

Let's Build Together

LET US RISE UP AND BUILD - NEHEMIAH 2:18

THE Nehemiah CHALLENGE

A 52-DAY CHALLENGE FROM THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

JANUARY 15 - MARCH 12

connectchurch.com/letsbuild

Week 1: Day 1-7

Search Your Heart (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

We are super excited to begin our new sermon series and church wide challenge, Let's Build Together. The challenge is to commit to 52 days - the time it took Nehemiah to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem - of study, prayer, fasting, meditation, memorization and other weekly challenges. These are foundational disciplines for the spiritual health of a disciple of Christ.

The Nehemiah Challenge

During our weekly challenges we'll be looking at the life and ministry of Nehemiah. One of the powerful lessons we learn in Nehemiah is how much we can accomplish when we align ourselves with the will and plan of God. Nehemiah and the people of God accomplished what seemed impossible because

"...the people had a mind to work" (4:6).

☰ Practicing the Spiritual Discipline of Meditation

Meditation can be defined as the act of calling to mind pondering upon it, and correlating it to one's own life. Meditation is the act of dwelling upon God's word:

- think on, reflect on, ponder
- listening to God's word,
- to turn over in your mind
- reflecting on God's works
- internalize, saturate
- ruminating on God's law
- rehearsing God's deeds

When we hear the word meditation, many of us may think of transcendental meditation or eastern mysticism. However the meditation we see in scripture is different. In scripture, the goal of meditation is not to empty our minds and consciousness, but to fill them with the words and works of God.

"Help me understand the meaning of your commandments, and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds." - Psalm 119:27

☰ What are Spiritual Disciplines?

Over the next 8 weeks we'll be exploring a few spiritual disciplines found in scripture to help us fully connect with God and others. This is important because just as the undisciplined body becomes sluggish and out of shape, the undisciplined spirit becomes weak.

This is why Paul tells Timothy:

"train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" -1 Tim 4:7-8

This verse is the cornerstone of the spiritual disciplines because it spells out their purpose—training for godliness.

Spiritual Disciplines are not the desired end product of spiritual life – but rather they are a means to an end. They are the intentional development of authentic spiritual life and intimacy with God. Spiritual disciplines are not the same as spiritual maturity. Spiritual disciplines are not a guarantee for spiritual growth; rather they open the opportunity for growth.



Our lives are so full of activity, information, responsibilities, worries, information, input and people, that we quickly forget our morning Bible reading, and quickly forget the weekly sermon. God has told us not just to read or hear his words, but meditate on them.

*And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates
-Deuteronomy 6:5-9*

Notice this all-day, private and public meditation, in which God's people are to keep his words in their hearts, in their minds on their lips, in their ears, and in their eyes, 24/7! Our goal then is to meditate on God's word, God's works, and God's Word; to live our lives in constant awareness that we are God's people in God's world.

Overview: Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah was the cup bearer to the King of Persia. In Nehemiah chapter 1, he introduced himself and recounted the time when one of his brothers and some men came from Judah to give him some bad news.

When Nehemiah asked the men about what was happening with the Jews who had lived through the exile and were back in Jerusalem, they told him that they were not going well. They reported that the people are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire (1:3).

Shocked by the news, Nehemiah broke down and cried for many days. He also fasted and prayed to God. During his prayer Nehemiah called on God to hear him and his prayer on behalf of the people of Israel.

He admitted that they sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave them. He also said that he and everyone in his father's household had also been disobedient and sinful.

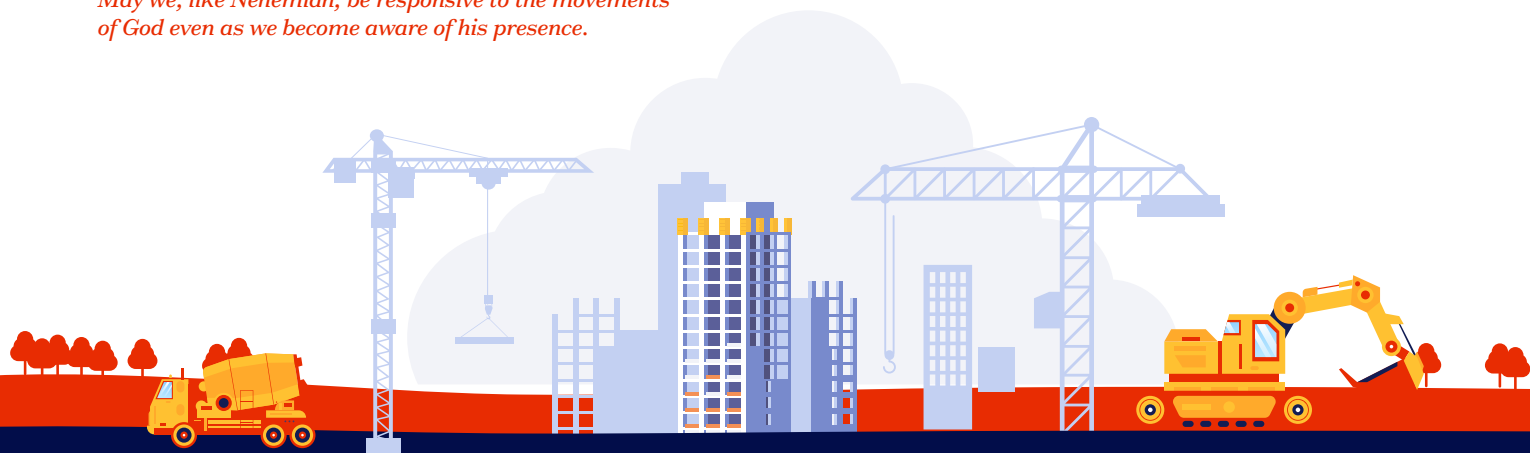
Nehemiah confessed that neither he nor the Israelites had kept God's commands. He knew that God told the Israelites that if they were unfaithful and disobedient, He would scatter them among the nations. However, Nehemiah also reminded God that He promised to hold His people near and bring them to the place He had chosen if they kept His commandments. Nehemiah then begged for God's mercy on him and the Israelites despite their corruption and faithlessness. He ended his prayer in 1:11 by asking God to grant him success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me.

A QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Does what break God's heart break your heart?


For three months, Nehemiah engaged in prayer, fasting, and confession on behalf of the people in Jerusalem, ever since he heard of their distress (1:1-3). Nehemiah lived in comfort in the palace of the king of Persia. He could have said that Jerusalem and the Jews living there were no concern of his. But Nehemiah was not that kind of man. His heart went out to his countrymen and to the city of his God. And after mourning and fasting, he turned to his God in prayer.

May we, like Nehemiah, be responsive to the movements of God even as we become aware of his presence.




Meditation in Scripture


Joshua 1:7-8

 *Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*

Psalms 1:1-3


 *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

Psalms 19:13-14


 *Keep your servant from deliberate sins!
Don't let them control me.
Then I will be free of guilt
and innocent of great sin.*

*May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

Psalms 145:4-6

 *One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds.*

Deuteronomy 6:5-9

 *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

The Four "Rs" of Meditation

1. Rest

"like a weaned child with its mother." - Psalm 131:2

In a hectic world Christ promises us his peace. Meditation allows us to settle ourselves before God and enjoy his presence.

2. Renewal

"like a tree planted by streams of water" - Psalm 1:3

Like Elijah beside the brook, we need refreshed and restored.

3. Re-alignment

"Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes". - Psalm 119:33

Meditation allows us to examine ourselves in the light of the Word.

4. Response

"I will praise you with an upright heart" - Psalm 119:7

Meditation on the truths of God prompts a response of obedience and praise.




WEEK 1 CHALLENGE

Practicing Meditation

Meditation Today

How might we do Biblical meditation today? Here are some suggestions.

God's words:

In your mind and heart

- Use the same passage of the Bible for your reading every day for a week
- Memorize a key verse from this reading, and repeat it to yourself as often as you can each day.
- Turn the words of the reading and the Bible verse into a prayer. When we pray them, we own, them, and when we pray them we reinforce them in our hearts and wills.
- Reduce the amount of time each day you spend consuming media.

In your eyes

- Put the Bible passage or verse as your screen saver.
- Print out a copies of it, and put them on the doors of your bedroom, bathroom, study, office, kitchen, fridge, sink, dining table and in your car or on your bike.
- Put a copy at the front of your calendar.
- Send yourself a daily email or text message with the verse on it.

On your lips—to yourself

- Say the Bible verse aloud to yourself as often as you think of it, so it is on your lips and in your ears as well as in your mind.
- Put the Bible verse to music, and sing it to yourself.
- Whenever you take exercise, or travel, meditate on the Bible verse. Say it out loud.

On your lips—to others

- Tell family and friends, and anyone you meet about the Bible words which you are meditating on, and encourage them with its message. There is a good chance that whatever you need to meditate on will help others, and it will be a ministry to them. (Colossians 3:16). In this way you will have the words on your lips and in your ears. And as you say them to others and encourage them to receive them, you will reinforce them to yourself.

In your ears — from the lips of others

- Ask family and friends to remind you of the Bible truth you want to absorb (Colossians 3:16). Have the words in your ears.
- Get a whiteboard in your kitchen, write the Bible verse on it, and talk about it with your family each meal for seven days. Do corporate Biblical meditation, just like in Deuteronomy! And ask others to pray for you, that God would change you by these words.

STUDY THIS BOOK
OF INSTRUCTION
CONTINUALLY.
MEDITATE ON IT
DAY AND NIGHT SO
YOU WILL BE SURE TO
OBEY EVERYTHING
‘WRITTEN IN IT. ONLY
THEN WILL YOU
PROSPER AND
SUCCEED IN ALL
YOU DO.

JOSHUA 1:8

