

SERMON SERIES COMPANION STUDIES  
FOR SMALL GROUPS



# LET'S REBUILD!

A SERIES FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

REBUILDING LIFE, CHURCH, AND COMMUNITY

STUDY 7

## Devoted to the Word

SERMON TEXT: NEHEMIAH 8

COMPANION STUDY TEXT: PSALM 119:9-16; 25-32

## 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 time of extended 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.

## Opening Question

How has your choice to engage in joyful worship and hearing the word of God been instrumental in restoring or renewing your faith in the past?

## Purpose of This Week's Study

To help us establish or re-establish regular patterns of individual and corporate reading of Scripture, in order both to strengthen our spiritual lives and to promote our overall well-being and engagement with people beyond the church.

### INTRODUCTION TO THIS WEEK'S STUDY

In chapter 8 of the Book of Nehemiah, Ezra and Nehemiah are named as contemporaries. As worship leader, Ezra reads the law of God to the people. Nehemiah is described as the governor, and at this time served in both a political and an "ecclesial" capacity. Placing these two central activities – worship and governance – in proximity to one another reminds us that there is a relationship between the governance of God's people and the worship of God, where the common thread between them is the word of God. Through the regular reading of the law of God, God's people are reminded that God is above them in their role both as worshipers, and as citizens of both church and state.

The emphasis in chapter 8 is on the people's eagerness to hear the word of God, to have it explained, and to worship the Lord in response. The people call on Ezra to read and to interpret the word and to help them apply it to their own lives. A wooden platform is built (v. 4), on which Ezra stands to read the word aloud as both a visual and audible reminder that the entire community is under God's authority. The phrase "all the people" is used again and again

to emphasize the unity of God's people as they submit to God, as they listen to his word, and as they worship God in response. The restored people of God will not be a people where everyone does what is right in their own eyes as they did during the time of the judges (Judges 17:6), when they embraced a highly individualistic approach to life, and made decisions centered solely upon their own will and desire. Instead, God's word establishes a shared rule of life to be lived out in close community with others.

Emphasized in chapter 8 is the concern that all the people not only hear, but also understand God's word. The people respond – body and soul – in worship. Hearing God's word produces penitence and joy. From that experience, the people are also moved to a sense of mission. They are urged to reach out to neighbors by sharing what they have with those who are poor. For to be in committed relationship with God is to be in committed relationship with one another and even with those beyond our immediate spiritual community.

Relatedly, at the center of the Book of Psalms is the theme that “the Lord reigns.” Under God's reign, we thrive as humans. Psalm 119 (along with Psalm 1 and Psalm 19, etc.) confronts our modern bias that sees commands as restricting our lives. Instead, the verses from this psalm liberate us and give us space in which to be fully human. Indeed, the word of God continually grounds us in our identity as beloved sons and daughters and calls us to our vocation as partners with God in healing the world through the Good News of the kingdom.

God's word is therefore our starting point from which we engage in our ongoing pursuit of God each day. In view of the brevity of his life, as “a sojourner on earth,” the writer of this psalm longs to make the most of his situation by studying God's word as a source of strength amid uncertainty, anxiety, and suffering.

## Scripture Reading

Invite two or three people from your group to take turns reading the following passages from Psalm 119 aloud:

### PSALM 119:9-16; 25-32 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup> How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

By living according to your word.

<sup>10</sup> I seek you with all my heart;

do not let me stray from your commands.

<sup>11</sup> I have hidden your word in my heart

that I might not sin against you.

<sup>12</sup> Praise be to you, Lord;

teach me your decrees.

<sup>13</sup> With my lips I recount

all the laws that come from your mouth.

<sup>14</sup> I rejoice in following your statutes

as one rejoices in great riches.

<sup>15</sup> I meditate on your precepts

and consider your ways.

<sup>16</sup> I delight in your decrees;

I will not neglect your word.

<sup>25</sup> I am laid low in the dust;

preserve my life according to your word.

<sup>26</sup> I gave an account of my ways and you answered me;

teach me your decrees.

<sup>27</sup> Cause me to understand the way of your precepts,

that I may meditate on your wonderful deeds.

<sup>28</sup> My soul is weary with sorrow;

strengthen me according to your word.

<sup>29</sup> Keep me from deceitful ways;

be gracious to me and teach me your law.

<sup>30</sup> I have chosen the way of faithfulness;

I have set my heart on your laws.

<sup>31</sup> I hold fast to your statutes, Lord;

do not let me be put to shame.

<sup>32</sup> I run in the path of your commands,

for you have broadened my understanding.

## For Reflection & Discussion

1. Focus on Psalm 119:9-16. What practical steps have you taken, or can you take, to pattern your life after God's word?
2. What attitude is a hallmark of following God's law? What does this say about the writer's perception of God's law?
3. Now focus on Psalm 119:25-32. Are those who follow God's word exempt from stress? Depression? Difficulty? What does suffering motivate the psalmist to do? What does suffering motivate you to do?
4. Is God willing to hear the writer's list of troubles? What is your attitude toward those around you who suffer and who are experiencing difficulty, whatever the cause?
5. What three things does the writer ask God to supply (vv. 27-29)? How has the psalmist prepared himself to receive God's help?

## For Prayer Ministry

Generally, you will want to include a time of quiet waiting before God, and an opportunity for group members to speak out impressions, scriptures, prophetic words or images, etc. Also, it is generally good to provide for a time of response in prayer, and/or for praying over one another, either as a single group or in smaller breakout groups. Beyond that, feel free to invite people into a range of ways of engaging with God and one another during this time of prayer ministry.

The first part of the group's prayer together is guided by several verses of Scripture. These verses are included to practice opening our hearts to the word of God and allowing the words of Scripture to shape our initial time of prayer.

Begin this prayer time with 1-2 minutes of silence.

Break the silence by reading **John 6:44**. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." Spend a few minutes listening for the invitation of the Father to this time of prayer.

**Read John 16:8**. "... and when He has come, He will convict the world of sin and of righteousness, and of judgement." Take a few moments to reflect on where God has convicted you of sin, righteousness and judgement this past week.

**Read 1 John 1:8-9**. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Take a few moments to notice any place in your life where you have walked away from God's commands and laws. As the Holy spirit convicts you of any attitude or action, confess it before God. Then receive the forgiveness of God.

**Read Ezekiel 36:26**. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." Open your hands before God and receive the refreshment of his Holy Spirit.

**Read James 1:22**. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Now wait on the Lord and seek to understand how God's Spirit wants to use you as a blessing to others in your group and beyond as you wait for prophetic words and words of healing, and as you offer prayers for one another.

## For Further Reflection & Action Outside of Group

1. The Holy Spirit through the Scriptures enables us to become not simply a “rebuilt” people, but a new creation, and a community who welcomes others in. In the season ahead, who might you invite into your group or circle of friends that feels excluded for one reason or another – perhaps because of a disability, or their race, or their gender, or their age, or for some other reason?
2. Choose a short book of Scripture, or several chapters of a longer book of Scripture, to read aloud this week, perhaps multiple times. As you read sections of Scripture aloud, what do you notice about God, yourself, other people, and the world? Take even a few minutes to record your observations and reflections in a journal.
3. How will you bear witness to your relationship with God and his word in the week ahead?