

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Daily Discipleship Guide ESV, Unit 18, Session 2

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God Protects His People Through a Cupbearer

Session in a Sentence: God provides leaders to strengthen and help protect His people from their enemies.

Background Passage: Nehemiah 1–7

We often look back at personal experiences not just cognitively but emotionally. In fact, the deeper the emotion associated with a memory, the clearer the details become. I can tell you the date, time, location, and a myriad of other random details from the moment I was told my younger brother had been murdered. Even typing this brings the visuals of 2011 back to my eyes, the details back to my mind, and the emotions back to my heart. Such emotional experiences change everything for us—nothing in our lives will ever be the same.

What emotional experiences have changed everything for you?

Group Time

Point 1: God’s leader feels burdened for the people and prays (Neh. 1:1-4).

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the capital, 2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

4 As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah was burdened by what he heard about the condition of his people and what he knew about the character, promises, and plan of God. It was a burden that came from the Lord. But Nehemiah didn’t just charge out to change things; he petitioned the Lord, seeking His faithfulness and favor to carry out the restoration of his homeland. We shouldn’t move too quickly from the simple yet profound truth that Nehemiah was moved deeply and subsequently moved to pray.

Why is prayer the best next step once we have a burden to act for God’s glory and the good of others?

Nehemiah knew that if the walls of Jerusalem were to be rebuilt and the people of Judah restored, it would take more than him at the helm—it would take the hand of God. So he fasted and prayed day and night for many days (1:4,6). He didn’t go to God one time and then go about his business; rather, he continually went to God as he was doing his business. He modeled a heart of dependence on and subsequent confidence in the Lord that showed up in how he lived and led.

Voices from the Church

“Never underestimate the power of self-deception and the pull toward self-reliance. Apart from the presence and power of God, these are irresistible. Do not trust yourself. Respond to God’s call to be your source for everything. If you don’t, you will damage God’s work by extracting Him from the very thing He initiated in the first place.”¹

—Crawford Loritts

Point 2: God's leader unites and strengthens the people for the work (Neh. 2:11-18).

11 So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. **12** Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. **13** I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. **14** Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. **15** Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. **16** And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." **18** And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

After securing the favor of King Artaxerxes because God's gracious hand was on him, Nehemiah set off to do what God had laid on his heart to do (Neh. 2:1-10). This scene ends with the people united and strengthened for the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, but in order to bring the people together, Nehemiah needed them to know what they were being brought together for.

How does the gospel bring clarity and unity to believers?

Nehemiah's clear communication and call to action was more than a marketing ploy or a tug on the heartstrings; he firmly believed in a greater reality and connected the people to it, to the very heart and mission of God. He gave the residents of Jerusalem an honest assessment of the state of the city: "We're in trouble; we're a disgrace!" But then he moved from what they knew to be true and focused them on the hand and heart of God with his testimony.

What are some ways your strength and work are connected to God and His gospel mission?

Point 3: God's leader protects and encourages the people in the face of opposition (Neh. 4:11-14).

11 And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work." **12** At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us." **13** So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. **14** And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

The workers faced real discouragement and danger. As a godly leader, Nehemiah's response wasn't to ignore their fears or concerns; rather, he **protected them strategically** and **encouraged them deeply**. The goal of his strategic plan of protection was to help alleviate some of the fears that would empty the workers of their courage. Furthermore, Nehemiah encouraged the people with the character of God, leading to confidence in His power and assurance of His presence.

How have you been encouraged by remembering the great and awesome God?

Nehemiah led the people to remember the God on their side, which would encourage the Jews to stand strong for those around them, for their countrymen and their families. Similarly, this is what it means to be the body of Christ. Jesus leads the church as its head, and as believers know and follow their great God and Savior, they fight for the well-being of their brothers and sisters in Christ, pursuing their holiness and encouraging them in the fight against sin. They also join together for the Great Commission, which is beyond any human ability to accomplish.

Body of Christ: The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ's _____ here on earth, with Christ as its head. This means that the church is an _____ of Christ's _____, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission.

My Mission

Because we are protected and secure in Christ, we join with others to complete the kingdom work God has given us.

- **What burden has the Lord placed on your heart for you to obey in faith?**
- **What rhythms can your group follow to encourage each other to continue the work of God?**
- **For whom will you labor and share the gospel that they would know our great and awe-inspiring Lord—Jesus Christ?**

Voices from the Church

“To work well in service to God also means to work as His people—as valued individuals and as a unified body of believers ... Once we have put our faith in [Jesus], this is our eternal identity: we become part of God's called-out people.”²

—Kathleen Nielson