

# “Ordinary World Changers”

*Sticks & Stones week #1*

## INTRODUCTION

This week begins our sermon series “Sticks & Stones” based on the book of Nehemiah. The setting for this book begins in the palace of the king of Persia, but quickly moves to the ruined city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was an ordinary man, a cupbearer to the king. But he was deeply moved for his people’s plight and called by God to take action. This book is more than a historic reference, it shows us the way God moves us and calls us to take up His cause.

### **Ice Breaker (Optional):**

Is there a renovation/restoration project you are planning?

## Study Questions (45 MIN)

### **Recognizing the Situation**

**Q1. Read Nehemiah 1:1-3; 8-9; Nehemiah 9:36-37; Jeremiah 44:8-9**  
Nehemiah lived in Persia, 800 miles away from Jerusalem; the land from which his ancestors were taken captive. Although a remnant of the Jews had returned to the Promised Land, over 70 years later its walls still lay in ruins. What was Nehemiah told about the condition of his people in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:3)? Why was he so distressed by this report (Nehemiah 9:36-37)? Why had this happened to Israel? (Jeremiah 44:8-9)

### **Reaction to the Situation**

**Q2. Read Nehemiah 1:4; Jeremiah 8:5, 18; Lamentations 1:16**  
How did Nehemiah respond to the report of Jerusalem’s condition (Nehemiah 1:4)? His response is a reflection of a broken heart. What are some things in Jeremiah 8:5 & 18 and Lamentations 1:16 that break God’s heart? God uniquely calls us and stirs our hearts to join in His mission. What is one area that you feel God is stirring in you?

### **Response we take**

**Q3. Read Psalm 69:9-10; Daniel 9:3, 20-22**  
Nehemiah did not jump into action immediately. He began by weeping, mourning, fasting and praying to God. What do you think was the benefit of those steps preceding his appeal to the king of Persia? What were the similar experiences of the Psalmists in Psalm

69:9-10 and Daniel in Daniel 9:3, 20-22? What are some of the dangers of acting before we prayerfully seek God’s direction? What ways has God used to confirm his direction in your life?

### **Right perspectives**

#### **Q4. Read Nehemiah 1:5-11**

We can look to Nehemiah’s prayer as a model for our own prayers. What does Nehemiah 1:5 reveal about his perspective on who God is? What do verses 6 & 7 tell us about how he viewed himself and his people? When we pray, we too need to have a right perspective of God and His nature as well as our own limitations and sinfulness. We have seen many instances of suffering brought to light in the news recently. In your group’s closing prayer, make your prayer like Nehemiah’s, not asking God to help “them”, but seeking His forgiveness for our world and asking him to use you in specific ways toward its restoration.

### **Wrap-Up**

The story of Nehemiah demonstrates how God uses ordinary people to become extraordinary world changers. It starts when we recognize the desperate situations around us. It grows as we allow God to break our hearts with what breaks His. And as He identifies those areas where He is calling us to action, we need to seek Him humbly as Nehemiah did. And when we have the right perspective of who God is and who we are, God is able use us to further His mission in our world.

### **Memory Verse**

*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 1:4 ESV

### **Prayer (20 MIN)**

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life:

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### **Challenge:**

*This week see if you can identify an area which God is stirring in your heart, and ask Him what your next step should be.*

**Q1**

Nehemiah 1:1-3; 8-9 ESV - 1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachabiah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, 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." ... 8 Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, 9 but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.'

Nehemiah 9:36-37 ESV - 36 Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. 37 And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.

Jeremiah 44:8-9 ESV - 8 Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, making offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to live, so that you may be cut off and become a curse and a taunt among all the nations of the earth? 9 Have you forgotten the evil of your fathers, the evil of the kings of Judah, the evil of their wives, your own evil, and the evil of your wives, which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?

**Q2**

Nehemiah 1:4 ESV - 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.

Jeremiah 8:5, 18 ESV - 5 Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit; they refuse to return. ... 18 My joy is gone; grief is upon me; my heart is sick within me.

Lamentations 1:16 ESV - 16 "For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed."

**Q3**

Psalm 69:9-10 ESV - 9 For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me. 10 When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting, it became my reproach.

Daniel 9:3, 20-22 ESV - 3 Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. ... 20 While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God, 21 while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. 22 He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding.

**Q4**

Nehemiah 1:5-11 ESV - 5 And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. 8 Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, 9 but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' 10 They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. 11 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." Now I was cupbearer to the king.

**Prayer Notes cont.**

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