



Message Summary: Prayer was a key part of Nehemiah’s life. Through his example, we learn to (1) pray with intention, (2) pray often, and (3) pray with confidence.

[Leader tip: A fun game to play ahead of time is Nailed it or Failed it First Pitch Edition by Steve Gold and John Kryvoruka. It’s a baseball themed game that fits great with the opening illustration. You can find it here: <https://www.downloadyouthministry.com/p/nailed-it-or-failed-it-first-pitch-edition/games-6189.html>]

[Show Slide 1] [Leader tip: Come up with your own way to transition to the intro of the “Field of Dreams” video clip, or just jump into it.]

In 1989, I was obsessed with baseball. I had thousands of baseball cards, visited the baseball card shop just about every day, watched games, poured over every page of my Beckett Baseball magazine subscription. If you’re wondering, my best baseball card is this Willie Mays rookie card. I think it might be the most valuable thing in my home.

In 1989, one of the most famous baseball movies of all time came out, called, “Field of Dreams.” It was nominated for three academy awards, including “Best Picture.” It’s about a farmer who builds a baseball field in his cornfield that attracts the ghosts of baseball legends to come play baseball. Trippy, right? Check out this scene from the beginning of the movie:

[Show Slide 2] Video clip: [If You Build It, He Will Come - Field of Dreams](https://youtu.be/5Ay5GqJwHF8) (2:27)

[Show Slide 3] **“If you build it, he will come.”** For this farmer, if he built the field, the baseball players would come – in particular, the ghost of Shoeless Joe Jackson. We’re going to spend the next few weeks looking at the story of Nehemiah, which, oddly enough, has a lot of parallels to this movie. Let me explain:

The book of Nehemiah is a tiny book in the Old Testament, right after the book of Ezra, and most likely written down for Nehemiah by the priest,

Ezra.ⁱ At times, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah have been combined into one book because their stories are so intertwined.

[Show Slide 4] In 586 BC, a little over 2600 years ago, the Babylonians conquered the Israelites and scattered the people, taking many of their best and future leaders back to Babylon; people like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whose story we read about in the book of Daniel. Babylon wanted to destroy the Israelite culture and identity, so they destroyed the cities, destroyed the temple, and scattered the people.

Fifty years later, the Persians conquered Babylon. They had a massive empire, and a different policy; whereby as long as conquered people paid their taxes and didn't rebel, they would be allowed to have their religions and identity. So, in the book of Ezra, we read about two groups of exiles who returned to Jerusalem, including the priest Ezra, the difficulties they faced, and the decades it took to rebuild the temple. The book of Nehemiah chronicles the third group of exiles who made the long journey back to Jerusalem to start over, and Nehemiah's mission to rebuild the walls surrounding Jerusalem.

[Show Slide 5] *Nehemiah 1:1-11 (NLT) ¹ These are the memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.*

In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. ² Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem.

The twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign means Nehemiah's story is thirteen years after Ezra had returned with the second group of exiles to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.ⁱⁱ

This news from these men who had traveled back from Judah was a big deal; it wasn't like today. They didn't have phones, social media, newspapers. News was hard to come by, especially news of Jerusalem since it was nearly a thousand-mile journey away. Obviously, traveling that far took a while.ⁱⁱⁱ Nehemiah was hopeful that the news would be good.

[Show Slide 6] ³ *They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace.*

The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”

Walls and gates played a much more important role back then than they do today. Now we can be attacked by planes and missiles, so a wall doesn't really make that much of a difference. But 2600 years ago? A good wall and strong gates could keep a city safe for years. People won wars over their walls being strong. Think about it. Remember the big battles in Lord of the Rings? One person on top of the wall could take out a ton of people below the wall. The wall was a critical defense tool. The fact that Jerusalem's wall was still in ruins showed its vulnerability and the danger the inhabitants, as well as the Temple, were still in.

⁴ When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.

Nehemiah wept. It wasn't just a wall. It was a symbol of how they were doing as a people, and it wasn't good. They were defeated and they weren't trying to rebuild. More importantly than weeping, Nehemiah prayed. He prayed for days. In fact, he prayed for four months that God would give him an opportunity to do something about this.^{iv} Over the course of these weeks, we're going to see an important pattern in Nehemiah's life: Nehemiah was a man who always thought it was **time to pray**.

[Show Slide 7] *⁵ Then I said, “O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of un failing love with those who love him and obey his commands, ⁶ listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! ⁷ We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.*

Do you notice that he's moving from the outside in? He praises God, then confesses on behalf of his people, then confesses for himself.

[Show Slide 8] *⁸ “Please remember what you told your servant Moses: ‘If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹ But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you*



- What stands out to you from these passages in Nehemiah? Why?
- What do we learn about Nehemiah?
- What do we learn about the Israelites?
- What do you think it was like to leave everything and work on rebuilding the wall? What do you think it was like to know they could be attacked at any point?
- In Nehemiah 5, we learned how bad it has gotten for some. What emotions do you think these parents were feeling who had sold their children? Why didn't they speak up sooner?
- In what ways do people take advantage of the poor today? How do you think God feels about it?
- Who is someone you know who responds with prayer in times of crisis? What can we learn from their example?
- How does prayer change us?
- How can prayer change us in our response to others? What injustices could you be a part of responding to in prayer and in action?



WEEK THREE | GO THE DISTANCE

Nehemiah 13:14 (NLT)

Remember this good deed, O my God, and do not forget all that I have faithfully done for the Temple of my God and its services.

Nehemiah 13:22 (NLT)

Remember this good deed also, O my God! Have compassion on me according to your great and unfailing love.

Isaiah 41:10 (NLT)

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

Matthew 11:28-29 (NLT)

Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Proverbs 3:5 (NLT)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.

1. **TURN TO GOD**
2. **PRAY FOR REST**
3. **GIVE IT TO GOD**



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