

SESSION 10

DISCIPLINARY ISSUES

Nehemiah 13 / Personal Study

Opening Prayer

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

Introduction

Imagine you have a friend who goes to prison for stealing. This friend spends several years locked up in a cell and away from his home. Finally, after finishing his sentence, he returns to society. You decide to pay your friend a visit and, to your dismay, you find out that he has returned to a life of stealing. How do you feel? How do you respond?

This scenario is similar to that of Nehemiah. Israel and Judah are exiled for idolatry and disobedience but are eventually allowed to return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah organizes and accomplishes the rebuilding of the wall and the repopulating of the city, setting in place solid leaders to govern. His term as governor complete, he goes back to the court of King Artaxerxes. Returning three years later for a second term, he discovers that Jerusalem's people are still doing the very things for which they were exiled.

Read Nehemiah 13 and answer the following questions:

1. Why was it necessary to remove the Ammonites and Moabites from Israel (13:1-3; Deut. 23:3-6)?
2. In chapter 11 the people commit to not intermarry with other races. Now they recognize that those of non-Jewish descent must be removed from their midst. What negative effects were these non-Jews likely having on the community of believers?
3. The Jews learn that their commitment to remain separate from pagans needs to extend beyond simply avoiding intermarriage. Have you ever repented of a sin only to find that the problem went deeper than you first thought? Why are we sometimes slow to understand the depth of our sin?
4. What evil thing does Eliashib do (13:4-5)? Why is Tobiah, of all people, the wrong person to move into a chamber in the temple courts? (Look back at 2:19-20, especially Tobiah's nationality.)
5. Nehemiah 13 is a chapter about forgetting and remembering. What commands do the people forget during Nehemiah's absence?

6. What does Nehemiah ask God to remember about the corrupt priests during his absence (13:29)?

7. What does Nehemiah ask God to remember about him (13:14, 22, 31)? Does Nehemiah's desire to have his good deeds remembered indicate that he believed he had earned God's favor? Why or why not?

8. Why is it important for us to not forget the commands and faithfulness of God? Look up Isaiah 49:13 to help with your answer.

9. Nehemiah goes to dramatic lengths to restore order. What do you personally think of his actions? Are they eccentric? Extreme? Do you think he is justified in acting this way? Why or why not?

10. How does James 5:19-20 give insight into Nehemiah's motives?

11. What keeps us from confronting a fellow believer about disobedience to God's commands? What would Nehemiah (and James) say about our reasons for avoiding such conflict?

Conclusion

As we come to the end, think back over our study of Nehemiah and answer the following questions:

1. What character trait of Nehemiah do you most want to develop? Why?

2. What aspect of God's character is most evident to you in the book? How has reflecting on this character trait deepened your understanding of the gospel?

3. What act of obedience or repentance has the Holy Spirit shown He desires from you?

Closing Prayer

Father, I ask for Your forgiveness for the times I have treated Your commands lightly. I thank You that, even though I sin, You are kind and gracious to forgive me because of Jesus. I pray that You will give me a heart, like Nehemiah's, that fervently wants to see Your will done. I also pray that I will be faithful to You, not to earn Your favor but because I already have it. Help me maintain the balance between loving people and hating sin. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

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Nehemiah 13 / group Study

Answer the following questions.

1. What thoughts do you have based upon this week's personal study?
2. What stood out to you? What challenged you? What prompted questions?
Read Nehemiah 13 and answer the following questions.
3. How does Nehemiah address Tobiah's unacceptable living situation (13:8-9)? Compare his response to that of Jesus in Matthew 21:12-13. How are they similar?
4. Have you ever felt anger that you could truly characterize as righteous anger? If so, when? How can we know if our anger is righteous or sinful?
5. Based on the pattern in Nehemiah, what should we do to gain a better picture of our sinfulness so that we might repent? Look up James 1:22-25 to help with your answer. Explain the comparison.
6. Does the amount of time you give to learning Scripture reflect a desire to confront or avoid sin? What wrong thinking causes us to hide from the mirror of God's Word?
7. In chapter 13 Nehemiah deals aggressively with the problem of pagan influence through intermarriage. Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-15. What is the difference between being unequally yoked with unbelievers and living missionally among the lost? What motive lies behind each scenario?
8. What potentially dangerous relationship with an unbeliever have you justified as missional living? How did (does) that relationship undermine your relationship with God? What action should you take to flee from sin?

Conclusion

1. Having now completed our study of Nehemiah, what have you learned about the nature and character of the Lord?
2. How has this study affected your view of God, the gospel, the faith centred community to which we belong and your own heart?
3. Is there one particular take-away from this study that you want to process, pray through and act upon in the days and months ahead?

Guide to Prayer

- Confess and repent of places in your life where you have failed to follow God's commands.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you enjoy righteousness and hate sin. Ask the Lord for a greater desire for holiness.
- Pray for a desire to follow God's commands and encourage others to do so out of a loving and kind heart.

LEADER GUIDE

SESSION 10

Disciplinary Issues / Nehemiah 13

1. Personal response
2. Personal response
3. He throws Tobiah out in righteous anger, just as Jesus drove out those buying and selling in the temple courts.
4. Righteous anger is jealous for the will of God to be obeyed. Unrighteous anger is jealous for the will of its owner to be obeyed. Insofar as our own will aligns with God's, our anger is righteous. Righteous anger comes from a heart that wants God to be worshiped and people to be obedient so they might experience God's blessing. Sinful anger comes out of a heart that wants to hurt people and also seeks to "feel better" by allowing their emotion to come out in a fit.
5. We should spend time in the Word, which acts as a mirror for us, revealing our sin.
6. We wrongly believe that if the Word exposes our sin the unpleasantness will outweigh the relief of repentance. We believe it is better to hide from our sin than to confront it, much like Adam and Eve in the garden.
7. Living missionally among the lost is motivated by a desire to see them saved. Being unequally yoked is motivated by a desire to live in close proximity to sin and temptation rather than fleeing from it. For more on being unequally yoked, see "Should a Believer Marry an Unbeliever?" on The Village Church blog.
8. Personal response

Conclusion

1. Personal response
2. Personal response
3. Personal response