



## Life Group Sermon Study Notes

### “Love the City: Heart for the City”

Sr. Ps. James Lowe – October 11, 2020

#### Warm Up (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question below to answer, or ask another. No right or wrong answers.

- What’s your favorite musical film?
- What is something important a grandparent or older mentor taught you?
- Think about your best spiritual friend. What do they do to encourage you?

#### Word (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at [www.bethelworld.org](http://www.bethelworld.org)

#### **Nehemiah 1:1-11**

*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, <sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”*

*<sup>4</sup> As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And I said, “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses..... <sup>10</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”*

To feel like we are living a fulfilling life is often elusive. We can struggle with our needs versus wants while wanting to contribute to society. It becomes more difficult when life is so different in the wake of a pandemic. It can be tempting to complain and look at our culture for who to blame. As believers, through scripture, we have a perception that others don’t have. In the book of Nehemiah, we see how he aligned with God to forge a response to the plight of a people in despair.

The opening scene of the book of Nehemiah is after the Jews seventy years of exile from Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. Nehemiah learned that the survivors were in great trouble. They lacked resources and protection. When Nehemiah got the report he wept, prayed and fasted for the people. The response of Nehemiah is exemplary. He was the one who inquired about the status of Jews. Then his empathy shifted to a place of continuous prayer on their behalf.

Nehemiah's prayer –listed in verses five through eleven– shows how to pray on behalf of others. Nehemiah confessed sins and spoke of God's covenant. Nehemiah recognized that the judgment of exile was warranted because of their sin. He took it further and confessed his sins and the sins of his father's house for not following the commands of God. It would have been easy to complain about Babylon and those who were against the Jews. Instead, Nehemiah addressed through confession and repentance, the fundamental concern of how sin had negatively impacted their relationship with God.

Prayer can feel daunting or useless; but, it's through prayer that we align with the heart of God. Nehemiah recalled the promises of God according to the Mosaic covenant. In Deuteronomy, God foretold through Moses that his people would indeed turn from him. Yet he would restore fortune and gather them once they return to the Lord with all of their heart and soul.

Maybe you feel like Nehemiah, concerned for those who are in distress, or like the Jews experiencing the suffering first-hand. The good news is God is merciful. He responds when we humble ourselves and pray his Word. Life was not smooth sailing for Nehemiah or the Jews after this time of consecration. Yet this marked a stark moment of alliance with God. Under the leadership of Nehemiah, Jerusalem's wall was rebuilt. The spiritual and economic conditions of the Jewish community improved. Nehemiah provides encouragement that God can redeem any situation. It takes trusting in his power through humility and prayer.

### **Discussion (10-15 minutes)**

**Choose one of the points below, and discuss how the lesson applies to our lives.**

- How does Nehemiah's response to learning of the plight of the surviving Jews resonate with you?
- How would you rate your prayer life, and why?

### **Prayer (10-15 minutes)**

**Pray for any of the following, as well as other requests you may have.**

- Thank God for his mercy and steadfast love.
- Ask God for the perspective to trust his redemptive power.
- Ask God for the heart to intercede for others.