of Nehemiah's day? Jesus Christ and what He died to give us. The dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Jesus came and died so that we all might have the person of the Holy Spirit living in our lives.

Someone read Acts 2:36-41.

Why don't we see this power in more Christians? Someone read Rev 3:14-21 about the state of the spiritually lukewarm Christians.

What does Christ say He will do to the spiritually lukewarm Christian? v 16.. "spew (vomit) him out of His mouth."

What must we do if we are spiritually lukewarm? The answer is in Rev 3:20-22.

Back to Nehemiah... Some read 2:17-18

What qualities do you see in Nehemiah in these scriptures? 1. An ability to share his spiritual relationship with God and inspire people rather than turn them off, 2. Ability to talk about the favor of the king upon him as a vital asset to their common purpose without appearing selfish, bragging and self-centered and 3. His air of unthreatening authority and confidence inspired them to act. He was able to enlist people with diverse loyalties in a common enterprise.

Are these important qualities for the leadership required in your life?

Could a military commander today share such things with contemporaries and subordinates?

Is it important for military leaders to be overt spiritual witnesses?

What does Jesus mean by "confess"? Sharing about my personal relationship with and commitment to Jesus as Lord of my life.

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What criteria or elements are indicative of that personal relationship with Jesus? 1. Biblical facts, such as: a. the necessity to be born-again into the family of God by accepting Jesus as Lord (John 1:12) and becoming an actual member of the family of God, b. The promise of Christ's personal affirmation if we are faithful to Him (John 14:21, 23), c. The special blessing of God's power flowing through us if we have His Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), d. The fruit of the Spirit qualities that are evident in the life of the spirit-filled Christian (Gal 5:22-25), e. The abundant life (life better than any other way) promised by Jesus; 2. Personally living a life of example (witness) by obedience and permitting Christ to have his way in my life.

Does Matt 10:32 apply to you?

How can each one of us apply Matt 10:32 to our own lives?

How can each of us "confess" (tell about/share) the importance of our relationship with Christ with our neighbors? ... with our closest relatives? ... with loved ones?

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Guide #6
Bible Study Discussion
Nehemiah 4:1-6

Someone read Nehemiah 4:1-3

How would you short title this scripture? "Reaction of the Judeans Neighbors," etc.

What are the facts in this scripture? 1. Sanballat was enraged when he heard about the Jews success in rebuilding the wall," 2. He ridiculed the Jews.. etc, etc, 3. Tobiah the Ammonite joined in the ridicule.

Do you see any similarity in the problems and attitudes that confronted early Zionism, 24 centuries ago, and the conflict that exists today between the Jews who have returned to their ancient homeland to re-establish Israel and the long-time Arab inhabitants of that same land?

How do you interpret Sanballat's reaction to the Jews progress (vv1 & 2)? Angry suspicion and bitter mockery. Genuine anxiety and fear. As governor of Samaria, he apparently was at a meeting of Samaritan leaders, including military leaders, discussing the "Jewish problem."

In light of what we know about the Jews performance today, were his fears reasonable?

Analyze his responses in v. 2. What are the real questions? city?, 3, Will they call upon their God?, 4. How fast will they rebuild the city?, 5. Can they bring it all out of that heap of stones, rubble and rubbish?

How do you suppose Nehemiah's statement to Sanballat in 2:20 relates to his question, "Will they sacrifice?" 2:20 is a statement of faith of an obviously confident person.

What qualities of the spiritual Christian do unbelievers sense? The fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22 ff) and the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)...Faith, confidence, assurance...; Lack of fear, depression, anxiety, etc...

Is the sense of the threat reaction of Sanballat one that Christians might experience from some non-Christians? Yes. Satan has been defeated, he knows it and so do those who serve him. Sometimes overt reaction of people are really subliminal spiritual reactions. This may happen with anyone (superiors, contemporaries or subordinates).

How do we know if it is a spiritual reaction? If we are "in tune" with God there may be discernment in the sense of 1 Cor 12:10. The spiritual discernment of Satan's work and those who serve him, etc.

How do you interpret Tobiah's reaction? It would appear that Sanballat is the "fatter cat" and Tobiah is in the "amen" corner. A statement of bitter mockery.

Someone read Nehemiah 4:4-5

How would you short title this scripture? "Nehemiah prays a prayer of Imprecation" ...etc.

What type of prayer is this? A prayer of petition.

What are the elements of this prayer? 1. A statement of relationship.. "We are despised." 2. Turn their taunt back on them. 3. Cause them to be plundered in a land where they are captives. 4. Do not grant them

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forgiveness... judge them based on their sin. 5. a statement of God's feelings - "they have provoked you to anger before the builders."

Someone read Ps 69:19, 27-28

How do you interpret this scripture with Nehemiah's prayer? The confident readiness to identify the feelings of patriotic Zionists with purposes of God. There is a sense in which the person who has the indwelling Holy Spirit has a very special relationship with God and should feel free to share his deepest thoughts and feelings with God--right or wrong. Doesn't God know our thoughts anyhow?

Someone read Ps 79:4-12, 123:3-4, 137:7-9.

How do you feel about these prayers? How do they fit with Phil 4:6. "Let all your requests be made known to God." In more than one sense, God is the greatest counselor and healer. Why shouldn't we be open to Him with our every thought. Also, there is also the aspect that if we walk with God, His enemies (satan and those who serve him) will be our enemies.

How did Nehemiah identify his project with the purpose of God? He knew because he had walked with God in spirit and prayer. God gave him the burning desire to rebuild the wall and blessed him at every step toward that purpose. There is an important aspect of knowing when we are in spiritual warfare and this is possibly true here.

Compare 4:4 & 5 with 13:25. What would you say about Nehemiah's personality in light of these scriptures? Volatile.

Compare 1:3 and 4:4. What effect did the idea of being despised have on Nehemiah? It was one of the factors that burned within him and brought Nehemiah to Judea. Nehemiah prays that their persecutors suffer same fate as the Jews had suffered. God can use even our anger to His purposes.

Compare Jeremiah 18:23b with 4:5

How could you apply these scriptures to your life? If we walk with God, He will be with us in all things. We can and should share the depth of our thoughts and feelings with Him... even the wrong thoughts.

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Guide #7
Bible Study Discussion
Nehemiah 5 & 6

Someone read Nehemiah 5:1-7

Someone read Nehemiah 5:8-13

How would you short title this portion of scripture? "Jews Take Advantage of Jews", etc...

What is the primary problem? There was a great famine (v3) and the rich Jews were exploiting the poor Jews because of their need.

Work on the wall is proceeding. Why does Nehemiah take time out to deal with this problem? It is apparently affecting the morale of the workers (vi).

Let's examine verse by verse verses 1 through 5 to determine specifics of the problem (Notice the increasing severity of the situation described in each verse).

vi? People were complaining against their Jewish brethren.

v2? Many were experiencing a shortage of food.

v3? Some had mortgaged their land and vineyards to buy food. In those days the entire production of mortgaged land was taken as legal interest by the mortgage holder.

v4? Some had mortgaged property to pay taxes.

V5? Some had already released children into bondage to Jewish brethren as forfeiture because of payments due or because there was nothing else left to mortgage. They were unable to pay more than interest because they had lost the means to produce capital.

Nehemiah's first response to these complaints was anger (v6).

What are the facts of vv 7-10? 7? a. Nehemiah gave serious thought to the problem, b. He rebuked the nobles and rulers, c. He called a public meeting to state his case against the nobles and rulers. 8? His statement in the assembly that: a. They had redeemed as many brethren as possible who had been sold into slavery to other nations, b. Now, brethren were being sold into slavery to fellow Jews, c. The questions were asked: Should we sell our brethren or should they be sold to us? ... They did not respond. 9? a. He says this is not good, b. He reminds them that they are under the criticism and threat of enemies and they should do what God's desire of them to do (they are silent because they know what God's desire of them is). 10? Nehemiah also admits to loaning money and grain to brethren and challenges them with the statement.. "let us stop this usury!"

What is Nehemiah's challenge in v 11? To give everything back, including interest charged.

Would you give back that you had collected as interest?

What was the response of the nobles and rulers (v12)? They agreed to give it all back.

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What action did he take to insure they would do what they promised (v12B)? He had priests administer oaths to them.

Why do you suppose he had them take public oaths administered by priests? A simple promise might later be broken but a public oath to a priest was equivalent to a public promise to God. To fail to honor this public promise to God would be equivalent to committing perjury (a crime abhorrent to God) and taking God's name in vain.

Would such a treatment have this kind of effect on you?

What does Nehemiah do in v13? He dramatized the penalties for failure to honor the oath by shaking out the lap of his robe and specifying the consequences of disobedience to the oath --forfeiture of house and holdings (the labor of the rich was their investments).

Did Nehemiah have the authority to do this? To the extent that he was very apparently led by God and he had the loyalty of a majority of the Jewish community.

What does he do to get the people to do what he desires?

1. He uses the power the people have accorded him as a positive, effective and charismatic leader, 2. He states his charges in private and public forum (He does not create conflict by rumor or gossip), 3. He uses their respect of and commitment to God to assure compliance with their promise, 4., He gets all the people in public forum to agree (their are no hidden agendas).

How hard is it to get a lender to give back what he has earned? What would this be equivalent to for you?

What problem do people have with tithing (giving 10% of what they earn to God)? Does this have anything to do with the first part of Christ's answer about the greatest commandment: "You must love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." Does that include your money?

What problems would people have with giving 30% to God?

What right does God have to a part of our earnings? He is the creator. Sovereign: the ultimate authority. Is the statement true: "If God has your pocketbook, He has your heart?"

How do you suppose the rulers and nobles felt about community after they returned all money and holdings to the people? We probably have some difficulty identifying with their strong feeling of belonging and community. Does this have anything to do with second part of Christ's answer when He was asked which is the greatest commandment: . . .to love your neighbor as yourself.

How does this relate to our involvement in the "body of Christ?" Do you feel that you are a member of the "body of Christ?"

Someone read vv 14-19.

How would you short title this portion of scripture? "Principles of Nehemiah's Administration."
"Nehemiah's Unselfish Example," etc...

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What are the facts of this scripture? Obviously this was written as a historical account after his experience as governor included at this point to illustrate his heart and motives. For 12 years Nehemiah served as governor without pay. He did not buy any land (take advantage of the poor who had to sell at low rates). He did not take advantage of the people because of his position. For those 12 years, his life was lived out solely to accomplish the purpose God had sent him to do. He did not do anything to discredit God, etc.. etc.

Nehemiah 6....
Someone read 6:1-4.

How would you title this scripture? "Plot to Trap Nehemiah away from home," etc.

Ono is 19 miles from Jerusalem in the Sharon Plain. This was considered a neutral area because it was not part of the provinces of Philistia, Judea or Samaria.

How do you evaluate Nehemiah's reply in v 3? He met the danger with a combination of personal fearlessness and social responsibility that reveals a leader at his best.

Do you see the content of v3 as encouragement and challenge to apply to your daily quiet time, study of the Bible, time with spouse and children, etc. in light of the demands of the telephone, doorbell and tyranny of the urgent in our professional lives?

Some one read 6:5-9

How do you categorize the charges of vv 5--7? They are accusing Nehemiah of sedition, planned rebellion, personal ambition to be king -- to be reported promptly to the Persian king. Isn't this similar to the charges that led to the crucifixion of Jesus?

What was the accusers intent? To weaken the morale of the Jews in order to slow or stop the weak and to arouse fear in Nehemiah's heart. They were trying to arouse his defenses.

What is the USSR government propoganda program similar to this that is used, often effectively, against the U.S.? Disinformation.

How do you evaluate V 9b? Nehemiah continues to walk in prayer as he goes about the business of being a leader.

Some read vv 10-14.

Shemaiah apparently was a priest. Both Tobiah and Sanballat had close ties with some of the priests. Nehemiah, a eunuch was considered blemished according to Jewish law. If Nehemiah, a non-non-priest and eunuch, entered the temple he would have been open to a sentence of death for profaning the sanctuary.

How do you interpret v 12? Possibly as spiritual discernment.

Also, we see the continuing communication of Nehemiah with God in v 14.

How do you feel about the actions of these crooked priests and prophets? Rom 3:23... "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Both the priests and the prophets were supposed to be the representatives of God. See 2 Peter 2:1.

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Someone read vv 15-19.

Does v 16 surprise you... that these rabble rousers would credit God with the victory?

The significance of parties bound by oath is explained in II Sam 21:7. There could be no enmity between parties under oath (a sworn ally). Tobiah apparently had strong relationships among the country-club set of the Jewish nobles and priests.

What elements of Nehemiah 4-6 do you see as applicable to your life?

How could you describe Nehemiah's example as a spiritual leader?

How would certain people describe your example... a. your spouse?, b. children?, c. superiors?, d. peers?, e. subordinates?, f. neighbors?, g. friends?, h. parents?, i. relatives?, j. in-laws?

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Bible Study Discussion Guide 8
Nehemiah 6:15-7:4

The wall was completed in 52 days. Work began on Aug 11, 445 B.C. and was completed on Oct 2, within 6 months of Nehemiah's obtaining leave from the king. Josephus concludes his story of Nehemiah: "He was a man of kind and just nature and most anxious to serve his countrymen, and he left the walls of Jerusalem as his eternal monument."

Someone read Nehemiah 6:15-16.

Why would the other nations around Jerusalem be afraid?

What do you suppose the team spirit of the Jews had to do with the fear of their neighbors?

What are the factors that contribute to this team spirit? 1. Nehemiah's faith and confidence that God was in charge from the beginning. 2. They were all Jews (of one blood), 3. Persecution often welds the persecuted together, 4. Opposition frequently provides a rallying point, 5. Nehemiah was a positive, charismatic style of leader that would not be discouraged, 6. Nehemiah had the king's approval and support... etc.

Are these things true of the nation of Israel today? Were they more true 10 years ago? Three years ago we had the most decorated officer of the Israeli army as a student at CGSC. This man was a dedicated believer in God, he was an orthodox Jew of faith.

How much impact was caused by the fact that the Nehemiah's followers had confidence (faith) that God was in charge and blessing them? Why would their enemies have a loss of self esteem when they acknowledged that the Jews had been blessed by God? 1. They had tried just about every strategy imaginable to defeat the Jews without success, 2. If God blesses my enemy and doesn't bless me, what message does that convey? This kind of admission is awesome. If God is against me, how can I win?

Do you feel that you have the kind of relationship with God that He would bless you over those who oppose you? The Bible is full of such examples from Moses to Paul. God blesses the righteous (those who are His people), and in doing so demonstrates the glory of his power.

Someone read vv 17-19.

Tobiah has continually been linked with Sanballat in efforts to frustrate the building of the wall. Why do you suppose they so vigorously opposed the wall? 1. They were not fully a part of the Jewish community themselves... Tobiah claimed to be a Jew but couldn't prove it from the historical birth records, 2. The wall would provide a protection for the temple and the city... in a sense, a protection of their identity as a people... a rallying base for rebuilding the nation of Israel. The power of this is seen in the great success of the modern nation of Israel against her foes.

How does Tobiah wield power in Jerusalem? Through his social and marriage connections to the upper crust (the nobility). His wife was the daughter of a Jewish noble. Tobiah's son and daughter both married persons of high influence. Messages came to him through the nobility to Tobiah. It may be that Tobiah desired political influence and Nehemiah's successes threatened that possibility.

It's interesting to note how often God glorifies himself through the weak and what was often seen as unfit by the Jews. Nehemiah was a eunuch and considered faulted by Jewish law. As such, he would not normally be

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permitted in the inner part of the temple. Consider others who were weak or unfit or unlikely who God has raised up...? Moses (who needed a spokesman to speak to pharaoh), Gideon, Paul, etc... Perhaps God would use you because you think you would be the last one he would use.

Someone read Nehemiah 7:1-4

What had Nehemiah promised the king? That he would return as soon as possible.

What is Nehemiah obviously doing in these verses? Setting up a guard system that would ensure security of the city.

The singers and Levites tended the temple gates. The gatekeepers tended the city gates.

The two names, Hanani and Hananiah, are two versions of the same name for the same person. Where do we hear of Nehemiah's brother before this? 1:2

Hananiah, who was apparently governor of the temple complex, is appointed as a kind of military governor over the city.

What does Nehemiah accomplish by appointing his brother as keeper of the city? Maintains control of the city within hands he could trust.

What is the key fact about how people are appointed to guard stations? Each opposite his own house. Both convenient and with maximum amount of personal interest.

What does v. 3 tell about when attack was expected or feared? obviously during the hours of darkness.

What does v 4 say about Nehemiah's resources that accomplished this great work? Scanty support and small resources.

In what senses do you see Nehemiah as a "man of action?"

In what senses do you see Nehemiah as a man of faith?

Do you know anyone today who duplicates the unselfish commitment to patriotism combined with commitment to God that Nehemiah exhibits?

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Bible study discussion guide #9
Nehemiah 10:28-31

Please read silently Nehemiah 10:28-39.

How would you title this portion of scripture? "Obedience to the Covenant", "The Letter of the Law", "A Vow to God", etc...

Someone read vv 28-30.

What are the primary subjects here? Mixed marriages, the vow, and observance of the Sabbath.

What does "...separated themselves from the peoples of the lands..." mean? Even as orthodox (conservative) Jews of today, in a sense, separate themselves in the sense of their faith and commitment to the Jewish community. They were separate in the sense of God's direction which forbade intermarrying with non-Jews (unbelievers). They were particularly separate in the celebration of holy observances, such as Passover (Num 9:13) in which all who were uncircumcised were forbidden to partake (Exod 12:43-45, 48-49).

Some Protestant denominations practice closed communion (i.e., only those who have been confirmed, etc. in our faith can participate) which is a sense of separation. Do you believe that Christians should be separate in the sense of ... (1) Marriage?, (2) Celebration of Communion?, etc...

Someone read 2 Cor 6:14

How do you interpret this scripture? What are the possible consequences of marrying unbelievers? Note their vow in v 30.

Someone read 1 Cor 11:27-29.

On the basis of this scripture, what argument could you make for closed communion? What case could you make against it?

In Neh 10:29 they entered into "...curse and an oath" which means they entered into a promise (Lev 5:4) or vow (Num 30:3,11,14 and Josh 9:20) of loyalty to God and a curse (Ezek 17:13). The "curse" means they accepted the threat of dire consequences if a person proved unfaithful to his oath. Such penalties were normally written out (Deut 29:20--21).

Do you feel that signing a written commitment to Christ as Lord of your life would be helpful to helping you grow spiritually?

Why are some military Christians seemingly more committed to the military than they are to Christ?

Of what importance is the wedding ceremony and vow to the marriage?

What did they promise to do in v 29?

What punishment of God had these people experienced because they had not observed his requirements? Exile under a foreign power.

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Someone read Neh 10:31.

Laws which forbid trade on Sundays are called "blue Sunday" laws.

Let's consider some scriptures about the Sabbath: Ex 20:8, 23:12, 34:21, Isa 56:1, 58:13-14.

How does God feel about Sabbath observation.

Do these things apply to our lives?

Let's look at the Jews sabbatical year (every seventh year): Ex 23:11; Lev 25:4-7, Deut 15:1-6, 31:10-13; Jer 34:14-22.

How serious was God about these things?

What do you think the sabbatical year did for the person? the land? the community of faith?

What things in all these scriptures should be a part of teaching someone how to live a Christian life?

How important is obedience to our relationship with God? Everything. Our obedience is a measure of our faith in Christ as Lord. Remember, the word "believe" in the New Testament means "... to adhere to, rely on and trust in" Christ as Lord.

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Bible study discussion guide #10
Nehemiah 10:32-39

Please reread silently 10:28-39.

Some read vv 32-33.

What did the people agree to do here? They levied on themselves a head tax of 1/3 shekel to support the temple services. Later the tax was increased to 1/2 shekel yearly (Exod 30:11ff 38:25ff and Matt 17:24). A Phoenician standard stated this 1/3 shekel was equal to about 112.2 grams of silver.

The sin offering (Ezra 8:35) was for atonement of the corporate body of believers (Israel).

Someone read v 34.

The wood supply for the continual flame on the great altar of the temple was replenished nine times each year. Lots were cast to formulate a kind of duty roster of the people to cut and replenish the woodbin of the temple.

Someone read vv 35-36.

First, let's examine "first fruits": Ex 22:29-30; Deut 18:1-5; Pr

3:9-10; Lev 27:30-34; 1 Cor 15:20; Jas 1:18.

What are the first fruits of our labors? The first part of our wages. Our tithe to God is what He already owns of our earnings.

In regard to v 36, let's examine the proposition of the firstborn sons set apart as belonging to God: Ex 13:1-2, 34:19-20; Lev 27:26-28; Nu 3:12-13, 18:15.

The redemption of human first born was doubtless presumed in the pledge.

Now, let's relate this to a subject of great importance to us. Someone read Luke 2:21-24.

Joseph and Mary were obedient to God's command and redeemed Jesus with a sacrifice.

What message does God's instruction convey to us today? His sovereignty.

What right does He have to claim the first fruits of our efforts? He created us. He is God... sovereign.

Let's look at some biblical words about how God views our children: Ge 33:5, 48:9; Jas 24:3; Ps 113:9; Isa 8:18; Pr 17:6; Matt 19:14; Mark 10:14.

How should Christians interpret these scriptures in terms of their attitude toward and relationships with their children?