Harvester Christian Church

Life Groups | **PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY**

NEHEMIAH | RETURN, RESTORE, REVIVE

**WEEK 1 – Backstory/Chapter 1**

**The Backstory**

Nehemiah is the story of God’s people returning to their homeland after living in exile. The Jews had faced the complete destruction of their possessions, traditions, temple, and country when God allowed the Babylonians to conquer them in 586 BC. They had turned their back on God and then suffered the consequences of their actions.

God, however, promised to remake Israel. This is the way the Lord rebuilt Jerusalem. Emperor Cyrus, in his first year of ruling the Persian Empire, defeated Babylon and then issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their land (Ezra 1).

This return happened in three waves:

1) Zerubbabel led the first wave of Jewish exiles to return in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1-6)

2) Ezra led the second in 455 B.C. (Ezra 7-10)

3) Nehemiah led the third in 445 B.C. (Nehemiah 1-3)

**Read Nehemiah Chapter One.**

The prayer Nehemiah prayed after hearing disturbing news about Jerusalem makes up the bulk of chapter one.

* How does he describe God? (v 5)
* What does he confess? (v 6,7)
* Summarize the words God said to Moses that Nehemiah now quotes back to God. (v 8,9)

**God’s Discipline**

God had a deep and abiding love for His people, the Children of Israel. Even so, when they would turn their back on Him and serve other gods, He would discipline them and allow them to suffer the consequences of their choices. **Please read and summarize the following verses** about how we view and experience discipline in our lives.

Deuteronomy 8:5

Job 5:17

Psalm 94:12

Proverbs 3:11-12

Read Hebrews 12:4-11

* The word “discipline” appears over and over in this passage. Why do you think the writer uses that word instead of “punishment”? Is there a difference between the two?
* How does God feel about those He disciplines? (v 6)
* What is God’s discipline meant to produce in us? (v 10-11)
* The writer makes comparisons between how parents discipline their children and how God disciplines us. What are we meant to learn in these comparisons?

**God Faithfulness**

God’s promise in Nehemiah 1:9 is to bring back even those who are at “the farthest horizon.” What actions from God’s people would trigger that response from God?

Read Luke 15:11-32. In what ways does the story of the Prodigal Son echo the promise of Nehemiah 1:9 from a New Testament perspective?

**Weekly Challenge**

We read this week that Nehemiah confessed his own sin and the sins of his people before God. We are instructed in the New Testament to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another. The challenge this week is to spend some time confessing. Start by confessing your sins to God. Talk to Him about the wrongs you’ve done and ask for His forgiveness. Consider also confessing your struggles to a trusted friend who can be for you a confidant and a source of encouragement. Is there someone you’ve wronged that needs to hear from you? Confess your wrong-doing to them and seek forgiveness.

**Group Discussion**

Is there anything from the homework/teaching time you’d like to discuss?

What do you think God was trying to accomplish by allowing His people to be exiled?

For those who are parents, in what way does parenting your own children give you insight into the discipline of God?

What positive thing has come about in your life as a result of being disciplined?

What comparisons did you find between God’s people returning from exile in Ezra/Nehemiah and the story of the Prodigal Son?

We read in this study that God would bring his repentant people back even from the “farthest horizon.” What does that promise mean to you?

What do you think the difference is between simple punishment and loving discipline?