

LIFE GROUP LESSON

Don't Forget to Remember • Week of August 13

Christ Church is about reaching and developing; our mission statement—

Reaching millions of unchurched persons by developing thousands of fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

This week, we are focusing on the work of *developing* fully devoted followers for Christ.

Introduction

The Old Testament contains valuable information regarding the fall of God's people and the rebuilding of God's people. The Bible is like a giant family record - with pictures, some wonderful to see, some not so grand – as the record reveals the depth of man's folly. Yet, zoom out, and Scripture always reveals the grander, more glorious picture of humanity's folly against the backdrop of God's goodness and faithfulness, His promises are always fulfilled. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are no exception. These two books go hand-in-hand and speak how two ordinary men (who were contemporaries) were both honored in high places – by the kings they served and the God they loved and served.

Background

The memoirs of Nehemiah are a fascinating personal record of God's heart to rebuild His people after seventy years in Babylonian exile. During the first year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, all Jews who are willing are given the freedom to make the trek back to Judah for the express purpose of rebuilding the LORD's Temple at Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of Jeremiah the prophet years before (Ezra 1:1-4). Because the people of Judah had abandoned the Lord, the Lord had allowed the Babylonians to destroy the Temple and all of the important places in Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 36:17-20). Yet, after Babylonian rule fell to Persia, God shows up and not only stirs the heart of the new king to honor the Jews, but God stirs the hearts of many priests, Levites and Jews who had been deported to return to Judea (Ezra 2:64-65).

Efforts are tried and tested on many levels; enemies pose threat at every turn. Letters of opposition thwart their work. At times the enemy appears to succeed at bringing the mission of rebuilding Jerusalem to a halt (see Ezra 4:1-7, 11-24).

Time ticks and God raises up Ezra the scribe and priest to go to Judah. He is actually commissioned by Artaxerxes for the task and urged to take more Jews back with him. God being gracious and allowing foreign kings to treat the Jewish remnant favorably is nothing short of miraculous. Yet, sadly, in addition to outside opposition, upon his arrival Ezra finds out that many of the Jewish leaders had married foreign women of surrounding enemy nations, compromising their worship of the living God. The problem with intermarriage is the idolatry and falling away that follows (Ezra 10:1-4).

Ezra was not the only one who was distraught and embarrassed by the actions of the returned people. Within a few years, Nehemiah, who also serves in the court of Artaxerxes, was granted permission to go to Judah for the purpose of rebuilding the walls Jerusalem. The first thing Nehemiah does is inspect the wall. He shares his heart and the people are unified and intent on starting the good work. Nehemiah rolls up his sleeves and works alongside the people. In fact, the effort commences quickly because people rebuild where they live, own businesses, or serve at the temple. Their progress soon stirs the negativity of those who oppose them. Nehemiah is great at seeing through deception; he is also a great encourager. But it's not so much the outside opposition that rouses his anger; it is the behavior from within that breaks his heart. Like Ezra, Nehemiah has to call out the greed of the wealthy who are forcing their fellow Jews into slavery, charging exorbitant interest on loans; Nehemiah is further appalled at the pagan intermarriage by some of the leaders, even some of the priests.

Ministry and the work of God is messy. It always has been; it always will be until the Lord himself returns and rebuilds His Temple. When the devil is not only working against, but from within we struggle with desires of the flesh (like pride, greed, jealousy, adultery), how do we stay focused on the task of developing fully devoted followers of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it anything short of a miracle that ordinary, sinful people can develop into the holy and living Temple that God's Spirit desires? Praise the Lord that He is patient and persistent! We must be, as well. What does Nehemiah teach us about developing a remnant of individuals into a people God is proud to call His own. What do we learn about rebuilding our identity in Christ?

Read Nehemiah 5:14 – 6:9

1. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you?

2. What are you going to do about what the Holy Spirit is saying to you?

3. How can we help you? How can we be there for one another so that we can all live into the call of developing the people around us, so they in turn, can be about reaching the next generation for Christ?

In Closing

Developing requires listening. Nehemiah listened to God’s Spirit (first) and to the people; he met them where they were. He was not afraid to confront dysfunction head-on, all the while keeping his eyes focused on the greater task. Developing requires serving. Nehemiah not only worked alongside the people and required his servants to do the same, he was quite the diplomat and welcomes/ hosted guests regularly in his home. Developing requires sacrifice. Nehemiah was not about his own comfort and interests. Had he been all about himself, he would probably have never left his post as cupbearer to the king, let alone, travel such a great distance to face the slander of Jewish enemies. Developing is active; a resolve to live into what we say we believe. Are you up for the task? We need each other.

Let’s pray that God’s Spirit will rise up in us and stir us *to want to* do this! – to be about developing the people around us and the next generation for Christ.

One Year Bible Reading

- August 13: Nehemiah 5:14-7:73, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, Ps. 33:1-11, Prov. 21:8-10
- August 14: Nehemiah 7:73-9:21, 1 Corinthians 9:1-18, Ps. 33:12-22, Prov. 21:11-12
- August 15: Nehemiah 9:22-10:39, 1 Cor. 9:19-10:13, Ps. 34:1-10, Prov. 21:13
- August 16: Nehemiah 11:1-12:26, 1 Cor. 10:14-33, Ps.34:11-22, Prov. 21:14-16
- August 17: Nehemiah 12:27-13:31, 1 Cor. 11:1-16, Ps. 35:1-16, Prov. 21:17-18
- August 18: Esther 1:1-3:15, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Ps. 35:17-28, Prov. 21:19-20
- August 19: Esther 4:1-7:10, 1 Corinthians 12:1-26, Ps. 36:1-12, Proverbs 21:21-22

DON’T FORGET TO REMEMBER

Text: Nehemiah 5:1-19, I Corinthians 8:1-3

PLAIN TRUTH

In developing I become more like Jesus by

_____, _____ and _____ for others.

1. Development requires _____.
2. Development requires _____,
3. Development requires _____.