



## GROUPS LESSON | WEEK 1

Sermon: January 11, 2026

### BUILDING THE KINGDOM: SEEING WHAT GOD SEES (NEHEMIAH 2:11-20)

*God is glorified in the unified effort of believers advancing His Kingdom*

#### HOOK

**MAIN POINT:** *God is glorified in the unified effort of believers advancing His Kingdom*

In the decades prior to World War II, the average construction time for an aircraft carrier in the United States was 4.5 years, with some taking as long as 7 years to complete. The launching of new ships was infrequent. From 1941-1945, the United States constructed 155 carriers, with construction times as short as 3 months and never exceeding 30 months (largest carriers earlier in the war effort). Production increased rapidly in frequency and time. This was true of a lot of wartime necessities as the nation unified behind the war effort. Men went to war, women went to work, and families sacrificed daily luxuries. The war machine became very efficient very quickly, and the construction of carriers is just one example of this.

The Church is God's plan for proclaiming to the world redemption through Christ, a far greater purpose than any war or movement in history. As believers we have a responsibility to be unified under this redemptive purpose to effectively advance the Kingdom. We need to see what God sees, aligning our desires with His. Gaining ground for his Kingdom begins with fully embracing his mission and purpose for the world.

#### BOOK

**MAIN POINT:** *God is glorified in the unified effort of believers advancing His Kingdom*

**Talking Point 1:** Kingdom work requires submission to the mission of God.

**Read:** Nehemiah 1:1-3; 2:1-8

The book of Nehemiah begins in 445 B.C. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to Artaxerxes, King of Persia (465-424 B.C.), four and a half centuries before the birth of Christ and over a century

after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.), the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.), and the Babylonian exile of the Hebrew people. The Persian King, Cyrus, authorized exiles to return home in 538 B.C. A new temple was constructed in Jerusalem from 536-516 B.C., and a significant group of exiles began returning home in the decades prior to Nehemiah's writing, particularly under Ezra's leadership. And yet, Jerusalem remained in dire condition, with no gates or walls to protect the city from constant threats.

Nehemiah heard the need and immediately prepared to respond to the need. In Neh. 1:4-11, he seeks the Lord through humble prayer, and in 2:1-8 he boldly stands before the king, requesting the leniency and resources to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. Nehemiah summarizes these moments in stating, "And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me" (Neh. 2:8).

The book of Nehemiah is filled with evidence that "the good hand of God" was upon the work that Nehemiah was accomplishing. He aligned himself with the vision and mission of God to rebuild the Holy City and protect his people that they might glorify him as a beacon of light to the nations. When the city wall was completed, Neh. 6:16 records that surrounding enemies and nations "perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God." The enemies mentioned were no joke. We will read more about some specific adversaries in a little bit, but Nehemiah faced opposition from the second he arrived (2:9-10).

Here are a couple phrases that will be helpful to understand for the group discussion:

- Kingdom work: Efforts that expand the reach of the Gospel and advance the eternity impacting ministries of God's earthly institution, the Gospel-believing Church.
- Mission of God: To make Himself known to people of all tribes, tongues, and nations—specifically through the redemptive work of Christ, that he might reconcile us to Himself.

With those definitions in mind, here are a few interpretative questions for the first talking point:

- Q: Was Nehemiah's work still "Kingdom work" even though it was centuries before the incarnation of Jesus and the establishment of the Church? How so?
- Q: How did Nehemiah align himself with the vision and mission of God? What obstacles might have prevented him from doing so?

**Talking Point 2:** Kingdom work is sacrificial.

**Read:** Nehemiah 2:9-18

In these verses we find Nehemiah encountering opposition, surveying the situation, keeping his hope and vision close to the vest, and then, at the right time, communicating a unifying rally cry to the leaders in the city. Further evidence of Nehemiah's alignment with God comes in v.12, stating that God had put on his heart what to do for Jerusalem. Part of this vision is to include others in a unified work to rebuild the wall, as made clear in vv. 16-18.

Consider the immense lifestyle shift that Nehemiah underwent to find himself in this circumstance. As the cupbearer, Nehemiah was a close and highly trusted official to the king. He likely lived in the palace, had a valued opinion on important matters, and maintained

great material comfort.

When he chose to align himself with the mission of God and take on Kingdom work, he also chose to sacrifice the status and comfort of his position. Nehemiah gave over his livelihood to the work of God, embodying selflessness and a willingness to serve. Nehemiah is not the only one who had to make sacrifices. To an extent, everyone that participated in the wall's construction had to sacrifice something for the sake of the city. The next several chapters show the sacrifices, obstacles, and victory that came throughout the project. It took a great number of people willing to lay down convenience, give up their time, and offer their abilities. These same attributes are true of Kingdom work today. The advancement of the Church, both globally and locally, depends on God, first and foremost, but secondarily on people that are willing to align with God's vision and mission, and make sacrifices for the sake of the Kingdom.

Sacrifice pays off. Just in the days of Nehemiah, Jerusalem became filled with worship and a deep desire to live according to the Law of Moses. Nehemiah led this religious revival among the Jews. But God saw far beyond the finite vision of Nehemiah. Rebuilding the city had a generational impact and ultimately prepared the way for the Messiah centuries later, who in that very city, would make the ultimate sacrifice.

- Q: What similarities exist between the work to construct the wall in Nehemiah and the work of the Church today?
- Q: What other Biblical figures had to make significant sacrifices for the glory of God and his Kingdom?

**Talking Point 3:** Kingdom work is counter-cultural

**Read:** Nehemiah 2:19-20, Romans 12:1-2

During the exile, the Jews in Babylon had received a command to build houses, have children, seek the welfare of their community (Jeremiah 29:4-7) even though they were only to be temporarily displaced from their homeland. Christians have the same command today as we live amid a culture that despises the things of God. To "seek the welfare" of our community does not absolve the fact that our community might have very different morals, customs, and desires than we do as believers under the authority of Christ.

Though the Jews were returning to their homeland in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the counter-cultural nature of their faith continued. Nehemiah was confronted with other local leaders, Sanballat and Tobiah, who did not share his zeal for fortifying Jerusalem and revitalizing devotion to the one true God. Sanballat and Tobiah become recurring annoyances throughout the book, but they fall short of leaving any lasting impact in their efforts to stand against the sovereign plan of God.

To understand counter-cultural living, skim through Hebrews 11, a chapter filled with figures who were set apart from their surrounding cultural because of their faith. Not every adversary we face in our faith will feel like direct enemies of God. Sometimes they are loud and obvious things that our cultural loves, like sexual immorality, genuine hatred, and instant

gratification. Other times they're "quiet" enemies, like apathy, busyness, or comfort. Nehemiah withstood all the threats and temptations that could have derailed the project. Of course, he was aligned with God's vision, and he had a united force of people all willing to make the necessary sacrifices to accomplish the work.

The call for sacrificial and counter-cultural living is well articulated by Paul in Romans 12:1-2: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

- Q: Nehemiah certainly lived counter-culturally, but he also spoke to his enemies that "The God of heaven will make us prosper" (Neh. 2:20). Does this mean that Nehemiah could have got away with slacking or giving in to the surrounding culture? What's the balance between our responsibility and the reality that God will always ensure his plans come to fruition?
- Q: What does it mean in Romans 12:1-2 for us to be a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God"? What does it mean to "be conformed to this world"?



**MAIN POINT: *God is glorified in the unified effort of believers advancing His Kingdom***

Spend a few minutes discussing the practical applications of today's passage:

- Q: What does it look like, practically, for you to align yourself with the mission of God?
- Q: What does sacrificial living look like? What sacrifices are most difficult to make?
- Q: In our current cultural context, what are some specific examples of how Kingdom work is counter-cultural?
- Q: Our main takeaway today is "God is glorified in the unified effort of believers advancing His Kingdom." What is the connection between this truth and our Gaining Ground effort as a church?