

# nehemiah

when God's call comes calling at work



God's calling and your vocation:  
an initiative of the navigators



*Nehemiah: When God's Call Comes Calling at Work*

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Getting Started

# Convictions and Calling



## INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah is one of the Old Testament's heroes in terms of working out his faith "in fear and trembling" in the midst of a complex, difficult work situation. Like many of us today, Nehemiah was thrown into a task that was larger than what he could possibly accomplish on his own, and yet, his heart burned with a desire to see the job completed.

This study is not an exhaustive study of the topic of work, and it is not a study of Nehemiah's entire life. Instead, it provides an "insider's view" into the heart, decision-making and leadership style of one person who responded with all he had to God's lead. It is a case study of a godly hero on the "job site."

One of the key attributes of Nehemiah was his commitment to living out his convictions. To live fruitfully in response to God's lead, one of the things we need most is a small set of deeply held convictions. The goal of this study is to help build and deepen the convictions needed to live well in the workplace.

## Skills Needed

There are three skills that will make this study richer.

The first is **paying attention to the story**. The Bible contains many different formats: history, poetry, teaching and narrative. The stories in the Bible teach truth by *showing principles in action*. To get the most out of a book like Nehemiah, you need to pay attention to the action: What is God doing? What are His people doing? And how should their actions shape your own? To get the most you can out of this study, you will have to pay attention to the plot.

### Skills Needed

- Paying attention to the story
- Digging into the details
- Having good conversations

The second skill is **digging into the details**. One time-honored approach is *observe-interpret-apply*.

*Observe* means to pay attention to the stated actions, the objective facts and the plain meanings of the words.

*Interpret* means to think about the ideas that these observations imply and the principles that the facts point to.

*Apply* means to take these ideas and work to see how they fit into your own life. Application is the step where you decide what you think God is asking you to do, think, believe or feel about what you have just read. Though digging into the details can be rich, it is just as important to think about how those details—and what they mean—apply to your own life. Sometimes, the impact is immediate: conviction, courage and hope come flooding in. Other

times, you have to do some thinking to see how God might be asking you to respond.

#### Example

A common mistake is to jump to conclusions about what something means before making enough observations. For example, chapter three does not simply say that “everybody pitched in and they built the wall.” Broadly speaking, yes, that is what happened, but there are important details that greatly deepen our understanding of what happened. The first builder mentioned, for example, is the high priest (v. 1). (Why would it be important to mention the high priest first?) The verse also mentions that he was joined by his brothers. (Is this important?) The chapter goes on to describe people with different backgrounds making different contributions. Not every detail is as important as every other detail, but in general, it is the details in a story that make it rich and help our interpretation of the story to be much more accurate. Applying this richer and more accurate understanding of the different types of people involved and their diverse contributions will be very different from applying a general idea that the passage is about “working together.”

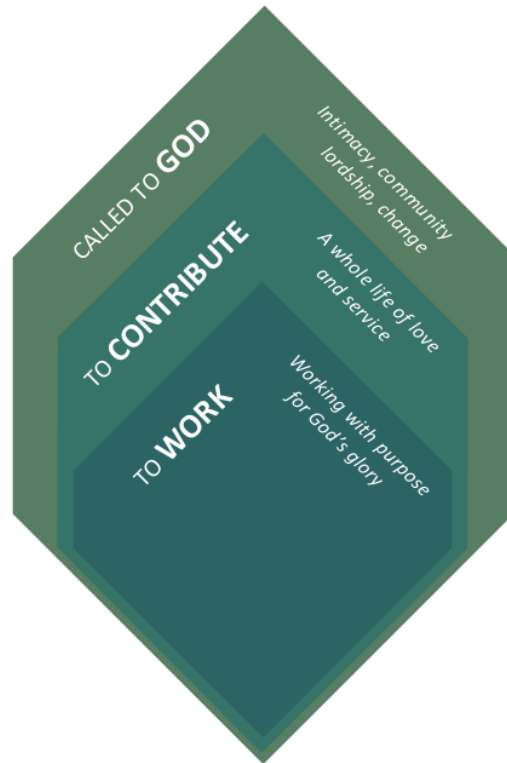
If you are doing this study with others, the last skill is **having good conversations**. A small group works best when everyone in the group is committed to listening well, asking each other questions, sharing authentically and learning from each other. Often times, the very best questions are not the ones on the page but the ones that come up in the middle of the discussion. (Leaders, please read “Tips for Leaders” on p. 55.)

## THE ROLE OF WORK

This study is not designed to cover everything that could be said about work. Instead, it looks at the topic of work and God’s leading through the life of one person. “Work” is not the central theme of the book of Nehemiah, but it is its context.

The study will cover a few topics that are likely new to you, but mostly, it is meant to add depth to ideas (such as prayer, faith and commitment), this time with a focus on work. (If you are interested in a more topical study on work, please see *A Biblical Perspective on Work, Vocation and Calling*.)

One of the hardest questions to sort out is how *work* and *ministry* fit together. How does God’s guidance into a career fit into God’s invitation to influence the world around us and His even clearer call to intimacy with Himself? Here is one way to picture it:



**Called to God:** In this picture, everything starts with God and points back to God. The biggest, most important call on our lives is the call by God to himself. He wants all of us, all the time.

**Called to Contribute:** Inside this call to God, God asks us to join in His work of restoring and rebuilding every part of our world. We are called to contribute in every aspect of life through love, serving and doing what is good. This contribution includes work but also other areas: being a good neighbor, volunteering and other types of formal and informal contribution and investment in others.

**Called to Work:** Within this call to contribute, God leads most people into a career. The Bible teaches that it is not just how we relate to people at work that makes a difference. Very often, it is the work itself that provides a way for us to do good (for example, the farmer who grows food, the doctor who helps people get healthy or the engineer who helps design a safer vehicle). Work is not the “center of the bull’s-eye,” but it can be a very significant place for us to contribute and do our part in changing the world and making it a better place.

As you work through the book of Nehemiah, look for evidence of his priorities and convictions. In what ways do you see Nehemiah pursuing his work inside of a greater call to love and serve others? In what way do you see him serving others inside the even greater call to walk closely with his God?

## WRITING A LIFE PURPOSE STATEMENT

Before diving into the study, take some time to examine your own sense of calling—even if it is not very clear yet. Here are a few questions to help get you started. (You will have several chances during the study to revise what you write here.)

1. In terms of the “big picture,” what outcomes most inspire you? For example, do you hope to *inspire, create, empower* or *help*? List the energizing action verbs that best describe your motivations. (If you are more of a detail person, you might want to start with question 3 and work your way back to question 1.)
2. What group or groups of people do you most want to serve? For example, *the poor, those without Christ, coworkers, customers, family, those from a specific ethnic group or culture*, etc.
3. What words describe your spiritual gifts, unique talents or special abilities that help you serve others? For example, *giving, designing, building, serving, teaching, interceding*, etc.
4. Looking at your answers to the above, write a first draft of your life purpose statement. This statement should be more than a job title. Here are a few examples:

*“To educate and inspire disadvantaged children through teaching.”*

*“To protect people and our world by designing aircraft that are safer and use fewer resources.”*

*“To be a good parent and raise my children well.”*



When you are done writing, step back and reflect (and if you have a friend around to talk with about it, even better) and ask yourself:

- Is your purpose consistent with how God has designed you?
- Do people agree that this statement describes your best contribution?
- Is your purpose statement something to be lived out in the workplace, in your neighborhood, through volunteer work?

## GETTING STARTED: EZRA, NEHEMIAH AND ESTHER

In 538 BC, after Israel had spent 70 years in captivity, Cyrus, the king of the Persian Empire, adopted a policy of allowing deported people to return home. It took many decades, however, for the people of Israel to return, the Temple to be rebuilt and the wall around Jerusalem to be restored.

To help understand the background leading up to Nehemiah's work, read Ezra 1:1–8 and make observations. Pay particular attention to the steps God took to open the way for His people to return to Jerusalem.

1. How do you feel about God using a Persian king to help?
2. Early during the exile, God spoke to His people through Jeremiah, calling them to settle down and to work to bless the city where they were living as exiles:

*"Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:5–7 ESV)*

How do you think this kind of living helped prepare the people to return to Jerusalem?

3. What impact did this approach to being exiles have on the king of Persia and the people of Babylon (Ezra 1:5–7)?

## PRAYER

To close, spend a few minutes praying about your career and the people you work with (or will work with). Pray that God would use this study to deepen your love for Him, your love for others and your understanding and ability to follow His lead.

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

*“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”  
(Jeremiah 29:7 ESV)*

## GOING DEEPER

For a more detailed timeline of the events leading up to Nehemiah, please read [Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther](#), a short paper by Navigator staff Dean Storelli, available at [human365.org](http://human365.org). (See the “Living in the World” section of the resource page.)

Nehemiah One

# Prayer and Calling





## WARM UP

Each study starts with a collection of quotes. They are not all necessarily meant to be agreed with but to promote conversation and thinking. A few of the sessions also include some brief discussion questions to use before reading the main passage.

- “Non nobis solum nati sumus.” (“Not for ourselves alone are we born.”) Cicero
- “Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.” Søren Kierkegaard
- “Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to his voice in the depth of our hearts.” Mother Teresa
- “Leaders think and talk about the solutions. Followers think and talk about the problems.” Brian Tracy

What is your reaction to these quotes?

## STUDY

Read Nehemiah 1 and make observations. Pay attention to the steps in the process of God’s leading and any factors that helped open the door for him to step into the next chapter of his service to God, God’s people and the world around him.

## REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

### Nehemiah's World

1. If the book of Nehemiah were to finish with the last sentence of this first chapter, what would you learn about Nehemiah?
2. How does prayer play a part in this chapter?
3. What is the link in this chapter between prayer and God's leading?
4. Treasuring what God treasures is another part of following God's lead. In Chapter 1, what does Nehemiah treasure that God also treasures? Who are the people that Nehemiah values? How does this value show itself?

### Your World

5. When we have plans for ourselves, we call them *dreams*. When others have plans for us, we call them *expectations*. (Which can really be annoying!) But when God has a plan for us...Wow! Are you willing to follow God's dream for you? Are there dreams you think God has for you in the workplace?
6. What makes submitting to God's dreams for us uncomfortable? What can make following God's plan exciting?

7. Consider Ephesians 2:10 (ESV):

*We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

One implication of this truth is that showing up – with our eyes wide open – is one of the keys to accomplishing God's work: we go *where* God wants us to go, looking for the good and beneficial work prepared for us to walk into. How does this perspective change our view of work and contribution? How might it change your job search?

8. Why does Nehemiah want you to know what he does for a living? Why does it matter?

## Convictions and Commitments

*Convictions* are deeply held beliefs. They are stronger than opinions and preferences, even stronger than beliefs. While *beliefs* include many things we think are true, convictions are things we believe with much more certainty.

*Commitments* are decisions we make, often in response to our convictions. For example, if I am convinced I need to eat well, I might make a commitment to eat three balanced meals a day. Other times, we make commitments as a part of developing deeper convictions. For example, while I may not be absolutely convinced eating well is important, I may still make a commitment to eating three good meals a day as a way to grow in a conviction that I am pretty sure is right.

- What is your takeaway from this discussion/reflection? Are there convictions you sense God is trying to build in you? Are there commitments He is inviting you to consider?
- Take a moment to reflect on your personal calling statement from the first session (pp. 8–9). How has prayer been a part of developing that statement? How might prayer help you clarify your calling? Is there anything from Nehemiah or today's discussion/reflection that you want to



add to what you have written (or anything you want to delete or modify)? If so, rewrite your personal calling statement below.

## PRAYER

Finally, take a few minutes to pray. Pray about your calling, career and any commitments you sense God is inviting you into. If you are with a group, pray first on your own and then, after a few minutes, pray together.

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

*“O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”  
(Nehemiah 1:11 ESV)*

## GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

**What if** God has been waiting for all eternity for the perfect time to bring you into existence, so that He can invite you to be His partner in His plan?

**What if** God’s plan includes all the places where you will find a job and who you will work alongside?

**What if** pursuing your life, your work and/or your career is designed by God to give you *purpose*, to give what you do *meaning* and to give you, through your accomplishments, rich *fulfillment*?

We are wired, like God, by God, to experience that very thing. Solomon wrote,

*I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man. (Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 (ESV))*

Having been created in God’s image, this is not surprising. We bear similarities that are undeniable. One of them is celebrating accomplishment. Like God, who ended each day of creation looking at His day’s work by saying, “Good!” we also enjoy looking at the outcome of a well-done task.

Take a few minutes to reflect on these “what ifs.” Are you encouraged? Confused? Have questions?

# Planning and Calling



## WARM UP

- “He who fails to plan, plans to fail.” Anonymous
- “If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the other direction.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- “If you don't know where you are going, you will wind up somewhere else.” Yogi Bera
- “Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.” Alan Lakein
- “Let our advance worrying become advance thinking and planning.” Winston Churchill
- “A life is either all spiritual or not spiritual at all. No man can serve two masters. Your life is shaped by the end you live for. You are made in the image of what you desire.” Thomas Merton

What is your reaction to these quotes? Agree, disagree? Did one of them make you consider something you hadn't?

## STUDY

Read Nehemiah 2 and make observations. Pay particular attention to the dangers Nehemiah faced and any evidence of his planning.



## REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

### Nehemiah's World

1. Planning is important to most of our life. Without planning, we typically are planning for failure. This chapter opens nearly four months after the close of Chapter 1. Nehemiah has had time to think about the situation in Jerusalem. What evidence do you see in this chapter that Nehemiah has been planning?
  
2. What possibilities, threats and opportunities did Nehemiah consider and solve?
  
3. Chapter 1 tells us that Nehemiah was Artaxerxes' cupbearer. Chapter 2 opens with events that happen "on the job." Nehemiah's position could be called *royal wine taster*. "Sweet!" we might say, but let's look at the position.
  - Nehemiah was on the front line of the king's personal defense. Wine tasting also meant testing for poison before it got to the king.
  - Nehemiah's job profile had to include integrity and trust. He was regularly at the king's side.
  - As the dialog between King Artaxerxes and Nehemiah reveals, Nehemiah was a trusted confidante, able to discuss the thoughts and intentions of the king.

Why would God have Nehemiah working as a cupbearer when he was an excellent leader and project manager?

### Your World

4. What does this chapter teach us about the way God views our work?

5. As you think about your current and future places of employment, what might be a good prayer based on this chapter?
  
6. If the workplace is a part of God's calling in your life, and planning is a part of following God's call, what should you be planning now?

## Convictions and Commitments

What is your takeaway from this discussion? Is there something you need to know, to be or to do? Do any of the ideas here impact your convictions and commitments? Your confidence in the process of being called by God?

## PRAYER

Pray about the opportunities and dangers you are each facing and for any plans you have made or need to make to help meet them.

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

*And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it." (Nehemiah 2:5 ESV)*

## GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

If the last chapter teaches the importance of prayer in God's leading, this chapter teaches the importance of planning. Being led by God does not negate the need to plan, strategize or organize. In part, we love God with our minds by using them to discern, decide and develop solutions that honor Him. Even so, you may be tempted to ask, "*Why plan if it is God's sovereign will anyway?*"

For me, the reason is partnership. I love the verses that say things such as "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26 ESV) and "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13 ESV). The words

“with” and “through” are huge. God, who is sovereign and can do *anything* (actually *everything*) without us, chooses to be in partnership *with* and *through* those who follow Him. Here are three questions to consider:

- What does it mean to you when you think of God wanting to actively partner in the work of your life? How does it make you feel?
- How might planning be a part of “learning to partner” with God?
- If you think you are in a job that doesn’t match your skill set or giftedness, what should be running through your mind? In what planning might God want to partner with you? Is it always a good idea to leave this kind of work? Never?

Nehemiah Three

# Teamwork and Calling



## WARM UP

- “One Goal!” Chicago Blackhawks Motto
- “The team with the best players wins.” Jack Welch
- “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” Solomon (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 ESV)
- “The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say ‘I.’ And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say ‘I.’ They don’t think ‘I.’ They think ‘we;’ they think ‘team.’ They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don’t sidestep it, but ‘we’ gets the credit. This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.” Peter F. Drucker
- “The players with the best team win!” Wayne Kuna

Which of these quotes caught your attention and why?

## STUDY

Read Nehemiah 3 and make observations. In Chapters 1–2, the story is fairly easy to follow, but here, much of the drama is hidden in the details. To help see the “story underneath the story,” pay attention to the details of who is doing what work.

## REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

### Nehemiah's World

1. Who was on the team working to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? What different types of people were involved? Why was this diversity important?
2. What range of motivations, contributions and skills might these diverse people have brought into the mix?
3. Look carefully at the different types of work required and the different levels of both difficulty and visibility. How difficult do you think these differences made it to work as a team?
4. Before this project, what do you imagine the relationships between these people were like? How do you think this project affected them?
5. How did people end up working on the particular parts of the wall they worked on? Do you think Nehemiah assigned them positions?
6. At least some of the people worked on the part of the wall adjacent to their house. (See vv. 10, 21, 23, 28 and 30.) If you were rebuilding the wall on "Team Jerusalem," how would working on the section next to your house impact your work?



## Your World

7. Why is it important to see following God's lead into God's tasks as a team effort? What are the dangers or shortfalls of approaching these tasks – even your own work – as a solo venture?
  
8. When you find your first job (or move to your next), spend time looking to see if God has already assembled a team. If you are already on the job or have clear plans about where you are going, do you see any signs or potential for a team beginning to take shape?

## Convictions and Commitments

What is your takeaway from this discussion? Is there something you need to know, to be or to do? Can you write a one sentence “best practice” from Nehemiah’s experience that you would like to see built into your own life? Is there a commitment God is inviting you to make?

## PRAYER

Does thinking about teamwork make you nervous? Are you worried about your ability to make a contribution? About others slowing you down? Pray about your concerns, and ask God for wisdom and grace as you consider your current or future teammates.

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 ESV)*

## GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

### Teamwork

By the time you finish college, most people are painfully aware of what it means to have a “slug” as part of a class project. (You know what I mean.) They never meet their responsibilities or commitments. The faithful on the team are forced to pick up the slack and do more. When you get the “A” for the project, everyone is happy until the real worker bees realize the slug got an “A” as well. Ouch!

However, when a team works and accomplishes much more than what is expected or hoped for, the experience is a lifelong treasure.

Calling is seldom done in isolation. Or maybe we should say, seldom done well in isolation. Calling is often a team sport.

- What is your experience as a member of a team?
- Do you always need a team? When is a team critical?
- What do you think God thinks about teamwork?

### Imagine...

Imagine yourself outside of the walls of Jerusalem as a resident spectator. You're not a Jew. You have always lived in the area, and you have never seen anything but debris where it looks like a wall once stood. You're walking by the day the project begins. There isn't a wall up, and yet, there is something surrounding the city that has never been there before. What is it? *It is a wall of people.*

Before God used Nehemiah to make a wall of stone, He used Nehemiah to make a wall of people, united in one work. What does this picture tell us about the role of a team in the pursuit of a career that is wrapped in God's leading?

# Threats, Opposition and Hindrances



## WARM UP

- “I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.” Rosa Parks
- "It always seems impossible until it's done." Nelson Mandela
- “It is only through labor and painful effort, by grim energy and resolute courage that we move on to better things.” Theodore Roosevelt

Before you read this chapter, think for a minute about perseverance. It's hard enough to complete a complex or difficult task without help. It's especially hard to “keep on keeping on” when there is opposition or danger. What causes people to persevere? What makes them stick to it despite the odds?

Do you know a person of perseverance? What makes them that way?

Is there a difference between perseverance and being stubborn? If you think there is, what is the difference? Which are you?

## STUDY

Read Nehemiah 4 and make observations. Note the different types of obstacles Nehemiah and the people faced and what helped them persevere.

## REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

### Nehemiah's World

1. Where were the threats to Nehemiah and the people coming from and for what reason?
  
2. What kept the people working despite the presence of a threatening army? Here are a few answers to start with. Can you name others?
  - Confident leadership
  - A good defensive strategy
  - 
  -
  
3. What evidence do you see that Nehemiah knew his Bible? How did this knowledge help him face danger?
  
4. If our work is something that comes from God, why would God allow threats?

### Your World

5. As you look forward to or look around at your workplace, what external threats do you see to your commitments to God?

6. How does each of the following help you persevere in your obedience to God's leading despite threats or opposition?
- Scripture?
  - Prayer?
  - Other followers of Christ?
  - Clarity in knowing what God is asking you to do?
7. In addition to external threats, internal "debris" from your past (or present) can also hinder the pursuit of your calling. What past failures or painful memories might you need to deal with in order to follow God more fully in the workplace?
8. In addition to the debris you can see, there may be other debris that you can't see. The JoHari Window shows us why that is the case.

<b>Known Self</b> Things we know about ourselves and others know about us	<b>Hidden Self</b> Things we know about ourselves that others do not know
<b>Blind Self</b> Things others (spouse, close friends) know about us that we do not know	<b>Unknown Self</b> Things neither we nor others know about us (only God knows)

Would you be willing to ask someone close to you (including a boss or co-worker) about your "Blind Self?"

## Convictions and Commitments

If you were to create a "best practice" statement to help you persevere when threatened, what would it be? Is it something you need to know, to be or to do? Are



there commitments God is inviting you to make now that could help you deal with threats later?

Are there commitments you need to make to help you overcome internal hindrances? Have you considered following King David gave his strategy in Psalm 139:23–24?

What strategies will help keep new rubble from piling up again?

## PRAYER

Pray for the strength to persevere in light of any current challenges.

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

*So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. (Nehemiah 4:6 ESV)*

## GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

Discouragement has many sources. It can come from others, from a project gone wrong or from an impossible task that seems to have no end. But the most serious discouragement often comes from within. Previous failures and disappointments can taint motivation and courage. When it goes unchecked, discouragement can lead to a deep sense of futility and new failures.

Midway through Chapter 4, Nehemiah reports this sign of discouragement:

*In Judah it was said, “The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.” (Nehemiah 4:10 ESV)*

In addition to being a physical burden, the rubble from the old wall was a picture of past disobedience and moral failure. Every person working on the wall was staring at the wreckage of the generations before them.

In a sense, accomplishing the task of rebuilding the wall first required moving the massive guilt and wreckage from past failures. (And the debris was massive: the wall was 2.5 miles in circumference, 40 feet high and over 8 feet thick.) In my life and yours, our contribution can be seriously hindered if we don't first clear away the rubble from past disappointments, failures and missteps.

Despite being an extremely serious a topic, there is some great and encouraging news: God is in your corner. He is the partnering God. Despite being completely sovereign and in absolutely no need of help, He chooses to accomplish His plan side-by-side with you. Here are verses I take as promises to keep me moving forward—despite the debris and challenges.

*The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands. (Psalm 138:8 ESV)*

*He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:24 ESV)*

*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6 ESV)*

Nehemiah Five

# Justice and Calling



## WARM UP

- “If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.” Solomon (Observations, not approval, by King Solomon, Ecclesiastes 5:8–9 ESV)
- “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.” Solomon (Ecclesiastes 5:10 ESV)

What do you think of Solomon’s observations?

Before you begin, how would you define justice? Injustice? Oppression?

What motivates people to act unjustly?

## STUDY

Read Nehemiah 5:1–19 and make observations. As you read, make a list of the greedy, unjust behaviors going on within Jerusalem (vv. 1–11) and note any action steps taken by Nehemiah to turn the situation around.

## REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

### Nehemiah's World

1. Chapter 5 of Nehemiah's memoir starts off with a disaster in the making. What was going on? Why were these things a threat to Nehemiah's work? To the city?
  
2. Doing justice requires courage and making commitments to...
  - Discern right from wrong
  - Act on behalf of what is right – regardless of the risk
  - Stop wrongful acts and wrong thinking in oneself and challenge wrongs in others and institutions
  - Follow through so that wrongs are not repeated

What evidence do you see that Nehemiah made these commitments?

3. How were his actions received?
  
4. How did Nehemiah model justice and generous living? (vv. 14–19) Are these things he had to do?

### Your World

5. As you look around your community and the world today, where do you see injustice and a need for the commitments listed above?

6. In Nehemiah's day, what motivations do you think were driving these people's unjust behaviors? How might these same motivations get you in trouble in your own workplace?
  
7. What would be better motivations in the workplace?

## Convictions and Commitments

Review the life purpose statement you wrote in the introduction to this study (pp. 8–9). Does this calling statement reflect God's heart for justice? Are there new commitments you need to make? Are these commitments something you can act on as part of your job or are they things you would need to pursue outside of your career? At this point, you may want to write a statement that has two parts, one part that reflects God's purpose within your occupation and another that you feel strongly about no matter what setting you are in. For example...

*"At work, I hope to build and restore communities in the light of the Kingdom of God through the design and service of city infrastructure. In all of life, I want to 'love the person in front of me' through acts of kindness and 'going the extra mile.'"*

*"In my job, I want to serve God through helping destigmatize mental health and providing care and support for our military members. Outside of work, I also want to coach disadvantaged kids and model Christ. I would love to start a kids' Bible study!"*

*"As a teacher, I want to educate and inspire disadvantaged children in my community. I also want to rescue and restore women who have been sexually exploited through sex trafficking and abuse."*

*"In the workplace, my purpose is to protect people and our world by designing aircraft that are safer and make better use of the resources God has given us. At work and at home, my purpose is to awaken hearts to the heart of God and help others fulfill their role in God's global mission."*

Revise or rewrite your life purpose statement here.



When you are done writing, step back and reflect (and if you have a friend around to talk with about it, even better) and ask yourself:

- Is your purpose consistent with how God has designed you?
- Do people agree that this statement describes your best contribution?
- Is your purpose statement something to be lived out in the workplace, in your neighborhood, through volunteer work?
- Is your purpose compelling and significant to you?
- Does it inspire others?
- Do you sense that your life purpose is truly meaningful? Could you be happy pursuing this purpose?

## PRAYER

Pray for justice in your relationships, local area, country and the world.

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

*Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive." (Nehemiah 5:1–2 ESV)*

Or

*O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart. (Psalm 15:1–2 ESV—See "Going Deeper" below.)*

## GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

Take a minute to read Psalm 15.

- According to this Psalm, what are the markers of an upright, just person in God's eyes?
- According to Psalm 15, how would you describe the access to God that is given to the upright?

- The Hebrew word translated “blamelessly” (v. 2 ESV) paints the picture of a person who is walking down the street at noon on a sunny day without casting a shadow. How does justice relate to “not casting a shadow”?
- How will you avoid “casting shadows” on your journey in the workplace?

Nehemiah Six

# Courage and Calling



## WARM UP

- “One ought never to turn ones back on a threatened danger and try to run away from it. If you do that, you will double the danger. But if you meet it promptly and without flinching, you will reduce the danger by half. Never run away from anything. Never!” Winston Churchill
- “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.” Nelson Mandela
- “Courage is grace under pressure.” Ernest Hemingway
- “One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.” Maya Angelou

Did any of these quotes make you stop and think? Why?

Before you consider Nehemiah's experience, what has been your experience with courage? Was it triggered by some event, something that took you by surprise or a person who challenged you to your very core? Have you ever “borrowed” the courage of someone else?

What are some of the ways courage is portrayed in entertainment? Do you agree with these portrayals? What do you think makes someone courageous?

## STUDY

Read Nehemiah 6 and make observations. Keep track of the kinds of attacks Nehemiah faced. Read the passage again, this time, putting yourself in Nehemiah's shoes as you read. Try to imagine what it would be like for you to be attacked that way.

## REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

### Nehemiah's World

1. In what ways was Nehemiah threatened and attacked?
  - 
  - 
  - 
  -
2. Imagine yourself in Nehemiah's shoes. What would these attacks feel like? What details do you notice about these attacks?
3. How do you think the numerous open letters sent to Nehemiah affected "public opinion"?
4. As you look at the different ways Nehemiah was attacked, which do you believe were the most dangerous to the completion of rebuilding the wall and restoring the nation? What do you think about Sanballat's strategy of attacking the work by attacking its leader?

### Your World

5. Nehemiah faced many different kinds of attacks. For you personally, what kinds of attacks would make your workplace the most uncomfortable or dangerous? What is the worst that could happen?
6. In your experience, are faith and fear mutually exclusive?

7. What practices will you begin *now* to develop and strengthen your courage in the face of future threats?

## Convictions and Commitments

No matter what dangers you face, here are a few promises you can be assured of in your life.

*“Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world!”*

*“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

*“His strength is perfected in weakness.”*

*“My God will accomplish all that concerns me.”*

- Look for the location of these promises in the Bible. If you haven’t already, choose several to meditate on or memorize as a way to commit them to your heart and mind.
  
- What other passages of Scripture give you strength and courage?
  
- What is your takeaway from today’s discussion? Make a “best practice” statement that describes something you must know, be or do.

## PRAYER

Pray about current or future challenges you see in your workplace, and ask God for the courage to face them.

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Choose one of the promises from the Wrap Up or this one:

*But I said, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in." (Nehemiah 6:11 ESV)*

## GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

I know a young woman born with severe cerebral palsy. She could not survive without her parents and other caregivers. Yet, she is fiercely courageous. She has had over 80 brain surgeries and has fought some of the worst bacterial infections ever known. Her spirit is unstoppable. Unable to speak, she communicates courage without words. Her eyes flash and her face lights up with a joyful and sure confidence in God. Grace under pressure! She is a hero of courage.

- Who are some of your "heroes in courage"? What challenges have they faced? What have they done that you admire?
- Nehemiah faced lethal enemies. In the workplace, our enemies aren't necessarily lethal, but pursuing your calling in the world's workplace can threaten your pocketbook and even your career. What challenges do you see ahead that will require courage?



Nehemiah Seven

# Leadership and Calling



## WARM UP

- “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” John Q. Adams
- “No institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership composed of average human beings.” Peter Drucker
- “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Solomon (Proverbs 27:17)
- “People development should be a daily event, integrated into every aspect of your regular goings-on.” Jack Welch
- “The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.” Steven Spielberg
- “Show me a successful individual and I’ll show you someone who had real positive influences in his or her life. I don’t care what you do for a living—if you do it well I’m sure there was someone cheering you on or showing the way. A mentor.” Denzel Washington

Which of these quotes stands out to you and why?

## STUDY

Read Nehemiah 7. Take note of how Nehemiah invites others into leadership. What is he paying attention to?

## REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

### Nehemiah's World

1. What does Nehemiah do to get others to own the task and take leadership? Why do you suppose he takes this critical step?
2. What does being “faithful” and having a “fear of the Lord” have to do with being a qualified leader? (v. 2)
3. Why were gatekeepers important? Why was a regiment of guards established around the city? (v. 3)
4. Why were priests important and why was their genealogy so strictly enforced? (vv. 39–65)
5. Being pushy, being outgoing and many other traits can be easily confused with true leadership. Looking at the example of Nehemiah, do you think leadership is mostly a matter of what you do, what you say or who you are? Or is it some mix of these three or something else altogether?

### Your World

6. Everybody leads something. How has God been developing leadership in you? Who has God used, and what circumstances have contributed to your growth in leadership?

7. Think about the convictions and commitments God has been leading you into. To be faithful to these things, what kind of partners do you need? What parts of your contribution and purpose, as you best understand them, would be better advanced if you had someone to help shoulder the load?
  
8. Character is central to leading, to developing other leaders and to teamwork. Give your character a “SWOT” review: in what areas of character are you **S**trong, and in what areas are you **W**weak? In what areas of your character are there **O**pportunities? In what areas are there **T**hreats? (If you are in a small group, share your SWOT evaluation in pairs.)

## Convictions and Commitments

Are their new convictions or commitments in the areas of leading, investing or character development that God is inviting you into?

## PRAYER

Discussing leadership can be difficult. Pray about the issues this study has stirred up. Ask God for the ability to move forward boldly, wisely and with grace.

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

*Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.  
(Nehemiah 7:1–2 ESV)*

## GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

God gave Nehemiah a vision that was not a walled city but a godly nation. With the completion of the wall, Nehemiah would have to return to his other

work in Persia, and new leaders would have to take his place. Their job wasn't simply to keep the walls in good repair—they would grow the nation of God to the next level.

In some way, great or small (even if it is “only” by example), leadership always requires helping others take responsibility. God's leaders, often called shepherds, live a life of developing others.

- Think about someone you know who has invested in the lives of those next in line. (While it is easy to think about “superstars,” don't overlook the more normal example of “everyday stars,” people who perhaps operate on a smaller stage but with no less passion and heart.) What was their motive? How did they do it? How qualified do you think they felt?
- Once a great task is accomplished and a vision has become reality, it is easy to let vision begin to coast, diminish, fade or disappear. (Read Nehemiah 13 for evidence of a dream tending toward a nightmare.) What kind of investment in others is needed to help prevent this kind of slide? What needs to be passed on to the next generation of leaders?

# Dedication, Celebration and Calling



## WARM UP

- “Celebrate what you want to see more of.” Thomas J. Peters
- “The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.” Oprah Winfrey
- “How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-  
roes!” Maya Angelou
- “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Apostle Paul  
(Philippians 4:4 NIV)
- “I think we all sin by needlessly disobeying the apostolic injunction to  
‘rejoice’ as much as by anything else.” C.S. Lewis
- “So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his  
work, for that is his lot.” Solomon (Ecclesiastes 3:22a)

Which of these quotes challenges you to celebrate a little more, and why?

## STUDY

Read Nehemiah 8 and 12:27–43 and make observations. How did the people respond to hearing God’s Word? What do you notice about the connections between the Scriptures, repentance, obedience and celebration?

## REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

### Nehemiah's World

1. Over the 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the Jewish people had no access to the Temple (it had been destroyed) and limited access to the Torah. As a result, many people had never heard Scripture read. The reactions of the people were strong: they stood, worshipped and wept (vv. 5–6, 9). Imagine being in the crowd, hearing God's Word after weeks of work rebuilding the wall and after years of exile. What do you think was going through people's hearts and minds as they heard the Scriptures being read out loud in this public assembly? Think about all the possible reactions that were going on inside them.
2. How and why did repentance play a part in this "celebration"?
3. In God's redemption plan, the finished wall was only one step toward the final victory. It was built, but God's people were still in subjugation to the Medes and Persians. Why do you think it was important for the people to rejoice and celebrate at this time?
4. The first act of obedience was...more celebration! (8:13–18) Why do you think this was an important step? How did more celebration lead to more Scripture reading, and how do you think this mix encouraged future obedience?

### Your World

5. Are there times when you have been stirred to repentance while on your journey to graduation and the workplace? Has any of that repentance lead to celebration?



6. What have been some of the highlights in God's guidance and help during your training and education? If you are working, what have been some of your work highlights? Is there a way to create some godly celebration of these victories?
  
7. In the life of Nehemiah and in the response of the people, obedience lead to accomplishing the impossible. In celebrating, the people of God were stirred to even higher levels of joyful obedience. What has been your experience in how obedience is tied to celebration? How does obedience encourage more obedience?

## **WRAP UP: SUMMARY OF NEHEMIAH**

Review any previous notes from the discussion sessions. As you look back, consider...

- What are the key elements of work and calling that you learned from the account of Nehemiah?
  
- Is there anybody you could/should/might want to share these ideas with?
  
- What are the 2–3 most important convictions and commitments God has been building in you through this study?

- You started this study with some work on a life purpose statement (pp. 8-9). Along the way, we asked you to revisit your calling (pp. 35-36). Now that you are done, is there anything you want to add, delete or change?

## PRAYER

Pray and celebrate. Thank God for accomplishments, big and small, that you have experienced recently.

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Choose one of these translations or another version of the Bible.

*Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10 ESV)*

*Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10 NASB)*

*He continued, "Go home and prepare a feast, holiday food and drink; and share it with those who don't have anything: This day is holy to God. Don't feel bad. The joy of God is your strength!" (Nehemiah 8:10 MSG)*

## GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

In creation, God couldn't wait to celebrate, He followed each creative explosion with a resounding, "That's good!" We bear God's image in our ability to work as well as in the area of celebration. Even if we're simply painting a fence, it's hard not to step back and admire the job once it's done.

But for some us, there is a fear of celebration, some "darkside" in our thinking about work and duty that permeates our beliefs. There is, of course unwise ways to celebrate, but this does not mean that godly celebration is impossible. As you think about celebrating the good God has done in your life, consider....

- What do you believe God has to say about celebrating? Can you point to any evidence for your opinion of God's opinion? How does God's approach compare to most people's approach?
  
- What have you celebrated lately?

# TIPS FOR GROUP LEADERS

## TIMELINE

This study is divided into nine sessions. The first lays some important groundwork that will help make the rest of the study flow more smoothly and includes an exercise on calling that will be referred to in later studies.

Most sessions can be discussed in approximately one hour, though the first and last sessions may take a little longer. Outside preparation, especially for the first and last sessions, is strongly encouraged.

## DISCUSSING QUESTIONS

Leading this kind of study will require high attention to facilitating good discussion and less worry about making sure every question gets answered. Sometimes, you will find that the best questions are the ones not on the page but the ones that are raised in the discussion itself.

The goal of this study is to build convictions. Because the focus is on application, people will need to learn to apply the truth of scriptures in ways that fit their circumstances and the “nudges” God is giving them. As you lead the discussion, do not worry if there is some initial ambiguity. Ambiguity at the beginning often leads to more thoughtful and deeper convictions as time passes.

## EXPERT OR FACILITATOR?

You do not have to be an expert leader or a teacher with all the answers to facilitate and guide these discussion sessions. Rather, consider yourself a fellow journeyer in the group. The goal is not to teach but to explore and discover together.

Jesus often guided a conversation through asking questions. A primary skill of a good facilitator is the ability to listen to other people’s responses and ask followup questions. This skill requires the discipline of listening well. On the other hand, do not be afraid of being part of the discussion yourself. From time to time, you should also share your thoughts as well.

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## OTHER RESOURCES

Other resources from The Navigators' *God's Calling and Your Vocation* series:

*Daniel: Thriving at Work as an Exile* by Ralph Ennis

*A Biblical Perspective on Work, Vocation and Calling* by Ronni Bernardi, Dean Storelli and John Teten

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wayne Kuna is former toy inventor and pastor. He is a long-time friend of The Navigators and the NavWorkplace Mission.