

November 11/12, 2023
"The Finish Line"
Pastor Jeff Manion



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.

NOVEMBER PRACTICE Bible Meditation

Day 1 Nehemiah 5:1-13 | Mending a Broken Relationship

"We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say." Nehemiah 5:12

The rebuild is almost done. Nehemiah's leading the people to restore the reputation of both Jerusalem and God. The people throw themselves into the task to the point where they aren't working their regular jobs. They end up having to borrow money to feed their families. The problem is that the nobles loaning money and food exploit the people. The relationship between the people and the nobles ends up completely broken. Nehemiah confronts the nobles and calls them to change. The nobles take Nehemiah's words to heart and change. The conflict is resolved.

Resolving conflicts and broken relationships is something Jesus cares about, too. In what scholars view as his core teaching, Jesus tells his listeners that reconciliation is more important than even sacrificing ([Matthew 5:23-24](#)). Jesus has a heart for mended relationships. It's central to the gospel. Jesus came to mend relationships through his work on the cross.

Jesus's death and resurrection offer us a way to fix our relationship with God. A follower of Jesus who comprehends the nature of the crucifixion and Jesus's sacrifice for them becomes a person who forgives and reconciles. We model God's love for us every time we mend a relationship. We show the love of Jesus to a broken world through how we treat others and mend broken relationships.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Identify a relationship that you need to take a step toward repairing. What's a way you can begin to mend that relationship? If you're unsure how to begin, consider talking with a mature Christian friend or contacting your campus pastor.

Day 2 Nehemiah 5:14-19 | Reverence and Generosity

But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. Nehemiah 5:15

Nehemiah isn't in Jerusalem for what he can get. A governorship is a prime position in the ancient world. Leaders use it to milk the people to gain immense wealth. Nehemiah acts differently. He's giving instead of taking. The text says he feeds the people and doesn't work to acquire more land. His generosity undoubtedly cost him something and was counter-cultural. Nehemiah tells the reader why he is generous. He says it's because of his reverence for God ([Nehemiah 5:15](#)).

Our reverence, respect and love for God should lead us to be generous. Reverence for God creates a life that imitates the generosity of God. Radical generosity is when we begin to organize our finances around giving money away. It's a young adult giving 10% of their paycheck to the church and choosing to live on the other 90%. It's a retired couple meeting with a financial adviser to discuss how they can wisely live below their means so they can give away a portion of their wealth to their church and nonprofits. It's intentionally putting giving into a budget as a line item so there's money to give away to those in need instead of just hoping there's something left when a need arises. The cause of this type of reorientation is what Nehemiah expressed—a reverence for God. It's a respect and love for the God of the universe who came down to earth to rescue us.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Pray and ask God to help your reverence for him turn into generosity. Then, begin to prepare to be generous. One step is to start a conversation with an Ada Bible financial coach. These trained volunteers can help you plan for your next step with budgeting and generosity. To get connected with a financial coach, visit adabile.org/financecoach.

Day 3 Nehemiah 6:1-9 | Danger of Distraction

So I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" Nehemiah 6:3

Nehemiah's opponents try to get him to lose focus. They invite him to a meeting. They try to damage his reputation. They are hoping to distract him to stop the wall from being completed. Nehemiah recognizes the danger of distraction. He refuses to leave the work on the wall. It's so close to being finished, and he's focused on completing the rebuild. He presses through the distractions to see the project to the end.

Nehemiah's focus is a good lesson for us. Distraction is an enemy of spiritual momentum. Distraction comes in many forms. Often, the things that aren't bad are the most dangerous. It's the travel sports league that keeps a family from church every week. It's picking up the phone to start scrolling before spending time alone with God in the morning. It's the conversation about fantasy football that distracts a group of friends from talking about what's going on in their lives. It's the constant texts from friends and co-workers that interrupt a husband and wife from taking time to talk about what God is teaching them. When we allow ourselves to be distracted, we risk losing spiritual momentum. Distractions steal our time with God and our church community. Nehemiah refuses to let distractions keep him from what God wants him to do. If we don't want distractions to pull us from things like church, small groups or our time with God—we must resist the distractions around us.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Grab your journal and write down three spiritual priorities. For each priority, write down what you would need to do daily, weekly and monthly to make progress on those priorities. Then, write down the things that will distract you from those actions. Carve out time to do the daily, weekly and monthly activities while ruthlessly working to eliminate distractions.

Day 4 Hebrews 4:14-16 | Betrayal

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Hebrews 4:15

The wall is almost done. Nehemiah faces one more hurdle. He visits a friend who then betrays Nehemiah ([Nehemiah 6:10-14](#)). The friend is an accomplice of Nehemiah's enemies. He's sold out and plots to destroy Nehemiah's reputation. It's a Judas moment. One threat to any rebuild is a betrayal by a close friend. Jesus faced this in his ministry. Like Nehemiah, Jesus knows betrayal. He didn't let bitterness creep in but instead completed his mission to die on the cross for the sins of humanity.

We're all broken people. Nehemiah experiences betrayal, and we'll likely have something similar happen to us someday. When that happens, we can be strengthened by knowing Jesus experienced this. The writer of Hebrews shows that we can hold firmly to our faith in Jesus, no matter what happens, because Jesus knows what we're going through. We read in Hebrews, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" ([Hebrews 4:16](#)). The things Jesus experienced while he was on earth should give us confidence to ask God for what we need. We can run to God to get us through when we're betrayed.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Personalize and pray [Hebrews 4:14-16](#). Here's an example: "Jesus, thank you for being the great high priest who ascended to heaven. Please help me hold firm to my faith in you. Thank you for enduring life as a human, with all its pain and temptations. Thank you for empathizing with what I go through. Help me have the confidence and trust in you to bring my struggles and pain to you. Please give me the mercy and grace I need to follow you and show your love to the people around me.

Day 5 Nehemiah 6:15-16 | Rebuild

So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. Nehemiah 6:15

Throughout this series, we've followed the story of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. The walls not only mean safety and prestige for the people of Jerusalem but also play a vital role in the glory of God in the ancient world. We see that Nehemiah hears the news and is distraught. He's grieving but doesn't get stuck in grief. He takes time to pray, then takes action and approaches the king. He arrives in Jerusalem and honestly assesses the situation. He works with the people of Jerusalem and the surrounding area to rebuild. He overcomes the threats and rallies the people to push through the challenge of the middle. He recognizes the vulnerabilities and addresses them. He maintains focus on the task at hand to complete the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah rebuilds to bring God glory.

We will all experience a rebuild in some way. Though we might not always recognize it, our rebuilds have the opportunity to glorify God. As we conclude the series, some of us may need to start our rebuild. Others may need to restart and get moving again. While some of us may be close to the end and need to finish faithfully. Wherever we're at with our rebuild, we should remember it's about God. Rebuilds allow us to reveal something about God to those around us. A rebuild may be about repairing the relationship and bringing God glory. It's an opportunity to rebuild our finances to bring God's glory. It's about restoring spiritual practices to grow closer to God. We can regain physical health to glorify God. We work to rebuild sobriety and point to God's rescue. As God's chosen representatives in the world—our rebuilds matter. They show the world a picture of who God is.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Take an honest assessment of what you're rebuilding or need to rebuild. Then, consider where you are in the process. Ask God to help you see how he can be glorified through your rebuild. As you rebuild, we pray, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" ([Numbers 6:24-26](#)).