

Sermon Series: Revive!
Nehemiah 2:1-20 *Getting Your Second Wind*
Small Group Participant Guide

Conversation Starter: Ready, Aim, Fire!

Ask

What's a big project you've undertaken? What was required to plan? Who did you have to enlist to help? What were the results?

Nehemiah before the King (Nehemiah 2:1-8)

Ask

In verses 1-2, Nehemiah as the cupbearer to the king has a conversation with King Artaxerxes. Four months have passed since Nehemiah had begun praying about the condition of Jerusalem. This matter weighed heavily on Nehemiah, but he had until now "put on a brave face" before the King. Have you ever had a time where you were similarly burdened?

Nehemiah's burden is so consuming that even the king noticed it. His question to Nehemiah indicated that he knew his cupbearer well enough to notice the change in his disposition. Who do you know, serve, or even "rub shoulders with" outside your faith community who can tell when you are burdened by spiritual matters? What do you think matters about being spiritually vulnerable or transparent?

Scholars suggest that the king's term "sadness of heart" is a term used in that time to convey evil intent. The king's suspicions instilled fear in Nehemiah, and compelled him to clarify. How have unbelievers misinterpreted your spiritual burdens?

What stands out to you in verse 4?

In verses 5-8, Nehemiah and the king discuss Nehemiah's request. What seems significant to you in this conversation? How do these insights apply to our own responses to God's leading in our lives?

Nehemiah's Inspection (Nehemiah 2:9-16)

The scene shifts in verses 9-10. As expected, Nehemiah met opposition. What provision did God make for this opposition?

What provisions does God give you to navigate through opposition?

In verses 11-16, Nehemiah has been in Jerusalem for three days, in near obscurity. Then, he anonymously surveys the condition of the walls and the city. What stands out to you about the details of Nehemiah's exploration?

Going Public (Nehemiah 2:17-20)

In verses 17-18, Nehemiah presents the challenge. Who does he meet, what does he say, and what is the response?

Verse 18 says they "strengthened their hands for the good work." What is the good work God is calling you to do? What have you seen as needs? Who is the team God is providing? What does it mean to you to "strengthen your hands for the good work?"

In verses 19-20, Nehemiah and his team meet their initial opposition. What stands out to you in this opposition? What can you glean from these opponents' tactics

How did Nehemiah respond and what does that teach you?

What is your "take away" from this chapter and our time together?

The following pages
are for small group leaders.

Sermon Series: Revive!
Nehemiah 2:1-20 Getting Your Second Wind
Small Group Leader Guide

Prepare: Things to do before your small group gets together

- **Recall** a time in your life when you presented yourself before God with a heart that was broken because of a situation or circumstance that seemed like matters were in total disrepair. What were the details? How did God respond? **Think** of the encouragement God gave you, and the plans he provided to you to rebuild what was so totally broken. **Consider** the favor God had shown you to have your plans come to fruition, and the initiative He gave to you to "put feet to your faith." **Thank God** for all that He has done in your life in the past until now, demonstrating His loving faithfulness in your times of crisis.
- **Review** Nehemiah 2:1-20 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: "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build... (Nehemiah 2:20a, ESV)

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

Discuss Nehemiah's interaction with the Persian King, assessment of Jerusalem's walls, vision casting to Israel, and response to the critics.

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

Apply the principles demonstrated in Nehemiah to your situation.

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: Ready, Aim, Fire!

Ask

What's a big project you've undertaken? What was required to plan? Who did you have to enlist to help? What were the results?

Say

As we move into chapter 2 of Nehemiah, we are seeing how God is moving Nehemiah forward to undertake the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The story picks up drama, enemies, and partners. And through it all, there are some relevant and timely principles to learn and apply for our own undertakings that God has for us, now.

Open in prayer for your time together.

Nehemiah before the King (Nehemiah 2:1-8)

Ask

In verses 1-2, Nehemiah as the cupbearer to the king has a conversation with King Artaxerxes. Four months have passed since Nehemiah had begun praying about the condition of Jerusalem. This matter weighed heavily on Nehemiah, but he had until now "put on a brave face" before the King. Have you ever had a time where you were similarly burdened?

Allow the group to respond. If the group doesn't offer a contribution, you may want to share a personal experience, or invite the group to consider the ongoing burden we have for the lostness of loved ones (and that in many circles we don't talk about spiritual burdens).

Nehemiah's burden is so consuming that even the king noticed it. His question to Nehemiah indicated that he knew his cupbearer well enough to notice the change in his disposition. Who do you know, serve, or even "rub shoulders with" outside your faith community who can tell when you are burdened by spiritual matters? What do you think matters about being spiritually vulnerable or transparent?

Allow the group to respond. Explain that spiritual vulnerability and transparency are means that God uses to show an unbelieving world that He is God, that He is good, and that He is at work in the world.

Scholars suggest that the king's term "sadness of heart" is a term used in that time to convey evil intent. The king's suspicions instilled fear in Nehemiah, and compelled him to clarify. How have unbelievers misinterpreted your spiritual burdens?

Allow the group to respond. Typical responses may include:

- *They think you're having a bad day.*
- *They try to interpret it through their own understanding of challenges and problems*
- *They dismiss your concerns as "religious issues"*
- *They try to solve the matter with worldly solutions that may address symptoms but not the root spiritual issue.*

What stands out to you in verse 4?

Key points of verse 4:

- *The king cuts to quick and says, "so what do you want?"*
- *Nehemiah's immediate response to the king's question is prayer.*
- *This moment is the culmination of 4 months of prayer. Nehemiah recognized the moment and reacted by faith. He put his faith into action.*

In verses 5-8, Nehemiah and the king discuss Nehemiah's request. What seems significant to you in this conversation? How do these insights apply to our own responses to God's leading in our lives?

Points to highlight include:

- *Nehemiah demonstrates significant humility, even having heard from God. He recognizes he serves a earthly authority and God's plan will be accomplished through the king.*
- *Nehemiah recognizes God's favor given to Nehemiah with the king. Nehemiah is confident to use that favor for leverage to accomplish God's plan.*
- *The king asked specific questions, and Nehemiah gave answers. This doesn't mean we have to know every detail, but that we should think things through and be prepared to address the reasonable details.*
- *Nehemiah rightly predicted that he would face opposition and asked the king to help him navigate difficulties. This illustrates our need to be wise to recognize that God works through people, and we shouldn't be shy about interacting with both believers and non-believers to accomplish God's work and to supply God's provision.*
- *Nehemiah ultimately recognized that everything God initiates, he perpetuates. He progressed solely due to the activity of God's good hand in human affairs.*

Nehemiah's Inspection (Nehemiah 2:9-16)

Ask

The scene shifts in verses 9-10. As expected, Nehemiah met opposition. What provision did God make for this opposition?

Not only did the king write letters that expressed his favor for Nehemiah's plans, but he also provided horses and guards to keep him safe along the way.

What provisions does God give you to navigate through opposition?

Appropriate answers could include:

- *He provides you with His Holy Spirit.*
- *He equips you to engage with resources to win spiritual warfare.*
- *He gives you a church, a community of believers to share your burdens, obstacles, challenges.*
- *He gives you influence and favor in relationships where those people provide meaningful resources and provisions that benefit and bless you in your endeavors.*

In verses 11-16, Nehemiah has been in Jerusalem for three days, in near obscurity. Then, he anonymously surveys the condition of the walls and the city. What stands out to you about the details of Nehemiah's exploration?

Details to highlight include:

- *Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, but did not rush into action. He was deliberately prayerful.*
- *He didn't raise a calamity on arrival. It would have been easy or even understandable to show up with the Lord's Agenda and immediately start "rallying the troops." But he recognized he needed get a right assessment of the situation once he was there. The preliminary report was adequate to begin, but a greater understanding was now necessary.*
- *The state of destruction was so extreme that Nehemiah could not progress all the way around. He had to turn back. And his rebuilding would be smaller than the walls' original measurements. The consequences of sin cause us to "lose ground" that had been claimed*

in earlier victories.

Going Public (Nehemiah 2:17-20)

In verses 17-18, Nehemiah presents the challenge. Who does he meet, what does he say, and what is the response?

He makes four important statements, when he meets with the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and others doing the work:

- *He identified with the people. He didn't say "this is your problem," and he didn't say, "this is the work you have to do for the king." He said, "You see this trouble we are in..."*
- *He didn't sugar coat the issue. He framed reality for his brothers and those who would be participating in the work.*
- *He spurred his team to action. He recruited them into commitment for the work that had to be done.*
- *He shared his testimony. He boldly talked about God's goodness shown to him, and relied upon God to have that testimony bear weight and give influence to the team.*

Verse 18 says they "strengthened their hands for the good work." What is the good work God is calling you to do? What have you seen as needs? Who is the team God is providing? What does it mean to you to "strengthen your hands for the good work?"

Allow the group to respond. You can encourage your group to see the opportunities that God has presented through the church:

- *Involvement in our church's ministries - preschool, children, and student ministry volunteering provides Bible training to emerging generations, and offers families the chance to worship.*
- *Participation in our church's missions - locally all the way to internationally promotes the Gospel and provides meaningful blessing to people in need.*
- *Ongoing contribution to Compelled by Grace - helps resource the renovation of our Shea campus and establish additional sites where people can come to know Christ and enter into Christian community.*
- *Active relationality with unbelieving family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and others - sharing your testimony of God's goodness shown to you and affords God a means by which His Spirit speaks to those who do not know Him.*

In verses 19-20, Nehemiah and his team meet their initial opposition. What stands out to you in this opposition? What can you glean from these opponents' tactics

Aspects to highlight include:

- *They "jeer and despise." A common initial approach is to try to ridicule or belittle the work of those who act by faith to the initiation of God's Spirit.*
- *They accuse them of rebellion against the king. Those who do not recognize God's ultimate authority will be inclined to falsely accuse disloyalty against shared earthly leaders (see Daniel, Jesus, and modern day examples for examples throughout history).*

How did Nehemiah respond and what does that teach you?

Nehemiah did not respond to their threats directly. He didn't make the case that he was working in

Artaxerxes' favor. Instead, he simply spoke to the spiritual reality and claimed the victory of God's glorifying Himself through them. He knew the conditions of his human relationships and didn't engage where it was unnecessary.

We do not have to engage in every verbal battle. Most accusations, mocking, jeering do not deserve nor demand a response. Instead, when we speak, we have the opportunity to glorify God with humble confidence and speak to His goodness even as we continue to by faith follow His leadership.

Say

This chapter, like the entire book, is rich in content, principles, and application. It has vital components for us to consider as leaders (as any person who has influence with someone else), but also as followers. Chapter two has given us some "gems" on how to relate with authorities, how to plan, and how to begin our actions.

Ask

What is your "take away" from this chapter and our time together?

Allow group members to share their insights

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!