

**SPRINGFIELD GARDENS  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Rev. Dr. Cecil B. Stone, *Senior Pastor*

**THE NEHEMIAH  
PROJECT**

**REBUILDING THE PEOPLE OF GOD  
RESTORING THE BODY OF CHRIST**

**“...THIS WORK HAD BEEN  
ACCOMPLISHED WITH THE  
HELP OF OUR GOD.”**

**NEHEMIAH 6:16**

**SGUMC Devotional (*Revised 2020*)**

**Part Two • Day 17-40**

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## DAY 17

### Nehemiah 2:20

*20 Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants are going to start building; but you have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem."*

#### WHO'S WHO

In the preceding verses, Nehemiah finally speaks to his fellow Jews informing them of God's favor and King Artaxerxes' support for Jerusalem's rebuild. Motivated by this good news, the people of the city commit to partnering with Nehemiah to carry out God's plan of restoration. Although Nehemiah's plan is met with support in the city, there are outsiders who stand in opposition to the work. This resistance undoubtedly came as no surprise to Nehemiah. Opposition frequently comes from those who believe they will derive no benefit from whatever has been proposed. It does not matter that the plan costs them nothing and does not detract from them in any way. They simply do not want to see the lives of others improve. They seem to believe that the only way they can have pleasure is through another's brokenness.

In times such as these, we need to be certain of our calling. Nehemiah makes it abundantly clear that the God of heaven is the one who has authorized and commissioned the work. The venture would succeed because the mandate came down from the ultimate authority, the workers were committed to God's service, and the Lord would supply all that was needed. Standing firm in his convictions, Nehemiah responds to the naysayers letting them know that "...[they] have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem."

Inasmuch as we must be clear on what the Lord has called us to do, we must also be clear on who the Lord has sent to serve with us. Although people may not have ill intentions, their involvement may yet run contrary to God's will. *Let Us* pray for God's clarity asking, "What do you want me to do?" and "How am I to accomplish your will?" And, *Let Us* remember to ask the Lord, "Who have you sent to work, partner, and serve with me to realize your plan?"

1. Who are the people and/or entities with whom you plan to partner in realizing God's plan? Have you prayed for discernment to confirm who is to share in the work?
2. What role are they to have in the process? What role are you called to take?
3. As you proceed forward, you will likely be met with challenges. How might you distinguish between enemy opposition and divine redirection, refinement or testing?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, thank you for the help you continue to send our way. Thank you for the provisions you continue to make available to meet our needs and to invest in the work to which you have called us. Please grant us discernment and enable us to recognize your divine direction... your holy hands at work. And Lord, grant us the courage to stand on your word to us and to faithfully follow through.

## DAY 18

### Nehemiah 3:1, 5

*3<sup>1</sup> Then the high priest Eliashib set to work with his fellow priests and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set up its doors; they consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred and as far as the Tower of Hananel.*

*5 Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.*

#### **BEGIN WHERE YOU ARE**

Throughout chapter three, Nehemiah's strategy for attacking the capital project of rebuilding Jerusalem is unfurled. Beginning with the priests working to restore the Sheep Gate at the Northeast end of the city, many of Jerusalem's leaders and citizens worked side-by-side to restore the city's outer wall and gates. Each family was assigned a section near their home where they would labor alongside family members and neighbors to accomplish the work. Although many would participate in the work, there were those who shirked their responsibilities. Perhaps they saw the work as being beneath them.

If you are still trying to wrap your mind around how restoration will be realized in your life, but you are not sure where to start, let me encourage you to simply begin where you are. Begin by addressing the concerns of which you are already aware, those matters that are closest to you. If your goal is getting out of debt, begin with looking at your finances and establishing a budget. If your goal is growing in your faith, begin with being regular in worship, participating in a Bible study or small group. Take the time to pray as you move throughout your day. One of the awesome things about God and the work the Lord has called us to do, is that although the task is great, our God will enable us to handle the work piece by piece and bit by bit. Yes, there will be those among us who will shirk and shrink from their responsibilities. The word at such moments is "focus": Do not allow another's dissent become your distraction. So, *Let Us* press ahead, continue the work and let God be glorified through our faithfulness. And, *Let Us* run the race that is set before us, beginning where we are.

1. Take time to be specific about the different elements in need of attention for you to experience God's restoration. Make a list to which you can refer when you pray.
2. Distinguish between what you can do on your own and those items requiring support.
3. Move forward with an item you can do on your own.
4. Choose an item requiring support and ask God to direct you further.

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, there is nothing to which you have called us that you will not see us through. For you Lord are faithful. Help us to take courage and move forward, trusting that you have not only called us to pursue restoration in our lives, but that you are ever-present with us. You, Lord God, will fulfill your plans in us. You, Lord God, will certainly bring what you have purposed in us to pass.

*4* <sup>1</sup> Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he mocked the Jews. <sup>2</sup> He said in the presence of his associates and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore things? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish it in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish—and burned ones at that?” <sup>3</sup> Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “That stone wall they are building—any fox going up on it would break it down!”

### **MIND OVER MATTER**

Restoration of the holy city had finally begun. After having endured decades of brokenness and shame, many of the Jews who had ancestral ties to the land were glad to give their time and resources to the work of rebuilding. News of their progress reached Sanballat and Tobiah. Angered and outraged by the prospect of a future for Jerusalem, these two men began mocking and ridiculing the efforts of those engaged in the rebuild. The only thing that kept them at bay was knowledge that King Artaxerxes commissioned the project. To physically interfere with the king’s mandate would have meant almost certain death. To verbally oppose the king would have worked to their detriment as well. The two walked a fine line between not violating the king’s mandate and seeking a way to put the kibosh on the rebuild. Although they spoke out against the work’s integrity, they were careful not to make a single derogatory statement against King Artaxerxes. Instead, they raised questions as to the possibility and probability that anything viable could be made from the heaps of rubbish that dotted the city’s boundaries.

The tactics of Sanballat and Tobiah are as old as the serpent in the garden. The adversary poses questions with the intent of raising a spirit of doubt within us. The goal: to physically bind our hands by getting inside our heads. How do we combat this? First, by continually reciting to ourselves what the Lord has purposed for us. Read the bible. Review and rehearse God’s plan, regularly praying and opening ourselves to the Lord’s will. Second, we need to restrict what we take into our heads and hearts by being mindful of whom and what we choose to listen. Much time spent listening to everything means little time invested in the main thing. If we want to experience the full restoration of God, we must accept God’s word as definitive in our lives.

1. What messages have you heard that encourage you in growing your God relationship?
2. Who or what have you identified as a discouraging influence in your walk with the Lord? What engagements, involvements fail to add to your relationship with God?
3. What, if anything, have you chosen to say and/or do concerning negative and discouraging influences? What will or have you chosen to do with the positive ones?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Remind me to seek you and spend time in your word. Lord, as I do these things, continue to strengthen me. Let it be my heart’s desire to pursue and embrace that which is good, healthy and helpful in becoming all you have purposed for me to be, and to happily set aside every weight... every hindrance to the life that can only be found in you.

## DAY 20

### Nehemiah 4:4-5

*<sup>4</sup> Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their taunt back on their own heads, and give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. <sup>5</sup> Do not cover their guilt, and do not let their sin be blotted out from your sight; for they have hurled insults in the face of the builders.*

#### **WATCH YOUR MOUTH**

The insults of Sanballat and Tobiah have not gone unheard and have not gone unnoticed, but wisdom dictates for the moment that they do go unanswered. It seems that no one engaged in the work on the wall has outwardly acknowledged anything the enemy has been saying. This serves as a reminder to you and me that every question raised does not merit an answer. We are not obliged to address every accusation that is leveled against us. Rather than confronting individuals, particularly when they are engaging in signifying and skirting a matter rather than coming right out and stating the issue, it is best that we order our case with God.

Once again, we are privy to Nehemiah's prayer to God. Nehemiah is open and honest about his hurt, his frustrations, his perspective on what Sanballat and Tobiah have done, and the fact that he wants the Lord to deal with them strongly. By choosing to pray to God rather than confronting the enemy himself, Nehemiah models what the Lord expects of us. In the face of insults, adversity, and accusations of all kinds, we are to stand and stay the course. Are the words and will of God truly the driving forces in our lives? If so, the words of people, no matter how pretty, provocative, or painful, must not deter us from whatever the Lord has called us to do. Our power is made evident in our perseverance.

1. When it comes to the accusations and remarks made by others, how do you tend to respond?
2. Have you ever felt inclined to defend your actions or position in a matter and sensed the Lord silencing you? How did you handle it? What, ultimately, was the outcome?
3. Do you trust the Lord to come to your aid and defense? If so, what makes this possible? If not, what prevents you from doing so?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, you said in your word that you would fight my battles. Help me to trust in you all the more. Because you are for me, I know that you will never leave me nor forsake me. Help me to be encouraged by your promises so that I may press ahead and accomplish the work you have sent me to do.

## DAY 21

### Nehemiah 4:6

*<sup>6</sup> So we rebuilt the wall, and all the wall was joined together to half its height; for the people had a mind to work.*

#### **MIND OVER MATTER (2)**

Bothered, yet undaunted by the words of the enemy against restoring the walls, the people of Jerusalem reached a milestone in the work. By this time, they were successful in restoring the wall to half its height, a measure of 20 feet. No longer could wild animals and persons with malicious intent cross the wall with ease and enter the city at will. The work accomplished thus far, while it may not have silenced the naysayers, undoubtedly put them on notice that their efforts to dishearten the workers had failed. More significant than the impact the wall's progress had on the enemy, was its encouragement of the workers.

It is day 21 of our devotional journey. Like the people of Jerusalem, we have come to and are crossing the halfway mark in our restoration process. While there is still much to do, we cannot and should not in any way diminish nor take lightly what we have been able to accomplish up to this point. *Let Us* step back for a minute. Reflect and take note of what we can do and what God can accomplish through us when we submit to the Lord's plan, and we have a mind to work. Despite challenges and perhaps even setbacks, you and I are further along now than when we began. We are better now. You and I are closer to knowing and living out God's plan for our lives than when we started this devotional trek a few short weeks ago. *Let Us* give praise to God. *Let Us* reflect on the journey and reflect on the work so that we can identify those things that have helped to move us further along the way. *Let Us* hold to those practices that have helped. And *Let Us* give-over to God those things that have hindered the work. Let our partnership with God continue until our work is done.

1. As you look at your devotional journey thus far, what changes do you recognize the Lord has made in you and your circumstances in relation to your area of focus?
2. How does recognizing the changes you have noted affect you as you move forward?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, thank you for your guidance on this journey. You continue to increase my faith in you because your hand remains on me. As you are faithful to me, help me to be just as faithful to you. As you have and continue to encourage me, I pray that I will be the voice and hands of encouragement to others as they too, stay the course of faith.

## DAY 22

### Nehemiah 4:7-9

*7 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and the gaps were beginning to be closed, they were very angry, 8 and all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. 9 So we prayed to our God, and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.*

#### STAYING THE COURSE

It is no surprise that those arrayed against the Jews have grown increasingly angry over their progress. The verbal jabs thrown by Sanballat, Tobiah, and company, have now escalated to plots being hatched to stop the work through physical force. Added to the opposition were the Ashdodites, a Philistine people. Despite knowing an attack on the Jews could be counted as an act against Artaxerxes and the Persian Empire, was little deterrent to the opposition. It is amazing how far some will go and what they will risk in order to block the progress of others.

Have you ever enjoyed a time of great progress only to suffer a setback? Have you ever had a spiritual growth spurt immediately followed by a spiritual attack? If so, it is not surprising. No moves made by the enemy ought to surprise us. If our presence and status as God's people angers Satan, how much more would our progress infuriate the adversary? Frequently there will be attempts to end our advancement. These things will come because Satan recognizes the strength that is ever growing within us. He would have a chance at winning were it not for the fact that God has determined that we are already victorious. As believers in Christ, we always... ALWAYS... begin our work from a place of victory. We simply need to be faithful. So, *Let Us* stay the course, continue the work, pray to God, and guard our hearts, minds, and ministries in the Lord.

1. Does God's assurance of loving support affect how you approach life? If so, how?
2. Try viewing your devotional focus from a place of victory. Take time now to capture in a meaningful way (i.e. write, record, draw, diagram, etc.) "victory," before reading and moving on to the next question.
3. What does victory in your focal area look like? What steps do you perceive as being key in realizing the victory you trust the Lord has already established? How does having a victorious outlook affect your process as you continue journeying forward?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, thank you for loving us. Thank you for protecting us. Thank you for our life's calling. Almighty God, you have made us victorious in Christ Jesus. *Let Us* never forget the complete work that our Saviour has done for our sake, presently and eternally. And, may we continue to work and serve you from victory. For we know that the good work you have established in us, you will see through to completion.

*<sup>10</sup> But Judah said, “The strength of the burden bearers is failing, and there is too much rubbish so that we are unable to work on the wall.” <sup>11</sup> And our enemies said, “They will not know or see anything before we come upon them and kill them and stop the work.”*

*<sup>14</sup> After I looked these things over, I stood up and said to the nobles and the officials and the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and awesome, and fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”*

### STRENGTH FOR THE FIGHT

Nehemiah hears the cries of the community of Judah expressing feelings that they are greatly overwhelmed. The workers’ energy is waning. The heaps of rubbish are impeding the work’s ongoing progress. And, if that were not enough, threats of attack by the enemy are constantly looming. Even in the face of considerable progress, having restored the wall to half its height, the people question whether they have what it takes to go the distance. Could they and would they finish what they had begun?

We know what it is to rise to a challenge. And, we have all experienced more than one occasion when we have stood against opposition and prevailed. Yet, despite notable accomplishments and victories in our past, we tend to question whether we will know similar success managing the next conflict or confronting the next issue. We sometimes allow our emotions to lead us, the appearance of things to wear on us, and the winds of rumor to stir our doubts. Rather than merely looking at and listening to what is around us, *Let Us* look and listen to the one who is over us. Just as Nehemiah reminds Judah, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and awesome, and fight...” Know that our progress and success are assured when our plans are rooted in God’s plan. In God, we have all we need to fight the forces of opposition, no matter their form, and to live victorious.

1. What do you see as the greatest challenge to realizing your devotional focus?
2. In what areas do you need to draw on the Lord’s enablement to remain committed to the restoration and renewal for which you have been praying?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, thank you for being an ever-present help at all times. As I learn of your promises, help me to commit them to my heart. May I continue to draw strength from your holy word.



## DAY 24

### Nehemiah 4:15-16, 19-20

*15 When our enemies heard that their plot was known to us, and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. 16 From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and body-armor; and the leaders posted themselves behind the whole house of Judah,...*

*... 19 And I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread out, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. 20 Rally to us wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet. Our God will fight for us."*

#### **A NEW STRATEGY**

Have you ever come to a point where the tried and true has simply become the tried and tired? Have certain practices on which you have learned to depend lost their effectiveness? Like Judah, we may have discovered that while our approach for the first half of the project (our devotional journey) was great, success in the next phase calls for us to make a change. Circumstances require that we employ a new strategy.

I am not an advocate of change for change's sake. Nor do I believe in doing a thing because we have always done it. Wisdom calls for us to be prayerful and watchful so that we can discern the proper course of action in any and every situation. *Let Us* be unswerving in our faithfulness yet unrelenting in our resolve to be used by God in whatever way the Lord sees fit. By being faithful yet flexible, Nehemiah was able to receive the next part of God's battle plan which outlined the new strategy Judah was to employ in order to keep the restoration project on pace despite the challenges from within and without. Are you like Judah? Has your progress reached a plateau? Is there something or someone you perceive as a threat to you in accomplishing what you have set out to do? First, pray to God sharing your concerns. Then, remain open to receive the new energy, renewed focus, or new strategy the Lord will impart enabling you to see this journey through.

1. What, if anything, is growing stale, routine and ineffectual in your relationship with God?
2. Where do you sense a need for renewal in order for you to continue making strides in relation to your devotional focus?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, you extend to us new mercies morning by morning. You continue to extend grace beyond measure. Lord, as we lay our concerns before you, we pray that you will reveal your plan that will enable us to endure. Thank you for all you have and will bring to pass.

## DAY 25

### Nehemiah 4:21-22

*21 So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from break of dawn until the stars came out. 22 I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night inside Jerusalem, so that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day."*

#### DAY AND NIGHT

There are critical times when we must stay on guard, alert, and vigilant although we would rather be at rest. We reason that we have made progress, so we should be able to reward ourselves. There is no immediate threat to our well-being, health, or finances. The second battery of tests came back negative, and we are no longer in the "at risk" range. You have saved some money and paid all your bills this month. Now all you want to do is have a little fun. Although our progress maybe undeniable, the reality is that we still are not out of the woods. We must preserve and protect the progress we have made, thereby safeguarding our futures from potential risk. The wise worker and the wise warrior will always prepare themselves for the next day's work, the next day's battle and the possibility of an emergency or an unforeseen attack. Those who are wise will always keep their tools near, their weapons at the ready, and be mindful to conserve both energy and resources.

There were clear signs that the new strategy Nehemiah enacted was proving to be effective. Work was able to resume and move forward because the people alternated between two roles with one half serving as a labor force and the other serving as security. This approach enabled them to continue the work unencumbered during the day. During the night, however, the city remained at risk. Many of the workers resided outside of the city and would return home at night, thus leaving Jerusalem vulnerable to attack. Nehemiah calls for workers and security alike to remain in the city throughout the night, thereby providing round-the-clock protection for the holy city.

1. How do you pass the time when your devotional focus is not in the forefront of your thoughts?
2. Do your actions and activities preserve your progress or place your progress at risk?
3. What can you do to enjoy some R&R (rest and relaxation) while continuing to protect the progress you have made in your devotional focus?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, thank you for using me as a vessel to accomplish your will. Thank you for your plans to prosper me and to give me a future. Please, help me to work with you and to willingly follow your direction. It is in you Lord, that rest, peace, and restoration may be found.

## DAY 26

### Nehemiah 4:23

*23 So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me ever took off our clothes; each kept his weapon in his right hand.*

#### WHAT'S IN YOUR HAND?

You have probably heard the saying that, “The early bird catches the worm.” Well, I am convinced that while such a bird’s promptness is a factor in its success its preparedness is the key.

The people of Judah developed the practice of always remaining prepared. What was indeed a work field also proved to be a battlefield. Although not in a traditional sense where physical confrontations ensued, but mental, emotional, and psychological warfare was constantly in play. Because the taunts and threats from the enemy always carried with them the possibility of physical harm, Nehemiah concluded that Judah should always be ready to fight. For they, “...[n]ever took off [their] clothes; each kept his weapon in his right hand.” The reference to the right-hand is an illusion to the side of strength and hints at God being their source.

With what has God equipped you? Know that God has purposed you and continues to prepare you. The Lord will equip you with everything you need to make progress. Also know that the Lord will promote you in due season. Our job is not to be worried about the enemy. Our focus needs to remain on what God is calling for and God intends to accomplish through you and me. *Let Us* stay clothed in our right mind, focus on the purpose to which we have been called, and keep in our right hand the weapons, tools, skills, and resources God has and continues to supply for our victory.

1. With what has God equipped you?
2. How has the Lord dressed you (prepared you) to do his work?
3. What do you have working in your favor that you believe will enable you to move forward even in the face of opposition?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, you are the one who calls and equips us to accomplish your work and to do your good pleasure. We thank you for all you have provided. Dear God, help us to trust in you all the more believing that whatever you have purposed you will see through to completion.

## DAY 27

### Nehemiah 5:10b-11, 14

*10 ...Let us stop this taking of interest. 11 Restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.”*

*14 Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor.*

#### LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Inasmuch as the people of Jerusalem were working to rebuild the wall while warring against enemies outside the city, their efforts were being hindered from within by those who called themselves brothers. Some of the people working on the wall were challenged to live up to their commitment because of their struggle to meet their families' basic needs for food and a means to make ends meet. Families who had been deeded land dating back to the time of Moses, had lost possession of their property or were being taxed so heavily that they could not sustain themselves. Nehemiah saw this as an egregious act on the part of the Jews who had taken possession of the lands or had sold their kinsman into slavery in order to satisfy the exorbitant debt they have incurred.

The power of Nehemiah's words is best evidenced through his actions. He is mindful not to use his position as governor for selfish gain. Nor does Nehemiah use his position to merely preach or teach. Instead, he models the lifestyle of one who believes that the Lord has not only sent him to reestablish his holy city but to restore his holy community. As God continues the work of restoration in our lives know that the Lord's purpose is greater than we can ask, think, or imagine. As we will undoubtedly be blessed by the renewal the Lord is bringing about in the area of family, fellowship, faith, or whatever has been your devotional focus, remember that the Lord is blessing you to be a blessing.

1. Who do you discern the Lord desires you to bless through the restoration God is working in your life?
2. How will you be of service to God as you make use of what the Lord has restored to you and in you?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, you are the giver of every good and perfect gift. Your blessings far exceed our needs and enable us to be a blessing to others. Lord God, help us to be ever mindful of you and to use the resources you have provided in a way that honors and glorify you.

## DAY 28

### Nehemiah 6:1-2

*<sup>1</sup> Now when it was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah and to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had built the wall and that there was no gap left in it (though up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), <sup>2</sup> Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm.*

#### **NOT THE ROPE-A-DOPE**

Recognizing that all prior attempts to stop the work on Jerusalem’s wall had failed, Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem resolve to try a different approach to halting the project. Rather than ridiculing the work and threatening the workers with bodily harm, these enemies of Jerusalem feign a willingness to meet with Nehemiah in an effort to iron out their difference. Although their tactics may have changed, their intentions have not. The meeting is a ruse to draw Nehemiah away from the safety of the city, harm him and permanently bring a stop to the work. When people and forces that have been opposing you suddenly appear to have a change of heart, know that things are not as they seem. My word of warning to you is simple. Don’t fall for the rope-a-dope.

The rope-a-dope is a strategy in which a fighter feigns weakness against an attacking opponent. The attacker, seeing what he perceives as the enemy’s weakened state, exhausts energy in bringing the enemy down in order to win. Undenounced to the aggressor, their opponent is steadily luring them into a false sense of security wherein the aggressor grows weaker, less vigilant, and more inclined to make a mistake. In that moment, the one who appeared to be down mounts a comeback decisively defeating their opponent. While Nehemiah may not have been familiar with the term, he was undoubtedly aware of the tactic. I suspect that his practice of continually connecting with the Lord in prayer heightened his ability to discern the motives of those around him. *Let Us*, like Nehemiah, be vigilant and faithful in our walk with the Lord.

1. Connect with someone and share a time when you were lulled into a false sense of security because of what you had accomplished or the weakness you observed in another.
2. What was the situation and how did things ultimately turn out?
3. What lessons did you learn from the experience?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, thank you for the gift of discernment that you are stirring within me. Help me to never seek to capitalize on another’s weakness, but appeal to the strength I have in you.

*<sup>3</sup> So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it to come down to you?"*

*<sup>4</sup> They sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.*

### STICK TO THE SCRIPT

Enemy attacks tend to be of two sorts. On the one hand, they can be blatant, obvious, and easy to detect, just as those made by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem in their initial attempts to prevent the people of Jerusalem from rebuilding. At other times, the enemy's advances can be covert and subtle; with those aligned against us being careful not to show their hand, and thus reveal their intent. It is this second approach that the malevolent trio employs against Nehemiah and the Jews in today's text. But, once again, the enemy's efforts prove feeble. Was it because they had already let the cat out of the bag with their behavior up until this point? Or, was it due to the fact that Nehemiah was able to discern their intent? While both factors may have come into play, I believe the prevailing influence over Nehemiah's choice was that he was committed to sticking to God's script.

There is no doubt that Nehemiah was keenly aware that the enemy's change in tactics did not constitute a change of heart. More importantly, however, is that Nehemiah's heart for God and fulfilling the Lord's purpose had not changed. This level of resolve made tough decision making much simpler. The call, enticement, lure, or temptation to stop the work and come down did not move him to deviate from the plan, but it motivated him to stick to the script. Consider this. If God's word is definitive, then anything not aligned with what God has said, revealed, or instructed is, therefore, not the Lord's will. For us to avoid pitfalls and being led astray, we must determine what place the Lord's word holds in our lives. Is God's way the only way for you? Or, is it one option among many? Know that the script you follow will be determined by what you believe. Like Nehemiah, I encourage you to discover God's word for your life. Then, stick to the script.

1. As you continue to discover how God is moving in your life concerning your devotional focus, how faithful have you been in following through on the Lord's leading.
2. What results do you see as being directly connected to your level of faithfulness?
3. What implications do you believe your future faithfulness will have on the degree and level of restoration you desire to experience?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, you are faithful in all your ways. You continue to stand up for us even when we sometimes waver. Lord, help us to stand firm in our faith and stay the course you have established for each of us. Help us to follow the holy script you have placed in your word.

*<sup>5</sup> In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. <sup>6</sup> In it was written, “It is reported among the nations—and Geshem also says it—that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall; and according to this report you wish to become their king. <sup>7</sup> You have also set up prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, ‘There is a king in Judah!’ And now it will be reported to the king according to these words. So come, therefore, and let us confer together.” <sup>8</sup> Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done; you are inventing them out of your own mind” <sup>9</sup>—for they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.*

### STICKS AND STONES

The kinder and gentler self-presentation of Jerusalem’s enemies is short lived. Their temperate yet persistent attempts to coax Nehemiah into having a meeting have failed. Sanballat now tries turning up the heat hoping to cause Nehemiah to finally weaken his stance, come out of the city, and meet with them in private. Sanballat crafts a letter to King Artaxerxes alleging that Jerusalem’s rebuild is a pretext for rebellion and for seating Nehemiah as king of the Jews. Nehemiah is unwavering in his position and approach. Sending his messenger with a response to the accusations, he remains in Jerusalem and insures the progress of the work.

While the people of Jerusalem remained faithful and continued to build, the rumors being spread by their enemies were undoubtedly cause for concern. This period of restoration was not the first attempt in Jerusalem’s history. Prior efforts were halted by enemy accusations that Jerusalem’s leaders failed to address. Recognizing what was at stake, Nehemiah does not allow false accusations by Sanballat and others to go unanswered. He does his part to remove doubt by telling his own story and speaking his own truth. Yes, we should speak words that are positive and affirming, but we must also use our words to combat lies with truth. It is ever important that we harness the power of our words as we continue to work and build.

1. What words have you found and what words do you use that serve to motivate you as you seek to rebuild?
2. What words and or language do you find tend to undermine your efforts?
3. How can you manage negative talk so that it does not gain and retain power over you?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, thank you for your word of truth which you have given to guide us and strengthen us. Help us to remain faithful in our calling and the work to which we have set our hands.

*<sup>10</sup> One day when I went into the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his house, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, tonight they are coming to kill you." <sup>11</sup> But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Would a man like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" <sup>12</sup> Then I perceived and saw that God had not sent him at all, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. <sup>13</sup> He was hired for this purpose, to intimidate me and make me sin by acting in this way, and so they could give me a bad name, in order to taunt me. <sup>14</sup> Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.*

### ENEMIES IN THE CAMP

Today's text underscores the fact that everyone that is with us, is not necessarily for us. Or, for that matter, everyone on whose behalf we are working, may not be working on ours. There were certain prophets in Jerusalem's community who came against Nehemiah and had aligned themselves with Tobiah and Sanballat in an attempt to discredit, intimidate, and cause Nehemiah to sin. Nehemiah discerns what is in the heart of the prophet Shemaiah through what he says, recognizing that if Shemaiah was speaking on behalf of God, then his words would be aligned with God's will and way. There was something in what this prophet said that did not ring true. If in no other way, Tobiah and Sanballat had managed to worm their way into Jerusalem through enemies in the camp.

As we move forward in rebuilding our lives in the areas of family, fellowship, faith, finances, freedom, physical health, or whatever our devotional focus may be, we must be aware of enemies in our camp operating from within. These enemies can be embodied in our thoughts, old habits, or our lack of discipline to continue in the new practices that have helped us to experience restoration thus far. Realize that our greatest enemies sometimes operate from within us. To combat them, we need to practice opening ourselves to the voice of God. Continue studying and receiving God's word. Then, test what we hear in light of what God has already revealed. Is what we are hearing now in agreement with what God has already shared? If not, this is cause to pause and pray.

1. What steps will you take to combat enemies within and around you that seek to hinder your progress?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, you are gracious. Help me not to take for granted the work you have done in me. Make me to realize those things within and around me that war against your plans for my life.



*<sup>15</sup> So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. <sup>16</sup> And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem; for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.*

### **MILESTONES AND MILLSTONES**

Jerusalem has reached a major milestone in its rebuilding efforts. It is day fifty-two, and the walls have been restored. I can imagine the people of Jerusalem standing inside marveling at the accomplishments the Lord has worked through them. I can also imagine the enemies peering at the wall from the outside and feeling their own defeat. For some reason, Jerusalem's progress was perceived by outsiders as a millstone tied around one's ankle or one's throat. Somehow, they equated Jerusalem's profit with their loss, Jerusalem's progress with their set back, and Jerusalem's favor from God with the Lord frowning on them.

As I reflect on today's text, I recognize how much our perceptions and the way in which we view our circumstances and those of others, impacts our sense of self-esteem. Too often we, as believers in Christ, act as if God's blessings will not reach us if the Lord has already blessed someone else. We perceive their progress and their milestones as millstones in our lives that are holding us back and preventing us from realizing the fullness of the Lord's purpose for our lives. Step back and look at what the Lord has already done for you. See and celebrate the changes God has already brought to pass. Then, see and celebrate what the Lord is doing in the lives of others. God's work in the world is simply an indicator that the Lord yet lives and is in the blessing business. God has a plan that will not merely build up some of us but has the capacity to restore us all.

Connect with a friend and discuss a time when you felt overlooked or passed over by God when it came to receiving a blessing.

1. What prompted or was the basis for your feelings?
2. Did you ever come to see the experience differently, more positively?
3. How do you now respond when you recognize the Lord at work in the life of another?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, you are God alone. No one can comprehend your greatness. As you rest, rule, and abide over me and in me, help me to trust in your wisdom which cannot fail.

*17 Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. 18 For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah. 19 Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence, and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.*

### THE TIES THAT BIND

The enemies of Jerusalem tenaciously try to retain a foothold in the city by seeking to maintain key connections established through marital ties. Both Tobiah and his son married into Jewish families of prominence. Tobiah makes use of these family connections to keep his name in Nehemiah's ear and on his mind. Although much of the restorative work to the wall has already been done, Tobiah yet holds out hope that he can do something, no matter how small, to undermine Nehemiah.

We are wired to be in relationship, and it is through our network of relationships that we will live out our purpose. Nevertheless, all the relationships into which we have and one day may enter are not necessarily easy to navigate. There are multiple dynamics brought into our relational exchanges by each of us. Some of these factors are good, but others are not. Still, no matter what levels of ease or compatibility we may or may not experience, all our relationships should be predicated on the ultimate relationship which can only be found in our God and our Lord. As we move ahead, we should evaluate our interactions and relationships with others considering what the Lord is calling for from us and desires to do with and through us. Is the way in which we are managing our relationships frustrating or fulfilling God's plan and purpose? Do any of the connections that we have formed require rewiring, rerouting, or disconnecting all together? There is no relationship that you and I enjoy that should ever overshadow or interfere with the relationship we are to have with the Lord. *Let Us* lift our relational ties to the Lord so that they will not be ties that bind us, but ties through which we all are blessed.

1. Is there a relationship in which you are presently engaged that has caused you to question God's purpose for you in the midst of it?
2. Are there any relationships in which you are engaged that the Lord is calling for you to make changes?
3. What benefit might you derive from presenting your relationships before the Lord?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, it is you who created us to be in relationship. We thank you for the gifts of family, friends, and community. Help us to cultivate each one with a mind toward bringing you glory in all that we say, share and do with one another.

## DAY 34

### Nehemiah 7:1-4

*<sup>1</sup>Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, <sup>2</sup>I gave my brother Hanani charge over Jerusalem, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel—for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. <sup>3</sup>And I said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot; while the gatekeepers are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their watch posts, and others before their own houses.” <sup>4</sup>The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few and no houses had been built.*

#### STAY ON YOUR GUARD

Great work had been done, but there was still considerable work ahead. The city's wall had been built up, fortified, and its gates were set in place. Those charged with guarding the city, while they needed to remain vigilant, were allowed a breather now that the guards could serve in rotation. Having given authority of Jerusalem to his brother Hanani and responsibility for its security to Hananiah the commander of the citadel, Nehemiah instructs these leaders in how to maintain and safeguard what Jerusalem had thus far regained.

With progress comes maintenance. Every gain requires specific attention if one is to retain whatever ground they have been able to obtain. Nehemiah notes that while the walls of the city have been restored, the walls, rooms, and rooftops over people's homes have not. Certainly, they were much better off than they had been, but they were still vulnerable. We have each been able to identify specific progress relating to our devotional focus, but wisdom dictates that we must yet remain on our guard. We cannot afford to become lax nor overly confident in our recent gains. There is yet and still work to do if we are to realize the fullness of God's restoration in our lives. We must learn how to rest in the Lord without resting on our laurels and becoming complacent. Just as Hanani and Hananiah must hold to the instructions of Nehemiah in order to remain secure, we too must hold to the instructions from our heavenly God and Guide if we are to maintain the gains the Lord has granted us.

1. List the changes God has brought about in your life surrounding your devotional focus.
2. What are you to do to maintain and continue progressing?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, thank you for bringing us thus far and for the future you have in store for us. Help us to hold to your plan and your way. May we continue to find our security and hope in you.

*<sup>5</sup> Then my God put it into my mind to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who were the first to come back, and I found the following written in it:*

*<sup>6</sup> These are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had carried into exile; they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town.*

### **A GREAT GATHERING**

The walls and gates of Jerusalem are now restored. And, just as the gates were set in place, so too does Nehemiah make certain that the city's leadership and protective force are set in place to serve. Having done much to meet the basic human needs of safety, shelter and sustenance, Nehemiah now turns his attention to his ultimate objective. Never was the rebuild of Jerusalem focused on reestablishing the city for the mere sake of revitalizing a place. The ultimate objective behind the work was to restore both the city and its people to their Lord and their God. Just as a survey of the wall was done before a single brick was laid or a single beam was set in place, so too does God call Nehemiah to survey his people from leaders to the laity.

Like the people of ancient Jerusalem, you have done a great work over the past several weeks. You have grown more, perhaps, than you imagined you could. Whether you have been focused on familial relationships, friendships, your faith, or whatever you have been led to lift to the Lord in this season, I trust that you have seen change. The change, however, is not merely intended for you to experience a personal best in some area of your life, but it is ultimately to allow for the purposes of God to be fulfilled and manifested throughout your life. What God desires for us is the same thing the Lord desired for Jerusalem of old, that we would be fully restored to God, and that through each of us, those to whom we are connected and in community would likewise be fully restored and blessed.

1. What growth or progress are you able to identify in your life regarding your devotional focus?
2. What, for you, was at the root of the change you have experienced?
3. How might you apply what you have learned and what the Lord has developed in you in other areas of your life where growth and transformation are needed?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, thank you for seeing beyond where I am and how I am. Thank you for the promised future you have for me. Help me to wholeheartedly embrace your plans for my life, trusting all that you do is for my good.

## DAY 36

### Nehemiah 8:1, 5-6

*8<sup>1</sup> all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel.*

*5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.*

#### **GATHERING FOR WORSHIP**

It was not enough for the people of Jerusalem that their physical needs be met, but they had a renewed desire for spiritual restoration as well. As their enemies previously acknowledged upon becoming disheartened over Jerusalem's success in restoring the wall v6:16<sup>c</sup>, "... *this work had been accomplished with the help of our [Israel's] God*" working through them and on their behalf. Now, in the seventh month, the month of Tishri, a holy convocation is called. The people call on Ezra the scribe, who had returned to the city some years prior, to bring and read the book of the Law of Moses in their hearing. As Ezra took his place above the people, he began giving praise and honor to God. And, as if their hearts had been ushered into a place of great gratitude, all those gathered began to bless the name of the Lord and worship their God.

Our worship is perhaps one of the greatest things that we can render unto God beyond our sacrifice and beyond our service. Through our worship we do not merely thank the Lord for what the Lord has done or has enabled us to do, but we honor God simply and earnestly for who God is. In this moment, God's people were tapping into and connecting with what was essentially God's primary purpose in rebuilding the walls of the holy city. God's desire was to restore a holy people into right relationship with the One who was, is and remained the Giver, Sustainer and Redeemer of life itself.

1. In what ways have you experienced or felt a need for spiritual renewal?
2. What, for you, triggered the need and or made you aware of it?
3. How are you presently feeding yourself spiritually?
4. Do you respond to God in light of whom God is or what the Lord has done? Explain.

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, I worship you for who you are, and I give praise to you for all you have done to sustain me in the days, months, years, and seasons gone by. You have kept me under your care and wrapped me in your protective embrace. Lord, thank you for seeing me through it all.

*<sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*

### **GATHERING FOR THE WORD**

Time and circumstance had greatly impacted the community of Jerusalem. While there may have been a few who survived to return home after 70 years in exile, the vast majority of the city's returnees were born in a foreign land and had little knowledge of the tenets, language and customs of their faith. They were Jewish by heritage and parentage, but little else in terms of daily practice, resembled their Jewish faith. Yet, what they lacked in terms of the trappings of their faith, they made up for through their expressed desire to know the ways of their Lord. Just as they had given themselves in service to complete the work of restoring the city's wall, they were now seeking to be restored to the God of their salvation and restoration through God's holy word. As Ezra begins reading the Law of Moses aloud in Hebrew, the Levites translate and interpret the word to the people in Aramaic, the common language of the day, so that all would come away with understanding.

Have you gained or grown as you anticipated at the start of this devotional season? Or, have you discovered that the changes the Lord has been working in you have impacted more than your waistline or your bottom-line? Whenever I enter into a learning experience, I almost invariably come away with something I anticipated along with a few things that cause me to think differently, act differently, stretch and live life today beyond the known and familiar of my yesterdays. It is the promise of living a renewed life in God to which the people of Jerusalem have opened themselves in today's text. And, it is a renewed life of blessings and understanding that will stretch us beyond the known and familiar of our yesterdays and our yesteryears that the Lord God has been inviting us to throughout our devotional journey.

1. What new and unfamiliar place (i.e. thing, opportunity, or situation) has the Lord been encouraging you to explore in relation to your devotional focus?
2. How might daring to journey into the unfamiliar during this devotional experience positively impact your life in other areas in the future?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, I pray that you continue to renew our minds through your holy word. Help us to be open to the possibilities and promises that we can only know and experience in you through faith. We take comfort in knowing you, for you are the One who has and will complete the good work you have begun in our lives.

*<sup>9</sup> And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

### **NO SPILT MILK**

Have you ever been woefully surprised by what you did not know? Have you ever been made aware of something after the fact, and been left feeling sorrowful over your prior response to or handling of a matter because you didn't know from the start what you later came to discover? If so, you can identify with the people of Jerusalem. After standing and listening to the word of God shared by Ezra and explained to them by the Levites, the people were grieved. They realized how far they had fallen into sin and away from God's plan for their lives and community. Understanding their pain, but, even more importantly, understanding that it was the Lord's Day, the leaders counseled the people not to grieve. Instead, they were to go forward eating, drinking, and providing for the needy, strengthened by the joy of the Lord.

On the other side of a great achievement, feelings of sadness or depression may frequently arise. Sometimes these feelings are born out of a sense that there is little else to be accomplished. Other times sadness grows out of the realization or belief that where a person is or what they have finally attained could have, should have and would have been accomplished long ago if they had only been faithful in following the Lord. As Jerusalem's leaders counseled the people then, I share with you now, don't cry over spilt milk! Don't let your shortcomings from the past hinder the sure thing God has for your future. You have allowed the Lord to build you up through your devotional journey. So, allow God to complete the good work he has begun in you. Go forward enjoying the Lord's blessings and being a blessing to others. Take courage in the Lord and be joyous, for the joy of the Lord is truly our strength.

1. In the face of success, what regrets tend to pop up threatening to steal your joy?
2. How, if at all, do you avoid this emotional sabotage?
3. What have you found in the word of God that encourages and brings you joy... sustains or restores your joy in such times?

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### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, your word is a gift. It is a guide to me for the living of these days. In it I find strength and encouragement. Even in the darkest times, your word speaks life to my heart. I thank you for such a gift, Oh God. May your word remain a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path and the living water that refreshes my soul.

## DAY 39

### Nehemiah 8:11-12

*11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.*

#### CONTINUE BEING REVIVED

Trusting in what they had been told, the people of Jerusalem moved forward endeavoring to live out their faith. Drawing strength as they rejoiced in the Lord, they enjoyed the blessings of what they received and extended the same to those lacking provisions. While there was actual food and drink which fed and nourished them, there was a sense that they were nourished and fed far more by the word of God which was revealed and explained to them by the spiritual leaders of their community.

There is something to be said for the word and wisdom of God which the Lord conveys through Scripture and expounds upon through his servants. There is nothing like it that can truly satisfy the thirst within our souls and the hunger which fills our hearts. As a part of the family of God, we are to continue in holy union and reunion, for it is in such times that we are revived and strengthened. God's word will convict us and correct us, but it will also be a continuous source of life, strength, and sustenance for all who continue to walk in the way that scripture prescribes.

1. Has the word of God ever served as a source of conviction for correction in your life?
2. If so, how did you receive the word initially? How did you receive it, respond to it ultimately?
3. Has that same word served you subsequently? If so, how?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, your word reveals that you chastise and correct those you love. While your word does convict, it will never condemn those who love you, have received your Son and daily seek to walk in your ways. Continue to revive us, oh Lord. And, continue to strengthen our hearts.



## DAY 40

### Nehemiah 8:13, 18

*13 On the second day the heads of ancestral houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to the scribe Ezra in order to study the words of the law.*

*18 And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the book of the law of God. They kept the festival seven days; and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance.*

#### CONTINUE BEING REFORMED

In the days following Jerusalem's great assembly, the heads of Israel's ancestral houses, the priests and the Levites came to Ezra so that they might study the word of the law. As their lives consisted of more than remaining safe within the walls of Jerusalem, but living in the assurance of their salvation in the Lord, all aspects of their being and personhood needed to be addressed in a way that was in keeping with the will and way of the Lord. The leaders, therefore, had to be both informed and reformed in all matters of life as they governed God's people. Daily they continued in this way, until the Feast of Booths, a solemn gathering of the community established during the time of Moses and reestablished in their day of reform.

Renewal and transformation ultimately are not a point of destination, but a process. They are an ongoing part of our faith journey. For, when renewal stops, decline and decay will undoubtedly set in. As this devotional season draws to a close, *Let Us* remember that we are a people who has been raised up by a risen Saviour! We, therefore, are to continue living our lives in the light of the resurrection, restoration, rebuilding and renewal that the Lord our God has manifested in our lives throughout these 40-days. Like Jerusalem's leaders, *Let Us* continue in worship, prayer, study, service and living the lives to which we have been called.

1. What should you continue to study and practice for renewal to continue to be manifested in your life?
2. Will you continue to center on the area that has been your devotional focus, or might you choose a different target from those offered and journey through the devotional anew.
3. Where have you, will you turn in God's word to gain insights that will guide you forward into greater, ongoing renewal and restoration?

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#### *Let Us Pray*

Lord God, we thank you for your grace. We thank you for the opportunities for growth, change and renewal you have brought into all our lives during this devotional season. Thank you, Lord God, for the life you yet live in each of us. Lord God, *Let Us* continue to experience your touch. Let your transformative power continue to be manifested in us. We pray that we would glorify you before the world through all we say, think and do.

*In Christ Jesus' name we pray... Amen. Amen and Amen!*