

## SPEND DAILY TIME WITH GOD AS YOU READ, THINK, PRAY + ACT.

### 2023 SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Intentional activities to deepen our relationship with God and mold us to be more like Jesus.

#### OCTOBER PRACTICE Serving

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## Day 1 Nehemiah 1 | News from Home

**When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.** Nehemiah 1:4

Nehemiah receives distressing news from home that breaks him. Nehemiah serves the king of Persia but longs for Israel (his homeland) to be restored. Israel's stubborn disobedience after years of warnings led to war, defeat and exile in a foreign nation 140 years prior. Years later, a new ruling kingdom decrees that scattered Israelites may return home. Yet few have returned to Jerusalem 90 years after the decree. Nehemiah hears the city's wall is lying in shambles with burned gates and people living in fear. His beloved people and city suffer trouble and disgrace. Nehemiah knows this isn't the way it's supposed to be. God intends his people to reflect God's glory and hope to the world. Nehemiah spends extended days mourning, fasting and praying. He knows something has to change.

We all face situations that aren't the way they should be sooner or later. It may be a marriage teetering on the edge, financial troubles, a child's destructive choices or a devastating diagnosis. We know things need to change, but it seems impossible. We can turn to God in our grief and devastation, just as Nehemiah did. We can cry out that this isn't how it should be and sit in our grief with God.

We will see in Nehemiah's story how rebuilding isn't simple. Over the next six weeks, this sermon series walks through his setbacks, complexities and weariness. We discover God is close and cares about our pain. We are not alone in our season of rebuilding. God is present and provides the courage, strength and perseverance to endure.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Evaluate what situation in your life, or someone you care about, isn't how it should be. Spend time praying to God, grieving and acknowledging the pain. Consider fasting over the situation as well. Revisit our *Beyond the Weekend* fasting spiritual practice for more information [HERE](#).

## Day 2 Nehemiah 1:5-6 | God's Character

**Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel."** Nehemiah 1:5-6a

Nehemiah takes his grief and pain to God in prayer. He begins by directly addressing who God is and God's character. Nehemiah knows God sees and hears his people's pain. Nehemiah proclaims God's never-ending love for his people and remembers the promises God made long ago. He is confident God is capable AND connected. God is not a distant, far-off God who can't handle pain or doesn't care. Nehemiah's beliefs about God draw him closer to God in his misery.

Our beliefs about God determine whether or not we turn to him in our pain. We do not try to handle pain alone when our image of God is big, and we believe he is capable and cares. Peter, one of Jesus's closest friends, reminds us to "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" ([1 Peter 5:7](#)). God sees, hears and cares about the things that concern us. We can talk to him about everything happening in our lives and world. Nothing is too small or too big for God to handle.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Consider your view of God and what has shaped that image. Journal what comes to mind. Then read through [Nehemiah 1](#) again, and write in your journal all the things you find are true about God. Ask God to help you remember to turn to him with every care and concern because he cares and is capable of helping.

## Day 3 Nehemiah 1:6-7 | Confession

**I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.** Nehemiah 1:6b-7

Nehemiah's prayer turns to confession. He recognizes the desperate situation they're in is due to their rebellion against God. They worship other gods, mistreat the poor and abandon God's commands. Nehemiah owns his part. He knows he has contributed to the sins of his people. It's not just his ancestors 140 years ago who disobeyed God and landed in exile. He cries out to God, confessing his sins and those of his family and people. He asks God to remember his promise to restore them when they turn back to him.

We too need to acknowledge ways we may be part of the problem. Sometimes, things happen to us that we had no part in causing. Yet other times we play a role, even if we think our piece is small. Culture urges us to pass all the blame. We can easily assume a posture of pride and think the fault falls entirely elsewhere. The Bible instead teaches us to humbly invite God to search, test and know us and then reveal any offensive ways in us ([Psalms 139:23-24](#)). God, in his love and grace, invites us to confess the ways we have walked away from him. He promises to forgive us when we turn to him and acknowledge our part. God is the one who rebuilds and restores.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Pray Psalms 139:23-24 to God out loud. Ask God to reveal if you are quick to pass the blame and if there are situations where you need to acknowledge your part and ask for his forgiveness. Ask him to lead you and thank him for his forgiveness.

## Day 4 Nehemiah 1:8-9 | Welcoming Back

**"But if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name."** 1 Samuel 1:27-28

Nehemiah claims God's promise that when people turn back to him, God will turn to them and forgive them. Nehemiah knows God delights in opening the door to welcome his people home.

Jesus vividly displays this truth about God. We are people in exile, separated from God because of our sins. Jesus is God-in-flesh sent from God the Father to live among and restore his people. Jesus shows the heart of God to welcome people home through his life and teachings. He reveals God as the Father who welcomes the prodigal home ([Luke 15:11-32](#)). Jesus is the shepherd who goes after one lost sheep ([Luke 15:3-7](#)). His mission is to seek and save the lost ([Luke 19:10](#)).

Jesus lives the perfect life that we never could. He never disobeys God or breaks his law. Jesus dies on the cross, and God places all our sins upon him. He bears the punishment that should have been ours. Jesus opens the door for us to return to God. He brings us out of the exile caused by our sins and into a restored relationship with God. No matter what we've done or how far we've wandered—it's never too late to turn to God and be welcomed home.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** If you've never placed your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, you can turn to him today. Pray and tell God you believe in Jesus and ask for his forgiveness. We would love to talk with you if you want to learn more about following Jesus. Please email us at [btw@adabible.org](mailto:btw@adabible.org). If you have accepted Jesus, join our Ada Bible Worship team as they sing "[Hallelujah Through it All](#)." Praise him that he will be found "with the outcast, where you run with open arms" and as the one who will "meet me every moment as you heal and you restore."

## Day 5 Nehemiah 1 | Part of the Solution

**"Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.** Nehemiah 1:11

Nehemiah concludes his prayer by asking God to answer a specific request. Nehemiah serves the king directly. His job is to be with the king on a regular basis. Nehemiah plans to make a bold move that could cost him his life. He seeks an opportunity to approach the king with Israel's problems and ask permission to be part of the solution. He has a unique opportunity, and he trusts God with it. He's upset about the situation AND asks God to use him to bring restoration. He desires for God to move and work through him. He doesn't have a plan yet, just a humble willingness for God to use him.

God often provides opportunities for us to be part of the solution. He may desire to work in AND through us to answer our prayers and those of others. It can be easy to see a problem and think God will use others to bring healing, help or restoration. Yet, God may call us as part of his plan to rebuild. We may not have the opportunity to help an entire nation, but we can impact a friend, neighbor, classmate, co-worker or community member daily. God can use us to rebuild a family, neighborhood or community—one person or family at a time.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** This sermon series provides an honest overview of what it looks like to rebuild through Nehemiah's story over the next five weeks. Rebuilds involve starts, stops and bumps along the way. Ask God to reveal areas in your life that need rebuilding. It could be a relationship, spiritual practices, habits in his word or how you handle finances. Own your part and ask God to work in and through you to be part of the solution. Pray with open hands and a willingness to follow as he leads through this series.