

SERMON SERIES COMPANION STUDIES
FOR SMALL GROUPS



LET'S REBUILD!

A SERIES FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

REBUILDING LIFE, CHURCH, AND COMMUNITY

STUDY 6

God's Welcome to the World, Part 2: Gracious Witness

SERMON TEXT: NEHEMIAH 7:1-73; 11:1-36
COMPANION STUDY TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12

Getting Started

If you haven't done so already, share this PDF, or the link to this study, with other members of your group.

After greeting one another, invite a person in the group to open the group with prayer, perhaps even take a moment in silence to simply enjoy God's presence together. If you don't all know one another already, invite each group member to share their name. Welcome people who are new and let them know what to expect. Have paper and pens on hand for an activity you will do with the group.

Opening Question

During this pandemic year a lot of people have been spending more time at home, more time in their neighborhoods. Have you found yourself doing things that you didn't do as much in your neighborhood pre-Covid? For example: taking a daily walk, biking, or doing extra projects in your yard or on your balcony or patio. Have you by chance met more of your neighbors this way? Share the 'new thing' you've been doing with the group.

Purpose of This Week's Study

To step into practical ways of winsome welcome and witness among our friends and neighbors.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS WEEK'S STUDY

As the work of rebuilding continues in Nehemiah, some of the people are chosen to move to Jerusalem and settle there, a city that is still largely rubble. It's fascinating to note that though this chapter is entitled, "The New Residents of Jerusalem," great detail is given to describe the people who do not move to Jerusalem but who stay in their homes, in the cities and towns where their families have lived for generations.

We spend a lot of our time in the places where we live: We sleep, eat, raise children, work, host friends, join the neighborhood watch, grow gardens, sit on city councils, shovel snow, wash cars, and chaperone play dates. In our culture there can tend to be an emphasis given to leaving where we come from, getting out of the neighborhood to go to the city, to do something exciting far away. While we do see a blessing is given to those who move to Jerusalem, nine out of every ten people are instructed to stay where they live. This tells us something: our neighborhoods, the places we come from, are very important. They are so important that the way we show up in

these spaces should be marked by a particular kind of presence. Paul talks about this in 2 Thessalonians. As followers of Jesus, the way we “show up” in the environments we inhabit should look and feel a certain way. If we truly believe that as followers of Jesus we are created, filled, and sustained by God’s Spirit, then to bear witness to God looks a lot like leaning toward the people we know, opening the cabinet doors of our lives and allowing the Spirit of God who inhabits us to become evident to our communities. In other words, how can we model being arrows that point to God in the most compelling, winsome, and beautiful ways possible?

Scripture Reading

Invite two or more people from your group to take turns reading the following passage from Nehemiah aloud:

NEHEMIAH 11:1-36 (NIV)

¹ Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten of them to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. ² The people commended all who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

³ These are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem (now some Israelites, priests, Levites, temple servants and descendants of Solomon’s servants lived in the towns of Judah, each on their own property in the various towns, ⁴ while other people from both Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem):

From the descendants of Judah:

Athaiah son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, a descendant of Perez; ⁵ and Maaseiah son of Baruch, the son of Kol-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah. ⁶ The descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem totaled 468 men of standing.

⁷ From the descendants of Benjamin:

Sallu son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah, ⁸ and his followers, Gabbai and Sallai—928 men. ⁹ Joel son of Zikri was their chief officer, and Judah son of Hassenuah was over the New Quarter of the city.

¹⁰ From the priests:

Jedaiah; the son of Joiarib; Jakin; 11 Seraiah son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the official in charge of the house of God,¹² and their associates, who carried on work for the temple—822 men; Adaiah son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah,¹³ and his associates, who were heads of families—242 men; Amashsai son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer,¹⁴ and his associates, who were men of standing—128. Their chief officer was Zabdiel son of Haggadolim.

¹⁵ From the Levites:

Shemaiah son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni;¹⁶ Shabbethai and Jozabad, two of the heads of the Levites, who had charge of the outside work of the house of God;¹⁷ Mattaniah son of Mika, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the director who led in thanksgiving and prayer; Bakbukiah, second among his associates; and Abda son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun.¹⁸ The Levites in the holy city totaled 284.

¹⁹ The gatekeepers:

Akkub, Talmon and their associates, who kept watch at the gates—172 men.

²⁰ The rest of the Israelites, with the priests and Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, each on their ancestral property.

²¹ The temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them.

²² The chief officer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mika. Uzzi was one of Asaph's descendants, who were the musicians responsible for the service of the house of God.²³ The musicians were under the king's orders, which regulated their daily activity.

²⁴ Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, one of the descendants of Zerah son of Judah, was the king's agent in all affairs relating to the people.

²⁵ As for the villages with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba and its surrounding settlements, in Dibon and its settlements, in Jekabzeel and its villages,²⁶ in Jeshua, in Moladah, in Beth Pelet,²⁷ in Hazar Shual, in Beersheba and its settlements,²⁸ in Ziklag, in Mekonah and its settlements,²⁹ in En Rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth,³⁰ Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, in Lachish and its fields, and in Azekah and its settlements. So they were living all the way from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom.

³¹ The descendants of the Benjamites from Geba lived in Mikdash, Aija, Bethel and its settlements,³² in Anathoth, Nob and Ananiah,³³ in Hazor, Ramah and Gittaim,³⁴ in Hadid, Zeboim and Neballat,³⁵ in Lod and Ono, and in Ge Harashim.

³⁶ Some of the divisions of the Levites of Judah settled in Benjamin.

For Reflection & Discussion

1. Re-read verses 1, 3, 20, and 25-36. What stands out to you in these passages (perhaps certain words stand out, or you notice words that are repeated)? By continuing to mention in detail the people who stayed in their homes and villages, what do you think is being communicated?
2. Do find yourself being more of a “homebody” or being more someone who is ready to move elsewhere/someone who leans toward change? Place yourself in this passage – which group of people would you most naturally gravitate toward – those who move to Jerusalem or those who stay in the villages and on their ancestral lands?
3. Regardless of whether we identify most naturally with one group, a huge portion of our lives is spent in our neighborhoods. Let’s take stock of our neighborhoods right now. Take paper and draw a quick aerial view of your street, cul-de-sac, or apartment building. Don’t overthink it, just draw boxes for each house or apartment (1”x 1” so that later you can write in the boxes) and draw a line for the streets. After you’ve drawn out the houses and the street(s), write inside each box the name of the person who lives there. Try to write all the names of the people you know. Don’t judge yourself based on how many you do or don’t know; just write the ones you do know. (Allow some time for everyone to complete their map.) Ask: Who would like to share your map? Did you notice anything as you made it? How complete is your map? Is there anything that surprises you or something that you feel God is highlighting for you?
4. Ask someone to read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12. What are the ways of witnessing that Paul highlights here? Ask people to call out all the different ways they hear. If the group would like to hear the passage read again go ahead and do that.
5. How do you find yourself currently engaging in your neighborhood? Are there any small examples or stories that someone would like to share? Are there ways of witnessing from the above passage that you find more natural than others? Or perhaps none of them feel natural at all (it’s okay to admit that as well).

For Prayer Ministry

1. Take some time in silence as a group, then together as a group present your maps before God, perhaps even physically opening your hands on your lap with the map open in front of you as a sign of offering your neighborhood to God. If there are a lot of empty spaces for the people you don’t know – pray something like this: **“God, would you offer me opportunities this summer to meet these people?”** If you know a lot of the names pray, **“God would you offer me opportunities to connect more deeply with these people this summer?”** You may even like to pray their names out loud.
2. Perhaps some of you find yourself with utterly no desire to “witness” or to get to know your neighbors at all. Don’t judge yourself, simply consider presenting yourself to God and saying, “God, would you give me the desire? Would you help me SEE my neighborhood, my neighbors more? Give me your eyes, O God.”

For Further Reflection & Action Outside of Group

1. Take your map with you and consider completing it slowly over the summer. As you meet more of your neighbors and learn their names, write them in the appropriate box and begin to pray for them as you walk, ride your bike, or when you do yard work.
2. For those of you who have relatively completed maps, think about ways you can “be” more in your neighborhood this summer. Here are some fun examples of ways members from the different VC campuses have been connecting in their neighborhoods lately: One family organizes a weekly gathering by reserving a food truck to come to their neighborhood every Thursday evening from 5pm-9pm. Another family is planning to host a Father’s Day cookout. One couple have a quarterly Friday evening “happy hour” in their front yard, inviting people to bring a drink and a folding chair along to ring in the weekend together in a Covid-safe manner.
3. Some people in the group may feel like they have relationships with their neighbors, but the conversations don’t ever go deep – they stay on-the-surface. Here’s a fun challenge: This coming week when you chat with your neighbors try to talk less yourself and instead ask more questions. For example: “Gosh, we’re headed into year two of this pandemic and it’s still not finished. I sure feel worn down emotionally by it all, are you noticing that as well?” OR “What are some of the things you feel the loss of the most this past year?” OR “What do you hope life will look like once this pandemic is over? Are there aspects of your life this year that you hope will stay?” These are just examples of some deeper questions you can ask of people you already have some level of relationship with. Remember if this has been a hard year for you, if you feel a bit sad or lonely, if you miss something, then most likely every single person is a bit like you; so think of the question you’d like someone to ask you.
4. Some may be interested in exploring the themes that were highlighted in this study a bit more. Here are two great (short) books you could read on your own (or even together as a group). Both are at the VC bookstore.
 - **Surprise the World; The Five Habits of Highly Missional People** by Michael Frost
 - **The Art of Neighboring; Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door** by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon
5. Spend some more time reading and reflecting on 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 this week and press into what you notice about God, about yourself, and about your own neighborhood as you do.