

Sermon Series: Revive!
Nehemiah 1:1-11 First Response
Small Group Participant Guide

Key Verse: They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. (Nehemiah 1:10, ESV)

Conversation Starter: Emergency Response

How do you tend to respond when faced with an emergency or crisis? Do you tend to jump in the middle of it or step back and look for the best way to help out? Why do you think you respond in this way?

State of the Nation (Nehemiah 1:1-3)

What is Nehemiah asking?

What does verse 3 reveal about the state of the matters?

How is sin (or sinful actions/decisions) like the conquering Babylon?

What are some life events, choices or circumstances that come to mind that evoke this imagery of destruction on people?

Nehemiah's Response (Nehemiah 1:4-7)

How would you describe Nehemiah's reaction to this news?

What stands out to you from Nehemiah's prayer?

With Nehemiah's prayer as a model, what do you understand confession to be, and what does that reveal about sin?

What does Nehemiah's prayer reveal about what you can expect of God based on His nature and attributes?

In our times of crisis, do you think your prayers are faith-filled like Nehemiah's, faithless like one who doesn't know the God to whom you pray, or something different? Upon what do you base your answer?

Turning to God (Nehemiah 1:8-11)

What is significant about Nehemiah's statement to God in verses 8-9?

What did Nehemiah bring to God? What did he have to offer God to gain God's favor?

What stands out to you about verse 10? Why does this verse matter to us today?

Verse 11 is key because in it, Nehemiah expresses his intent to move forward by faith. What do you see here about how Nehemiah frames his relationships with God and with other people? Why is that important in the context of taking action in response to crises?

The following pages
are for small group leaders.

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Prepare: Things to do before your small group gets together

- **Think** about something you have seen go through a restoration process. Maybe it was a car that started as a "clunker" and ended up a "classic." Maybe it was a piece of furniture that was worn out or broken down, but after some TLC and deliberate attention, it looks like new and has new use and purpose. Maybe it was a photo or video that was badly damaged, but in hands of a skilled technician, it was fixed to its original state (or even better!). Now, see how God has restored you from a state of spiritual disrepair to be His beloved child with hope and a future.
- **Review** Nehemiah 1:1-11 to review the content of the biblical focus. **Invite** God to speak to you with a fresh application of His timeless truth. **Ask** God to give you wisdom in teaching His message of grace and restoration to your small group. **Submit** your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to reveal a meaningful appreciation for their part in the family of God. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

To The Point - What to impart to your small group

Key Verse: They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. (Nehemiah 1:10, ESV)

Objectives: Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

Discuss Nehemiah's circumstances in the context of his culture and in history.

Identify how Nehemiah's example applies to your lives and circumstances.

Commit to following Nehemiah's model and turning to God in times of life's crises.

Leader Guide Key:

Blue - hyperlinks to other resources

Red - Reading prompts

Green - Leader headers and *sample responses to questions*

Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience

Conversation Starter: Emergency Response

Ask

How do you tend to respond when faced with an emergency or crisis? Do you tend to jump in the middle of it or step back and look for the best way to help out? Why do you think you respond in this way?

Say

We are beginning a journey through the book of Nehemiah. We are going to discover amazing truth about God's ability and activity in the work of restoration. Using the servant Nehemiah, God took a nation of people and a city that were broken, dissembled, and in utter disarray and restored them. He demonstrated His inclination to accomplish the impossible, and in so doing, shows us that the emergencies in your lives - the broken, dissembled, and utterly unfixable parts - are where He intends to do His greatest works of restoration and rebuilding.

Open in prayer for your time together.

State of the Nation (Nehemiah 1:1-3)

Ask

What is Nehemiah asking?

Nehemiah is asking about the state of his nation (the people of Israel) and specifically about the condition of Jerusalem after the fall of Judah to Babylon back in 586 BC (and Babylon's subsequent fall to Persia, which had earlier overtaken the Northern Kingdom of Israel).

What does verse 3 reveal about the state of the matters?

The people who survived being taken away to Babylon had returned to Jerusalem. They were despairing and disgraced by the state of their home. They had been both humbled and humiliated. A chief expression of this shame was the utter desolation of the walls that had surrounded the city.

How is sin (or sinful actions/decisions) like the conquering Babylon?

Sin often has a conquering effect on a person or people. It sweeps in and overtakes, laying ruins in its wake. It takes people captive, chases people away (putting relationships into exile), and devastating unintended victims. It can have a generational impact, leaving people in despair and disgraced.

What are some life events, choices or circumstances that come to mind that evoke this imagery of destruction on people?

While virtually any sin can have this type of destructive consequence, some of the most readily thought of may include:

- *adultery or other sexual sin*
- *divorce*
- *abusive relationships*
- *addictive habits*
- *ethical breaches (misuse of money)*

Nehemiah's Response (Nehemiah 1:4-7)

Ask

How would you describe Nehemiah's reaction to this news?

He was broken hearted. He took personal responsibility for his offenses against the holiness of God, and identified in his nation's disobedience and betrayal against God.

What stands out to you from Nehemiah's prayer?

Appropriate answers could include:

- *He extolled the goodness and greatness of God.*
- *He declared the faithfulness of God.*
- *He expressed the sovereignty of God.*
- *He revealed the attentiveness of God toward his children.*
- *He trusted the forgiveness of God.*

With Nehemiah's prayer as a model, what do you understand confession to be, and what does that reveal about sin?

Confession is not merely telling God what He already knows. When you confess, you are agreeing with God about the wrongness of your sin. Confession is the submission of self to examine life and circumstances from the reality of His perspective, rather than through the jaded lens of continued self-deception. This tells us that sin is deceit. You believe lies, you lie to yourself, and you lie to others when you sin in order to perpetuate a false reality. Confession reveals the deception and affords you the ability to proceed forward in reality and truth (all in the context of God's love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, kindness, and righteousness).

What does Nehemiah's prayer reveal about what you can expect of God based on His nature and attributes?

Because God is good and great, we can expect him to exist (behave) in accordance with His nature. Because He is the God of faithful, covenant love, we can expect Him to express His loyalty to his children according to the promises He established with them. Because He is the attentive, loving Father, we can expect Him to hear and respond. We can expect Him to answer. Because He is gracious and forgiving, we can expect Him to receive His children having forgiven them and to related with them fully without harboring resentment or ill will.

In our times of crisis, do you think your prayers are faith-filled like Nehemiah's, faithless like one who doesn't know the God to whom you pray, or something different? Upon what do you base your answer?

Allow group members to answer and share their insights.

Turning to God (Nehemiah 1:8-11)

What is significant about Nehemiah's statement to God in verses 8-9?

Nehemiah declared the promise of God to Moses. This "call for God to remember" is not an actual instruction from Nehemiah to a forgetful God. Rather, it is Nehemiah's recollection of the absolute reliability of God for his timeless promises. Nehemiah was articulating his faith...that the promise made to Israel in Moses' day was still trustworthy today.

What did Nehemiah bring to God? What did he have to offer God to gain God's favor?

In one sense, Nehemiah had nothing. He was a servant in the Persian king's court. He was by all worldly accounts insignificant. He had nothing to give God that would impress Him. In another sense, he had the only things that matter to God: humility, selflessness, love for God, and total dependence upon Him for provision.

What stands out to you about verse 10? Why does this verse matter to us today?

In verse 10, Nehemiah declares Israel to be the people who God has redeemed. In the context of Moses, God paid the price and freed them the bondage of Egyptian slavery. For Nehemiah, he was claiming the reliable promise of God that as their redeemer, He would regather all His children scattered by the exile (which was a result of their sinfulness and rebelliousness against God expressed through their spiritual

adultery). Today, it matters because God has redeemed all those who trust in Jesus as Lord. Even though sin can/has devastated lives and relationships, God will gather His children and restore them if they will humbly turn to Him.

Verse 11 is key because in it, Nehemiah expresses his intent to move forward by faith. What do you see here about how Nehemiah frames his relationships with God and with other people? Why is that important in the context of taking action in response to crises?

In verse 11, we see that Nehemiah voices his position of service to God. Even though he is a child of God he sees God as the Sovereign over all people. This is not an either/or, it is a both/and. He is the faithful child of the Almighty God, and serves him above all. This allows him to see the Persian king as just a man, who he can approach with confidence. This idea and mindset is important because when we face crises, we tend to become overwhelmed with earthly authorities and power. Yet, in the intimacy of prayer, we are reminded that we are the beloved children of God who have been blessed to serve and honor Him. We can approach others with confidence and assurance that He is the ultimate Sovereign and Lord over all.

Say

We see spiritual crises all around us. Many of us are beset by the devastating effects of sin. Perhaps you are the one responsible because of your wrong choices, or perhaps you are the collateral damage of someone else's. Nehemiah (the book and the example) afford us a great picture of how to respond when we look around and survey an unrecoverable mess as the result of sin. We must rightly assess the situation, turn to God, and trust Him to restore us. As we proceed through this book, we will see what that looks like, and we'll explore how to live this out in day-day living.

Let's close in prayer:

Invite the group to pray for one another. Pray over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. Pray over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important. Confirm your plans for your next gathering!