

CHRISTIAN, DOES YOUR LIFE LOOK LIKE SOMETHING THAT  
GOD IS BUILDING? NEHEMIAH 6:16



A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

## STUDY 3 - DISCERNMENT

*Nehemiah 2:1-8*

### Study BACKGROUND

**Last Time** – We observed how Nehemiah sought favor from God to perform a mission he was passionate about. Nehemiah had a non-prideful view of himself before God and shared in the responsibility for the condition Israel was in during his lifetime. Nehemiah's closeness to God was seen in his compassion for others and his unity with others who were praying for the Jews suffering in Jerusalem.

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**Nehemiah** understood that in order to seek God's favor in a matter, he had to live up to his part of the agreement Israel had with God. Nehemiah had to trust and obey God in all matters in his life in order for God to bless and protect him. According to Nehemiah's prayer, he was living according to the covenant God had made with Israel and God would not be unjust if He were to answer Nehemiah's request.

**Our study** closed with the idea that God does not do things randomly. Nehemiah's current place in life, his experience, and his relationships could all be used of God as long as he was surrendered to God's plan and purpose for his life.

**Today**, we will learn about planning while praying for a thing, using wisdom when dealing with those in authority, and then a way of determining God's will concerning big decisions.

***Read Entire Passage*** Nehemiah 2:1-8

## Topic #1: PRAYERFUL PLANNING

**Nehemiah 2:1** And it came to pass in the month Nisan, ...

**Nehemiah 2:6b-8a** ...and I set him a time. 7 Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; 8 And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into...

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**The amount of time between** the month Nisan and the month Chisleu (1:1) is about three months. So it has been at least 3 months since Nehemiah had first received the report about the Jews suffering in Jerusalem in Nehemiah chapter 1.

**Many times Christians can be people of extremes.** Some of us don't like to pray and then wait for God to act; we pray a quick prayer and then take matters into our own hands. The other extreme would be those of us who pray and wait and wait and wait and do nothing expecting God to pull an absolute rabbit out the hat while we don't lift a finger or give the circumstances we are facing another thought. Nehemiah used more of a balanced approach to life. He clearly understood his role in living out God's will for his life. He prayed and he definitely exercised patience waiting for God's timing, but he also did something else while he prayed and waited: *he planned.*

### ***Discussion Question***

- How do Christians learn to balance not getting in God's way and still doing their part in living according to His will?

## Topic #2: CAREFUL WORDS

**Nehemiah 2:2-4** Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, 3 And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres [*tombs*], lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? 4 Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.

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## ***Group Questions***

- Why was Nehemiah “sore afraid” when the king questioned the sad look on his face? A servant was never to let his negative emotions show before the king, for it might suggest dissatisfaction with the king. To do so might jeopardize his position or even his life.

**20 years earlier (464 BC)**, Artaxerxes had responded to a letter from Judah’s Persian governors who were complaining about the Jews rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. Artaxerxes’ letter ended with this:

**Listen to Ezra 4:23** Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes’ letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power.

- So from Ezra 4, why was Nehemiah so stressed out about asking permission to rebuild Jerusalem and the wall? Nehemiah’s request was an attempt to get a 20 year standing policy reversed.
- Why do you think Nehemiah referred to Jerusalem as “the place of my fathers’ sepulchers”? In Nehemiah’s response he avoided using the name Jerusalem, maybe to prevent striking a nerve with Artaxerxes as Jerusalem, like Iraq today, was a political hot potato. Instead, he shrewdly appealed to the king’s sense of respect—his sense of “rightness” regarding proper respect for the dead.
- What did Nehemiah wisely do just before answering the king’s question about his sadness? He prayed *again*.

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## Topic #3: GOD'S WILL CONFIRMED

**Nehemiah 1:11b** ...prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy (*favor*) in the sight of this man (*Artaxerxes*)...

**Nehemiah 2:5a** ...If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah,...

**Nehemiah 2:6b** ...So it pleased the king to send me;...

**Nehemiah 2:8b** ...And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

### ***Group Questions***

- How did Nehemiah know it was God's will for his life to go to Jerusalem and help his countrymen by rebuilding the wall? He prayed extensively and planned and waited for God to provide an opportunity. When Artaxerxes showed favor toward Nehemiah's request, God's will for Nehemiah's life was confirmed.
- How do Christians determine God's will for their lives? *Discussion*
- What can we learn from Nehemiah's example about determining God's will for our lives? 1) seek closeness with God, 2) let God grow compassion in you for others, 3) develop a plan that is focused on helping others in need, 4) detail your plan that helps others while you wait for God to provide an opportunity, 5) move forward with your plan when he specifically answers the request you've made.

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## Life CHANGE

### PRINCIPLE 1

Nehemiah was not hasty or complacent in living a life of faith. His closeness to God resulted in a desire to help others. When he heard about his fellow countrymen in Jerusalem, he prayed (1:4 and 11), and he patiently planned for over 3 months (1:1 compare 2:1) while he waited for an opportunity from God. Nehemiah was well prepared to answer the king's questions regarding how long the rebuilding project would take. He also detailed what he would need for safe passage to Jerusalem as well as the resources needed for the job at hand.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

Which **extreme** am I? *Choose one:* **a)** do I tend to take matters into my own hands when living out my faith? *or* **b)** do I sit back and expect God to do everything? How can I copy Nehemiah's balanced example of working *with* God and combine prayer *and* planning?

### PRINCIPLE 2

Nehemiah carefully and thoughtfully made his request to the king. He was respectful and did not use language that would stir anger. Nehemiah directly answered the questions the king asked him.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

How **respectful** am I when requesting something from an unbeliever? Does the language that I use around unbelievers stir anger and cause conflict? Do my words **represent** Christ well? How can I improve this?

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## PRINCIPLE 3

When the king showed Nehemiah favor (1:11 compare 2:5, 8), it was the answer to prayer Nehemiah had been watching for and he then knew for sure that it was God's will for him to move forward with his plans to return to Jerusalem and get busy.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

In order for me to determine God's will for a circumstance in my life, I must: 1) seek **closeness** with God, 2) let Him grow **compassion** in me for others, 3) develop a **plan** that is focused on helping others in need, 4) **detail** your plan while you wait for God to provide an opportunity, 5) **move** forward with your plan when he specifically answers the request you've made.

NEHEMIAH PRAYED AND PLANNED  
AND WHEN GOD ANSWERED HIS  
PRAYER HE KNEW FOR SURE WHAT  
GOD WANTED HIM TO DO.