

*Growing*  
THROUGH *Crisis*

# *Growing* THROUGH *Crisis*

*Help from the Book of Nehemiah*

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## **Dedication**

To my late husband, Don, who encouraged me to write  
and try more than I ever dreamed I could.

GROWING THROUGH CRISIS

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# Preface

**T**he book of Nehemiah? A Bible study for *women*?” you might wonder. Yes, it certainly can be! I trust that before you finish this study, the man Nehemiah will become your new friend.

Too many people measure their spirituality by their personal lack of conflict and trouble. Don't make this tragic mistake! We grow through crisis. Nehemiah faced problems that are common to you and me. He referred to “the God of Heaven” as the help for his problems. This same God is waiting to help us if only we will turn to Him.

It is my hope that these lessons will help you learn the facts of Nehemiah and how to handle life's problems, and that these lessons will stir a desire to apply these lessons to your daily life.

## **How to Use This Study**

Each lesson is divided into four parts: “Overview,” the first part before the questions, is a condensed review of the subject or Scriptures being studied. The second part, “Study the Word,” is designed to help you think about the subject. Many of the questions are simple to answer, but I hope they will help you understand the Biblical truths. The third and fourth parts, “Make It Personal” and “Put It into Practice,” are to help you apply the truths you learned.

The first eight lessons go through the book of Nehemiah. The next three are on topics found in the book: fear, handling problems, and renewing our spiritual fire. The last lesson is a review of the previous eleven.

## ***Suggestions for Individual Study***

1. Before you begin each study, pray that God will help you understand it and apply it to your life.
2. Read the entire book of Nehemiah; it is only thirteen chapters. (Do this in one sitting if possible.)

3. Use a reliable modern translation of the Bible alongside the King James Version. (A parallel Bible has two translations side-by-side. If you have one, use it.)
4. Look up any unfamiliar words, names, or places in a Bible dictionary if you have one.
5. Before your group study, read the lesson and write your answers in the space provided.
6. In preparation for your study, think about the questions at the beginning of the lesson.
7. Use “Put It into Practice” at the end of the lesson to apply the truths that God impressed upon you in the lesson.

### ***Suggestions for Group Study***

1. Follow the suggestions for individual study and come prepared to the group study.
2. Be willing to take part in discussion. Be open, but also be careful not to say things that would embarrass your family or friends. Share lessons/truths that God has taught you in your individual study.
3. Stick to the passage being studied—don’t get sidetracked.
4. Listen to what others say. You may be surprised at their insights. Commend them for sharing their thoughts. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members to participate in discussion.

### **A Look at the Book of Nehemiah**

Let’s look at the setting of the book of Nehemiah. According to Nehemiah 1:1, the book was written by a man named Nehemiah.

#### ***Who was Nehemiah?***

The only time Nehemiah is mentioned in the Bible is in the book with his name. He was a plain, ordinary person like you and me, yet he was highly motivated to do a difficult job for God. He rose from obscurity to national prominence. He was probably born in slavery, yet he made his way to one of the top-level positions in the Persian Empire, one of the grandest

empires in history. Many would have reveled in his position, but his heart was elsewhere—in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was a fantastic organizer and pragmatic leader. He had great power in prayer and knew God was his final resource in any success. He did not act without prayer and did not pray without acting.

### ***When did Nehemiah write the book?***

The book of Nehemiah was written during the reign of Artaxerxes (465–424 BC).

### ***What is the background of Nehemiah?***

The Jewish nation started with Abraham and his descendants Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The people multiplied greatly while serving as slaves in Egypt. Eventually Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt to the threshold of Canaan, the Promised Land. Under Joshua the people entered and conquered the land. For several hundred years the only leadership was provided by various judges whom God chose to lead His people.

When the people demanded a king, God allowed them to choose Saul. His reign was marked by disobedience, and God established a new king, David, whose reign was marked by great military success. He was succeeded by his son Solomon.

At the time of Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam became king; however, he disregarded the counsel of Solomon's advisors, and the nation was divided. Ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel; two tribes formed the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

The Northern Kingdom, known as Israel, never had a good king. The Israelites were captured by the Assyrians in 722 BC. A few of them escaped to the Southern Kingdom, but the rest have never been heard of again.

The Southern Kingdom, Judah, lasted until 586 BC. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and took many of the Jews to Babylon as slaves (2 Kings 25:1–8, 11, 18–21). The soldiers burned the temple and carried back to Babylon many of the beautiful items from the temple (2 Kings 25:13–17; 2 Chronicles 36:18). Most of the other buildings in the city were destroyed, along with the city wall (2 Kings 25:9, 10).

God did not forget His people. Eventually the Persians overthrew the Babylonians, and God used King Cyrus to accomplish His ultimate plan. After the Jews had been in captivity for seventy years, Cyrus allowed the first group of Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel (2 Chronicles 36:20–23; Ezra 1:1–4; 5:2). Eighty years later, Ezra led back another group. When Cyrus died, Artaxerxes (pronounced Are-taz-erk-sees) became king, and Nehemiah was his cupbearer. Thirteen years after Ezra’s return, Nehemiah led a group back to Jerusalem to build the city wall.

***Why was it important to build the wall?***

City walls kept a city safe from bands of robbers. In the case of the Jews in Jerusalem, the walls would also help to keep the people from being assimilated by the pagan nations around them. The Jews had started to intermarry with the Gentiles and were beginning to lose their distinctive culture, language, and religion. Nehemiah did not want this trend to continue.

***What is the key verse?***

“Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:20).

***What questions should you ask as you study this book?***

1. What does the passage mean in its historic, Biblical context?
2. What practical lessons can I apply to my life today?

May God bless you as you study the book of Nehemiah and learn to grow through crisis.



# Our Greatest Resource

## NEHEMIAH 1

*“O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man” (Nehemiah 1:11).*

**H**ow important is prayer in your life? The disciples knew the importance of prayer. They asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Prayer is more than mere words from our lips; it is the expression of the heart. Someone has said, “When I read the Bible, God talks to me; but when I pray, I talk to God.” How tragic that many Christians rush into the day without reading their Bibles or praying. No wonder problems arise and their prayers go unanswered.

## OVERVIEW

Nehemiah is an example of someone who knows how to pray. He faced many crises, but he handled them in the most powerful way—he prayed. The only time his name is mentioned in the Bible is in the book that bears his name. His was a rags-to-riches story. He was born in slavery but rose to one of the most prominent positions in ancient Middle Eastern politics. He became the king’s right-hand man in the Persian Empire, which was the grandest of its day. Many men would have reveled in this position, but something meant more to Nehemiah than prestige: Jerusalem. His heart was in Jerusalem.

One day Nehemiah’s brother, Hanani, told him about the devastation of Jerusalem. The report broke Nehemiah’s heart (Nehemiah 1:1–4). But

how could he do anything about Jerusalem when he was only a slave living eight hundred miles away? It sounds like an impossible problem, doesn't it? But God specializes in these kinds of problems. The God Who intervened in Nehemiah's problem can help you and me.

Nehemiah's job for God was to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. In many ways, his job parallels the Christian life. The practical principles in Nehemiah are timeless, reliable guidelines that will work today if we apply them. The book uncovers practices to follow and problems to avoid. The principles in Nehemiah can help us build our lives for God. This lesson, "Our Greatest Resource," teaches us how prayer is the answer for life's problems.

**Questions to ask yourself:** Am I facing an impossible situation? Is a problem breaking my heart? What concerns are on my heart right now? What do I do when my heart is broken: try to work out the situation myself, or turn to God for help?

Let's learn how Nehemiah faced life's problems.

## STUDY THE WORD

### Prayer Is Our Secret Weapon

#### Read Nehemiah 1:1–7.

This story unfolds in winter. Chisleu is the Jewish name for December. Nehemiah lived in the capital city of Susa, which would compare to living in Washington, D.C. Susa was a center of activity and decision-making for business and politics. And Nehemiah was in the middle of it all. He was the king's cupbearer. This may sound like a table server to you, but his job was far more important. His job was to taste the king's food and drink before the king did. If dinner was poisoned, good-bye cupbearer, but long live the king. Often the cupbearer developed such a close relationship with the king that he had more influence on the king than anyone else did. Some cupbearers used this influence to their advantage by putting in a good word for their friends or pushing their particular cause. Others made money from their position.

1. What were Nehemiah's earthly credentials (vv. 1, 11)?

Nehemiah's father is mentioned only once in the Bible. Apparently his claim to fame was his son. Often we underestimate the importance of raising children.

2. What devastating facts about Jerusalem and the remnant of Jewish people left there did Nehemiah learn (v. 3)?

We, like Nehemiah, are always plagued with problems. When one problem vanishes, another is waiting in the wings to replace it. Have you got problems? Nehemiah sure did! God placed Nehemiah in the palace, where he faced his greatest problems.

Likewise God has placed you where you are for a reason—maybe a reason known only to Him. When we realize this truth, it changes our whole perspective on our problems and helps us trust God to change them into blessings.

3. When Nehemiah heard of the conditions in Jerusalem, it broke his heart. What four things did he do (v. 4)?

Even though Nehemiah had reached a high echelon of success as a cupbearer, he still cared about those who were down-and-out. He could have easily said, "Too bad for those people in Jerusalem. I feel sorry for them." No, his heart was broken for them. He did more than feel sorry. He did crisis praying.

4. Crisis prayer is intense praying. The Bible sometimes describes it as "crying out to God" in prayer. Nehemiah's prayer was not a ritual of memorized words, but an outburst from the heart. List Nehemiah's specific concerns as he cried out to God (vv. 5–7).

Nehemiah knew the Jews' plight had resulted from sin against God (Nehemiah 1:4–7). On one hand, he believed God's promises; on the other hand, he knew God was tired of His people's lack of obedience. (God's judgment for sin had sent the Jews into exile [2 Chronicles 36:13–17].) Nehemiah didn't simply feel bad because of the conditions of God's holy city; he *mourned* over Jerusalem—and he expressed great grief to the point of physically weeping. He did more than merely recognize the problem; he had a heartfelt concern. Do you care about the needs of your family and friends? We need godly compassion for the needs of others.

### **Prayer Has Four Components**

#### **Read Nehemiah 1:5.**

5. Prayer should have four parts: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Find each of these in Nehemiah's prayer.

Adoration

Confession

Thanksgiving

Supplication

6. (a) Read Psalm 66:18. Why is confession of sin an important part of prayer?

(b) According to 1 John 1:9, what happens when we confess our sins?

As you read 1 John 1:9, notice that it sheds more light on the confession of sin. In the original language, the word “confess” is in the present tense, meaning “to continually confess sin.” Confessing our sins should be as natural to us as breathing. We should develop a habit of continually confessing our sins.

7. According to Philippians 4:6, what are we to incorporate in our prayers and supplications?
8. According to Hebrews 4:16, how are we to come to God in our cry for help?
9. Nehemiah had a right view of God. In Nehemiah 1:5 how did Nehemiah describe God and show his reverence and respect for Him?

Whom did Nehemiah serve on earth? He served the king. How did King Artaxerxes compare to God? There was no comparison! Nehemiah kept life in the right perspective. Even though King Artaxerxes was the greatest king on earth at that time, God was greater. Remember, even though your problems seem great, God is greater.

## **We Can Pray Confidently**

### **Read Nehemiah 1:6–10.**

If God directs us down a hard road, we can be confident that He will also direct us to an easier road in His own time, in His own way, and for His own glory.

10. Answer the following questions to see Nehemiah's confidence that God would hear and answer his prayer (vv. 6–10).
  - (a) Did Nehemiah seem to doubt that God would answer his prayer? Explain.
  - (b) When did Nehemiah pray, showing his earnestness in prayer?
  - (c) What did Nehemiah say that revealed his familiarity with Israel's history and God's response to Israel's disobedience?
  - (d) What did Nehemiah say that showed his trust in God for his safety and Israel's welfare?

To be the kind of Christian God can trust with answered prayer is a great blessing.

11. Just to recap, whom did Nehemiah say had sinned (vv. 6, 7)?

The marvelous thing about confessing sin is that the result, forgiveness, is contagious. When we see God forgive us, we should forgive others.

We need a fresh realization that sin is against God. Sin is not some little mistake that can be overlooked.

12. When Potiphar's wife tried to entice Joseph to commit adultery, how did Joseph view this sin (Genesis 39:9)?

## **Prayer Is Claiming God's Promises**

### **Read Nehemiah 1:8.**

When we pray, we should not focus on our problems, but on God's promises. We need to read and meditate on God's Word so we know what God has promised. Nehemiah believed that prayer would transform God's promises into reality. He knew the Scriptures and claimed what God had promised in Leviticus 26:40–46.

13. Read Nehemiah 1:8 and 10. What promises from the Scriptures did Nehemiah claim?

The first promise had come to pass (i.e., Israel sinned and the people were in captivity). In his prayer, Nehemiah was claiming the second promise for his people (i.e., God would bring them back to Jerusalem). God wants us, like Nehemiah, to believe Him, to claim His promises, and to trust Him for answered prayer. Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but claiming God's willingness to hear and answer. Since Nehemiah would later plan to build the wall of Jerusalem, these particular promises of Israel's restoration were meaningful to him.

14. God had said He would bless His people for obeying His Word and punish them if they did not. Contrast Jeremiah 17:5 with 17:7.

(a) Whom does God curse, and whom does He bless?

Curses

Blesses

(b) Which one are you like most of the time?

### **Praying Will Strengthen Your Faith**

#### **Read Nehemiah 1:8.**

15. (a) What is the first word of Nehemiah 1:8?

(b) Whom was Nehemiah addressing?

(c) Did Nehemiah say this to remind himself or God?

Have you ever forgotten something you promised a child, only to have that child remind you? Sometimes we are not good at remembering our promises, but God never forgets His promises. He wants us to trust Him.

16. George Mueller founded and directed a large orphanage in England. He determined to ask no one for money for the orphanage and to depend completely upon God to supply his needs. One day someone asked Mueller to suggest some verses for strengthening one's faith. Some of those verses are listed below. What do these verses say that can strengthen your faith?

John 14:13, 14

Hebrews 11:6

1 John 5:14, 15

Jeremiah 33:3

17. In Joshua 4:20–24 we read that the Israelites set up stones to remind them of how God had helped them cross the Jordan River. What are some ways you can remind yourself of God’s past blessings?

When God answers a special prayer for you, it is good to find ways to remind yourself of it. An example could be when driving by a certain place, you remind yourself, “God spared me from an accident here as an answer to my prayer for safety. God answered my prayer then, and I will trust Him to answer my prayers now and in the future.”

### **Prayer Reveals Our Hearts**

#### **Read Nehemiah 1:9–11.**

Nothing reveals our hearts like how we handle problems. Letting God deliver you out of your problems instead of working them out yourself is a test of your Christianity. Don’t ask, How can I get out of the mess? Instead ask, How can I glorify God through this mess? He will show you the way.

18. For what two things did Nehemiah ask God (v. 11)?

You have two choices to your problems: pray or panic. You choose. Prayer will help you stay calm, cool, and collected when the world around you is falling apart. We have the same needs that Nehemiah had. We need our prayers answered and success in our daily endeavors. Success in God’s eyes is not the same as success in the world’s eyes.

Nehemiah practiced what some people call “model and serial number prayer.” Have you ever needed a new part for an appliance? You needed to specify the model and serial number to get the right part. Likewise, we need to be specific in our prayers to God.

19. Read Luke 11:5–13.

(a) What specific request did the man make?



(b) Why was his request granted?

(c) According to verses 9 and 10, what is the lesson for us?

## **Prayer Affects Our Everyday Lives**

Nehemiah's life was a mixture of prayer and action. Action seems to come naturally to most of us, but we have to work to develop a prayer life. Let's look at what prayer can do for our everyday lives.

### **Calmness**

Prayer helps us stay calm, cool, and collected. Waiting makes us take time out of our actions and forces us to leave the situation in God's hands.

20. What does Psalm 46:10 tell us to do?

21. Read Psalm 27:14.

(a) What phrase is repeated in this verse?

(b) What command is given?

(c) What is promised if you obey this command?

As you pray and wait on God, He helps you put things in the right perspective.

22. According to Isaiah 40:31, what are the benefits of waiting on the Lord and putting things in the right perspective?

### **Peace**

Prayer is the cure for worry. You can't pray and worry at the same time.

23. Read Philippians 4:6. The word "careful" has the meaning of "worry."

(a) What are we not to do?

(b) What are we to do?

Often our vague praying results from unbelief. Would you ask someone to “come over and have dinner sometime” or to “have dinner with us at 7:00 this Friday night”? If you were serious about the invitation, you would be specific. We need to be specific in our praying too.

It should encourage us that God answered Nehemiah’s prayer. (The king granted his request.) It all started because one person cared about God’s work, confessed sin, and claimed God’s promises. It was not easy, but the results were worth the effort. Are you willing to take the necessary steps to answered prayer?

God is willing and able right now to take you just as you are and make something special out of your problems. He is the master at taking our impossible situations and turning them around for His glory.

### **MAKE IT PERSONAL**

Prayer develops some important qualities in our lives. First, it develops patience. Prayer teaches us to wait on God (Psalms 25:5; 123:2). Our first response to a problem should be prayer. Have you ever started putting something together and found that you could not figure out how to do it? Then you read the instructions and learned how it was meant to go together. Sometimes we rush into projects, confront difficulties, and then we pray! How much better it is to wait on God first. Too often we are like the two men out on the ocean in a lifeboat. After they had used all of their provisions, one man turned to the other and said, “I guess we had better pray about this.” The other man replied, “Has it come to that?”

Second, prayer teaches us a proper view of life. Have you ever looked down at the ground from an airplane? How much different the view is from the sky than from the ground! God sees the end from the beginning, not just one tiny section of our lives. When we try to view things from His perspective, our thinking changes and our view of life becomes more like His.

Third, prayer gives us a sense of peace. In this world of turmoil and chaos, prayer brings peace to our hearts (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Finally, prayer makes us more successful. Nehemiah prayed 120 days before he started the project. (“Chisleu” in Nehemiah 1:1 is November/December; “Nisan” in Nehemiah 2:1 is March/April.) He built the walls in only fifty-two days (without all the modern equipment). Nehemiah prayed twice as long as he worked. He prayed for four months so he could get the job done in two months (Nehemiah 6:15). Often our failures are due to lack of prayer.

1. How can each of the following things improve your prayer life?

A time to pray

A plan to pray with written requests

A journal of answered prayer

Difficult situations in life

2. Take a minute to think about the personal questions at the beginning of this lesson (p. 12). Why not follow Nehemiah’s example to help you solve these problems?

I believe it is important to have a time each day for prayer and Bible study, but it is also important to have an attitude of prayer all day long (see 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

### **PUT IT INTO PRACTICE**

(For personal challenge, not class discussion)

Most people want a great prayer life, but often they are unwilling to pay the price to have one. Here are six suggestions that could help you develop your prayer life.

1. Set a time and take time for prayer each day.
2. Have a specific place to pray.
3. Find a prayer promise to claim.
4. Make a list of concerns for which to pray.

5. Find a prayer partner to pray with you. Your spouse or a close friend would be a good partner.

Which of these suggestions can you put into practice right away?

The great old hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” says it well:

*O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!*