



Introduction

After a move, loss, crisis, or any big change we can find ourselves rebuilding: rebuilding our lives, trust, relationships, and routines. Through the account of Nehemiah, we see the details of the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem after the exile. But more than that, we see the rebuilding process of the people of God, which provides not only hope but also a model to all believers of what rebuilding looks like in our own lives. Through this study, we'll look at God's central role in the rebuilding process and how we can ENDURE in times of change and transition.

- Session 1: Honesty and Faith
- Session 2: Prayer and Vocation
- Session 3: Word and Worship
- Session 4: A Way Forward

Structure of the Leader's Guide

This leader's guide is meant to equip you in order to get the most of the Bible study itself. Here are the categories of content that you'll see in the guide:

Words in black: These are the actual questions and content from the participant handouts. Your page numbers will differ from the participant handouts, but you're all working with the same set of questions, verses, and commentary. What differs in the leader's guide is that instead of blank spaces below the questions, there are more words in red and italics.

Words in Red and Italics: This makes up the bulk of the leader's guide. It is red and in italics so that you can print it out either in color or black and white and still know which parts are the leader's guide additions. Some of this content is simply sample answers to the questions that are being asked. This doesn't mean that these are the only possible answers, but hopefully it gives you an idea as to what your conversation could be about.

Other sections of the red content are ideas of follow-up questions, tips, examples, or application points that don't appear on the participant handouts. Certain questions can go in a number of different ways, depending on your group needs, and the red words are an attempt to identify a few of those deeper discussions that may be worth having in your group. Sometimes there are questions that a certain group may not understand clearly, and hopefully the red words will help you be able to know what the purpose of that question or section is so that you can get to that same point by asking a different question or using an additional example. Use what is helpful to you, skip over that which isn't, but please read

through it ahead of time so you have an idea of what's there and what could be helpful. Otherwise you'll have 2-3 paragraphs of information that you're trying to read for the first time while your group only has 1-2 sentences.

Note to Group Leaders:

All of these leader's guide notes are simply a guide to help you facilitate learning and growth in your group. Speaking from experience here, be careful not to turn the study into a lecture instead of a discussion. What you don't want to happen is for a leader to ask the question, give the group 1-2 seconds to answer, and then jump into reading the leader's guide to them. Anytime the leader dominates the conversation or launches into a large commentary after each group member's contribution, it shuts down the conversation. Try to observe the 1/3rd Rule: No more than 1/3rd of the discussion time should be taken up by the leader talking. Give your group ample time to think of answers (10 seconds is recognized by educational researchers as appropriate wait time) and encourage contributions from everyone by having them write down answers to share with a partner or small group. Utilize polls or break-out rooms if you're doing the study virtually to help facilitate discussion that way. Use the information in this guide to help you lead, but make it your own by changing wording, asking your own questions, and using examples from your context. Keep the focus on helping the group to discover these truths for themselves rather than quickly giving all the answers to them.

Overviews: Each lesson has an "overview" section at the beginning section, which has a brief summary of the content of the lesson, contains the learning goals or outcomes that the lesson is trying to foster, some key passages, and the name of the companion devotion that corresponds to that lesson. This overview is not in the participant handouts, just in your leader's guide. You don't need to teach anything from the overview, just be aware that it is there and try to keep especially those learning goals in mind as you go through the study.

Suggested Times for Each Section: Next to each subheading, there is a time listed in parenthesis. This is a suggested amount of time for each section, to try and ensure that the whole study is completed in 45 minutes. If you have more time, you'll want to adjust those times accordingly and devote more time to discussion of key questions, but either way, the suggestions are meant to help you keep things moving rather than dwelling on one section too long and then having to hurry through others.

Devotions

This Bible study also has four companion devotions, one for each lesson. These devotions take the theme of their corresponding lesson and illustrate it in a more narrative form. They are meant as a supplement for this study, but could also be used on their own. I hope they will be a useful tool for you to help your group's discussion and reflections continue even after the study is done.

My Prayer For You

Blessings to you on this "rebuilding" journey! My prayer is that as a leader, you would be blessed also through this study. That you would see God's work clearly in your life. That you would rest in His promises. And that God would work through you to bring those same truths to everyone else who participates in the study. Life is full of transitions, but God can work through them to bring about growth!

"Rebuilding: How to ENDURE During Life Changes"

Leader's Guide

Session 1- Honesty and Faith

Overview

Summary: Whether we like it or not, life regularly gives us opportunities to rebuild. It could be due to an injury that changed your season, an unexpected break-up, a family move, graduating and going to a new school, recovering from a public failure, or any number of other circumstances. Rebuilding or starting over is a daunting task, but not one that God leaves us alone to deal with.

The first gift that God gives us in any rebuilding process in life is honesty to be able to accurately assess where we are and how we got there. There was a real mess in Jerusalem, and it was their previous rebellion and rejection of God that had placed them in this circumstance. Through God's grace, Nehemiah was able to see this and confess it, leading God's people to honestly see the needs that were in front of them.

At the same time, God gifts us with faith to see that He is bigger than both our failures and the daunting task in front of us. We live in His mercy and in His promises all the while.

Learning Goals: That participants will...

- Identify what "rebuilding" projects they have in their life currently or upcoming in the future
- Honestly look at what has caused the need for rebuilding
- Trust in God's promises even when everything else seems to be a mess

Key passages: Nehemiah 1:3-4, 2 Kings 17:5-15, John 17:20-26

Corresponding Devotion Title: "What a Mess!"

Lesson Plan

Introduction (8 minutes)

Brainstorm: What are some situations or circumstances in a person's life that lead to rebuilding or restarting?

Examples could include: Switching jobs, moving cities, injury, health diagnosis, divorce, break-up of a relationship, change of sports season, graduation, starting a new school or a new school year, fallout from a public mistake, death of a loved one, returning to church after a time away, joining or returning home from the military, realization that your current habits or life choices are not sustainable, burnout or exhaustion, experiencing a "mountain-top" moment like a mission trip or Youth Gathering, changing majors or career paths in college, getting married, having children, becoming an aunt or uncle, etc.

Writing these on a whiteboard or something like that while everyone quickly shouts them out helps keep the examples in front of the group throughout the session.

Which, if any, from that list are you dealing with in your life currently? Are there any that may be coming up in the near future?

This is a chance for each person to consider what transitions or changes they're undergoing in their lives currently. Some may have some pretty serious ones like an upcoming move, they got injured and can no longer play their favorite sport, they're experiencing a break-up, or are worried about what happens after graduation.

The Mess in Jerusalem (10 minutes)

We aren't the only ones that have had to deal with rebuilding. In the Old Testament, God's people faced a tremendous rebuilding task in their most sacred city, Jerusalem.

Looking at Nehemiah 1:3, what are the circumstances in Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah?

Things are not good in Jerusalem. The wall has been broken down, the gates are destroyed, and most of the people are in exile.

There is a big mess in Jerusalem! But how did it get to this point? Let's look at a few key passages in the history of God's people to see what happened:

The point of this section is to hit some highlights in the Old Testament narrative on how the Israelites started to how they got to where they are in Nehemiah 1. This is meant as a brief background section, not as a deep dive into each passage. You may want to assign each passage to an individual or group to read or to summarize for the group rather than having everyone turn to every verse, in order to be efficient with your time.

Genesis 12:1-3- *This is the call of Abram, and the promise that God will make a great nation out of his ancestors. Of course, the promise ultimately points to Jesus who will bless all people on earth, and who will come from the line of Abraham. This is the establishment of the people who will become the Israelites.*

Exodus 19:3-6- *The Israelites have been rescued from slavery in Egypt by God. Here declares to them once again that they are His people, and His "treasured possession", emphasizing the importance of the covenant.*

Judges 17:6- *In this short verse, we see everything that had been set up previously begin to fall apart. Instead of following their God, of living under His loving reign, they do whatever they want. They are no longer living as His people, even though God continually calls them back.*

2 Kings 17:5-15- *This passage clearly outlines not only that Israel was carried into exile, but also why: they had sinned against the Lord. They had worshipped other gods, lived wicked lives against God's commands and the covenant, and did not listen to all of the prophets that God sent to call them back.*

2 Chronicles 36:15-20- *Here we read about the destruction of the walls, the burning of the temple, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem being taken into exile in Babylon. But more than that, we also hear again why: God had persistently sent them messengers out of compassion and they mocked and even despised His word.*

The Root Cause (5 minutes)

There truly is a drastic and tragic change that has taken place here! Israel has gone from being given the Promised Land by God to being taken into exile in Babylon, with Jerusalem in ruins. Ultimately, what was the root cause of Israel's need for rebuilding?

This question is an opportunity to summarize the verses listed in the previous section. Israel needed to rebuild not because their walls were in ruins. Ultimately, they needed to rebuild because spiritually, they were a mess. They had time and time again abandoned their God and lived in ways contrary to His commands. They had despised His Word. They had worshipped other gods. They had an idolatry problem more than anything else.

Maybe in your life you're dealing with a mess, similar to the Israelites in exile, that was primarily caused by your own sin and failure. Or your rebuilding could be due to a normal life transition like an upcoming graduation or the end of a sports season. It could be the result of something that wasn't your choice, like a health problem or injury, moving to a different school, or a divorce or conflict in your close relationships. In many cases, the causes are multifaceted, consisting of both things we can and can't control. Regardless of how big or small the circumstance is, why is it important to honestly reflect on the factors that have contributed to the need to rebuild?

For the factors that are out of control, it's important to recognize that and to not weigh ourselves down with whatever we can't influence to begin with. On the other side, it's easy to simplify a reason why our lives are changing and not take any ownership of what comes next at all.

For example, someone dealing with a breakup can realize that they contributed to the problems in the relationship. This enables them to learn from that in the rebuilding process and not repeat the same mistakes in the future. But someone who refuses to look at the problems and realize how they contributed will continue to repeat the same mistakes.

Simply put, reflecting on how you got to this point allows you to learn from the experience. It allows you to confess any sins that were involved and receive forgiveness. It allows you to see what areas you may need to learn more about, skills you can develop, resources or relationships that you need to continue to grow, etc.

A Faithful Response (15 minutes)

When faced with the daunting task of rebuilding not only the walls of Jerusalem, but also seeing the need for the people's restoration to their God, Nehemiah could have responded in a number of ways. Why would each of these responses be tempting, but ultimately unhelpful next steps for Nehemiah or for any of us:

-Trying to downplay the real issues going on ("It's not that bad" or "I'm doing fine")

It's tempting to do this because then we end up sounding better, like we're still in control. But downplaying issues doesn't change reality, just our ability to confront the issues and actually heal from them. For Nehemiah to say, "The walls are fine" not only isn't true but actually could lead them into a false sense of security regarding the hostile forces around them.

-Giving up, because you're not worth the effort ("God wouldn't want a mess like me")

This is tempting because the devil wants nothing more than for us to think God doesn't want us. We oftentimes buy into this lie, sometimes even because others tell us we're not worth

it. But God never says this to us. That's what we have to remember. We have a God who died on the cross exactly for a mess like me.

-Getting so overwhelmed by the task ahead that you either shut down or give up ("There's nothing I can do")

Just because it's too large a task for you doesn't mean it's too large for your God. We get overwhelmed when we think we're the ones that are going to turn things around rather than God changing our hearts through His Word and that being more important than our circumstances.

-Attempting to do it on your own ("I got myself into this mess, I can get myself out")

We're so independent oftentimes that doing it alone becomes second-nature. But even if you caused the mess, it's not your problem alone. That's not how the body of Christ works. We carry one another's burdens, regardless of whose fault it was.

Read Nehemiah 1:4 to see how Nehemiah chooses to faithfully respond. What is significant about each of the main activities he does in this verse:

Instead of doing any of the tempting options discussed in the previous section, Nehemiah responds faithfully.

-“I sat down and wept and mourned for days”

He grieved for what was broken and lost. He mourned that things weren't the way they were supposed to be. And that's okay. In fact, it's healthy to do so. At the core of rebuilding is grief: whether we're grieving our sin or grieving the loss of future dreams, a relationship, a loved one who has died, missing friends that you don't see anymore, a lost sports season, a decision that we made, or anything else. It's appropriate to grieve whatever it is that we have lost or whatever is not the way it is supposed to be.

-“I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven”

Secondly, Nehemiah directs that grief and hurt towards the One who brings healing. The next session will dive into the specifics of what Nehemiah prays, so for now just focus on the simple fact that he does pray.

Conclusion (7 minutes)

It's significant that Nehemiah's first response was lamentation and also prayer, rather than going to God simply as a last resort. In our next session, we'll dive into the content of Nehemiah's prayer, which provides a model for us of a rebuilding prayer. For now, though, let's rest in the promises of another prayer, this one from your Savior, Jesus, as He prays for you in John 17:20-26.

What gifts of God that He gives you in the midst of your needs does Jesus highlight in this prayer?

Jesus' prayer highlights the gifts of God's presence with us, the gift of the unity of people, and the love that He has for us. In the midst of whatever change in life, whether big or small, exciting or dreadful, you are loved by God! And He is with you always!

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). When our lives are a mess, when we're in the midst of a difficult rebuild, when we're undergoing changes and life transitions, God invites us to anchor our lives in what doesn't change: His promises to us in

Jesus Christ. Rest in those promises as we hear the beautiful hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness" (LSB 809)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changest not: Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. [Refrain]

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! [Refrain]

Note: The text of this hymn entered into the public domain in 2019

For this closing activity, you can sing the song together, reflect on the words, or watch a lyric video like this one: <https://youtu.be/osOm6sn-xz0?si=h6bLrM481ZoDNpyC>. One recommendation would be to have each person highlight, underline, or circle one or two lines in the hymn that stand out to them.

The purpose of this is to summarize the whole lesson again: even when we are unfaithful, when our lives are in turmoil, when we're undergoing change, God does not change. His mercies are new every morning. He is faithful! And that gives us hope in whatever change we're experiencing in life.

"Rebuilding: How to ENDURE During Life Changes"

Leader's Guide

Session 2: Prayer and Vocation

Overview

Summary: Nehemiah responds to the great need in the rebuilding not just of the city of Jerusalem, but of God's people themselves by beginning with prayer. This is a great model prayer for any rebuilding process, using a variation of the ACTS format that so many Christians use today.

The response to Nehemiah's prayer is not just to wait for God's miraculous intervention, but to get to work using the gifts that God has given to each person. These vocations provide a faithful way forward for God's people, both after the exile as well as today.

Learning Goals: That participants will...

- Be able to outline a faithful "rebuilding" prayer using the ACTS model
- Rejoice in the relational connection of prayer, rather than seeing it as transactional
- Identify vocations that God has given them, and those around them, that may help in the rebuilding process

Key passages: Nehemiah 1:4-11, Deuteronomy 4:25-31, Nehemiah 2:1-10

Corresponding Devotion Title: "Lord, Help Me Start Over"

Lesson Plan

Introduction (8 minutes)

We're going to be focusing on the topic of prayer today, but before we dive into Nehemiah's prayer, it's important for us to be reminded about the posture of prayer. How we view prayer deeply impacts not just *what* we say in prayer, but *if* we pray at all. Below are some examples of ways that we can view prayer. For each one, consider two things: 1. What does this image say about prayer? 2. What would a sample prayer be, using this model of prayer?

-Prayer as my emergency brake

*What this says about prayer: It is a last resort. When nothing else has worked, I should pray. I can trust God in the worst of situations. Some of this is true: we can trust God in all things. We should come to our God in emergencies. However, if we **only** see prayer as an emergency brake, we lose out on the gifts of prayer in the midst of the other non-emergency times of life.*

Sample prayer: "Lord, I've tried everything else. Please help me!"

-Prayer as a vending machine, where I say the right things and then get what I want

What this says about prayer: Prayer is transactional. I give God something He wants, so then

He gives me what I want. I can control God. To be clear, this is a non-biblical way of viewing prayer.

Sample prayer: "God, I've been good this week and even went to church. So please give me what I want." Or "I've never asked for anything for myself before. So now God, the only thing I want is..."

-Prayer as a conversation with my loving Heavenly Father

What this says about prayer: God cares for me because I am His child. He loves me because He is my perfect Father. He wants me to come to Him with whatever it is that is going on in my life. This is a relationship, not a transactional conversation. This is the biblical model of prayer.

Sample prayer: "Lord, thank you for all your gifts for me. Thank you for saving me. I'm really struggling right now and I need you. I'm not fitting in at this new school and I'm almost losing hope. Lord, please help me. You know what I need better than I do. I trust you to provide. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Nehemiah's Prayer (10 minutes)

When we see prayer as a relational connection to our loving God, it becomes our first response in the midst of difficulties. This is what Nehemiah does as he looks at the need for rebuilding in Jerusalem, not just of the walls but of God's people themselves. Read Nehemiah 1:4-11.

Nehemiah's prayer here mirrors well the ACTS prayer model (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication) that is commonly taught today:

A: How does he praise God in verse 5?

The whole verse is one of praise: He is the Lord of heaven, great and awesome. He keeps His covenant and steadfast love. Nehemiah begins the prayer by remembering who he's talking to: His loving, faithful God.

C: What posture does Nehemiah take when approaching God (verse 6-7)? Where does he put himself in the prayer?

Nehemiah takes a posture of humility. He humbly confesses sin, not just of his people. Nehemiah includes himself in the prayer: "even I" (v6). "we have acted" (v7). He confesses his own sins, not putting himself above the rest of his people.

T: Instead of traditional "thanksgiving" here, what does Nehemiah include in verses 8-9? Why is that an important building block of prayer?

Instead of "thanksgiving", Nehemiah includes the Torah (Hebrew word for "teaching" or "instruction"). He quotes Moses from Deuteronomy 4:25-31. This is an important building block of prayer, because it points Nehemiah back to the promises of God. What has He promised? Because we know He will be faithful to His promise. He hasn't forgotten that, but oftentimes we do. Speaking back to God the promises of God helps the people of God to remember.

S: What is Nehemiah's request in verse 11? Why is it important that he brings his prayer before God?

His request is that he would be given success in his upcoming task of bringing the needs of God's people to the king. It is important that he brings this before God because that's how relational prayer works. We are meant to ask him as dear children from what we need.

Nehemiah's Vocations (10 minutes)

The end of 1:11 gives us a seemingly random detail about Nehemiah: "Now I was a cupbearer to the king." No, this wasn't an off-topic comment. Rather, this verse outlines one of Nehemiah's vocations. A vocation is a calling or role from God. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king. He was also an Israelite, a child of God.

Read Nehemiah 2: 1-8. How did God use Nehemiah's vocations for the sake of this rebuilding process?

Nehemiah, in fulfilling his vocation as the cupbearer for the king, gets noticed for his sad demeanor. His vocation as an Israelite lead him to deep mourning over the state of Jerusalem, and God uses these two vocations to open a conversation between Nehemiah and the king. Not only that, but Nehemiah lives out his vocation as a child of God by praying to God again in verse 4. Then he talks to the king again in his vocation as Israelites and as cupbearer and presents a bold request to the king to rebuild Jerusalem. And miraculously, because the hand of God was on Nehemiah, everything he asks for was granted by the king.

Even as Nehemiah responds faithfully by serving in his various vocations, he never leaves behind prayer. For him, they are intricately connected. Read Nehemiah 2:4, 4:9, and 4:13-14. What is the relationship between prayer and vocation?

In 2:4, Nehemiah prays and then asks the king his request. In 4:9, the leaders pray to God and also set a guard. In 4:13-14, they set a guard but also trust ultimately in the Lord. Prayer does not lead them to neglect their vocations, "Oh, we prayed. Let's wait and see if God will do anything." Instead, they pray, trusting everything in His hands and then they go forward faithfully with whatever God has given them to do. Prayer leads into faithfully living out vocation, which in turn continually leads us back into prayer.

Application (15 minutes)

For each of these scenarios, consider a faithful prayer (using the ACTS model, if helpful) and possible vocations that God could use to help in the rebuilding process.

Scenario 1: Rebuilding after a move for your family and starting a new school

Scenario 2: Rebuilding after the death of a loved one

Scenario 3: Rebuilding following a break-up

Scenario 4: Rebuilding after an injury ends your season

Here we take the principles from the Scriptures we've just looked at and apply them to scenarios that are more applicable to youth. Feel free to substitute in your own scenarios if you have other ideas that better fit your particular group. A few options to do this activity: you can have the whole group discuss each scenario all together. You could divide into small groups and have each group

discuss each scenario in term. Or you could assign a scenario to each small group, have them discuss their scenario, and then report back to the large group.

One final suggestion would be to have your group do a self-directed journal activity inserting their own scenario, from their real life, and then going through the prayer and vocations.

Prayer

Adoration:

Here, ideally you're not just generically praising God but thinking of specific aspects of who God is that relate to the scenario at hand.

Scenario 1: Lord, you are the Creator of all. You know all things, and you knew about this move before I was even born. You are always with me. Your promises are trustworthy.

Scenario 2: God, you are truly great. You have conquered even the grave, and given that victory to me even though I cannot deserve that. Thank you for your victory in Jesus!

Scenario 3: Father, you come near to the brokenhearted. You don't leave your people alone in their grief. You love me with an everlasting love, shown in sending Jesus to die and rise for me.

Scenario 4: Jesus, you are the great healer. You hold all things in your hands and even now, you hold me. What an amazing God you are!

Confession:

Note that for this one, you have to insert your own sin to be confessed, so you have to take some liberty with the scenario in each case.

Scenario 1: I have idolized safety and security over trusting you. I have not honored my parents, and even cursed at them over this move. Forgive me for my dishonor and harsh words. Help me to change.

Scenario 2: This world is broken by sin. Death is the enemy and it has taken my friend. It's not supposed to be this way! Where I have been led to despair and to curse your name for what has happened, please forgive me.

Scenario 3: I confess the gossip I spread about my ex. I have not kept my thoughts, heart, and actions pure. I have idolized being in a dating relationship and turned that into my source of identity. Lord, help me to return back to finding my identity in You alone!

Scenario 4: I confess my pride that I thought I was the greatest on the court. I only wanted to make myself look good. I turned this gift of yours into my sole focus and forgot that my abilities come from you.

Thanksgiving/Torah (Scripture):

Either giving thanks or calling to mind a promise from Scripture is the focus of this portion of the prayer.

Scenario 1: You promise that you are "with me always, to the end of the age". I need that promise! I need your presence with me. Thank you for that gift!

Scenario 2: Lord, you promise, "I am the resurrection and the life, He who believes in me, even though He dies, yet shall He live." You have promised my friend eternal life. He lives even though he is dead. Thank you for defeating the grave!

Scenario 3: God, I am precious and honored in your sight. You love me. Thank you for your never-changing promises. My identity is in you! I am your beloved child!

Scenario 4: Lord, you have placed me into the body of Christ, where I never suffer alone. When one part suffers, all suffer. Thank you for surrounding me with brothers and sisters in Christ to help me through this difficult time.

Supplication (Request):

Scenario 1: Help me to find some new friends and to not feel so lonely. Help me to be less angry with my parents and to restore our relationship.

Scenario 2: Help me to have hope and to find healing in the midst of my grief.

Scenario 3: Lord, heal my heart. If it is your will, reconcile this relationship. Help me to find contentment in you.

Scenario 4: God, bring about quick healing and recovery through this physical therapy process. Help me to be able to play again, always keeping my eye on the Giver of all good gifts, You alone.

Vocation

What vocations that I have that God could work through in this scenario?

Scenario 1: God can work through my vocation as a student to meet new people, vocation as an athlete or musician to get involved in the new place, and my vocation as a child or sibling to support my family in what is probably a difficult transition for them too.

Scenario 2: God can use my vocation as friend to connect me to others who are grieving the same loss.

Scenario 3: God can use my vocation as child of God and church member to root me in my baptismal identity. He can use my vocation as friend to give me companionship and community outside of a dating relationship.

Scenario 4: He can use my vocation as teammate so I can continue to cheer on and encourage my teammates. He can use my vocation as youth group member to help me to have another great group to pour my energy into.

What are vocations that others have that God might use in this scenario?

Scenario 1: God might work through other students, family members, teachers, church members, etc. to help me to feel connected.

Scenario 2: God may use a parent, grief counselor, youth leader, or pastor to help provide grief counseling and support. He will use my pastor to preach Christ's resurrection hope to me in the funeral sermon.

Scenario 3: He could work through a youth leader that helps me to navigate the conflict that happened in my relationship and friends to help me still have community and companionship.

Scenario 4: He will use the vocation of doctors, nurses, physical therapists, and athletic trainers to help my injury heal and recover. He will use coaches and teammates to help me stay connected and contribute to the team. He may open doors to other new vocations that I haven't even considered, as he opens doors to new activities or skills because of this change.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

In any rebuilding phase of life, God gives us endurance through the gift of prayer. Prayer reminds us of how great our God is and that we are never alone in our troubles. It calls us to confession and repentance, being washed of our sins through the blood of Jesus. It reminds us of God's promises and roots us in His Word rather than our own ideas. Prayer leads us to bring our needs before God, knowing that He hears and answers prayer.

While there is also waiting involved in any rebuilding project, God also has given us vocations within which we can be a part of His rebuilding in our lives. We can help and serve others and also receive those same blessings from the vocations of those around us. All the while, we trust that God is the primary builder and is working in all things. We'll dive more into that truth next time.

Gather prayer requests and close with prayer, modeling the ACTS prayer format outlined in this lesson.

"Rebuilding: How to ENDURE During Life Changes"

Leader's Guide

Session 3: Word and Worship

Overview

Summary: In the rebuilding of Jerusalem, God's people face troubles both from within and from those around them. This necessitates the need for endurance, as rebuilding is never easy. God's people respond through the rebuilding Word of God. Through a worship service of rejoicing, confession, and reflection, the Israelites are led to God as the primary builder in their lives. It is His Word which recreates us, resulting in the primary rebuilding that needs to happen for any of us.

Learning Goals: That participants will...

- Explain the centrality of worship to the Christian life, especially in times of rebuilding
- Explore resources on finding LCMS churches wherever life takes them
- Recognize God's Word as the primary builder in their life

Key passages: Nehemiah 8:1-8, Nehemiah 9:1-3, 1 John 1:8-9, Luke 6:46-49

Corresponding Devotion Title: "Worship Which Rebuilds"

Lesson Plan

Introduction (5 minutes)

In any rebuilding project in our lives, there are material or physical concerns and there are spiritual concerns. What are some examples you can think of each?

Material/physical concerns: Reconstruction of a building, healing from an injury, restoration of a relationship, finding a place to live, how are we going to pay the bills, am I going to make the team, who am I going to friends with, dealing with intense emotions, burnout, etc.

Spiritual concerns: Sin that needs to be confessed, promises that I need to be reminded of, doubts that I have, staying connected to the body of Christ, regularly receiving God's gifts, etc.

In the rebuilding of Jerusalem, God's people faced troubles both from within (chapter 5) and from those around them (chapter 6). God's people are led to confront these troubles faithfully, in accord with the Word of God. They confess their sins and repent in response to the troubles within and they trust in God's deliverance regarding the outside attacks.

The end result is seen in Nehemiah 6:15-16, "So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God." Almost all the material concerns have been taken care of! Praise the Lord! But the spiritual concerns, the idolatry that led God's people into this problem in

the first place, remain. And the new wall isn't going to fix that. No, there is a greater tool that God will use for this rebuilding: His Word.

The Rebuilding Word of God (15 minutes)

Read Nehemiah 8:1-3, 8. What is the purpose of this gathering of God's people? Why is this such an important part of their rebuilding process?

They gathered to hear the Word of God being read, so that it would not only be heard but understood. This is so important because it is what had gotten them in trouble in the first place. Anytime they forgot or neglected the word of God, things went poorly for God's people. Keeping God's word at the center of their lives was essential for long-term success in a rebuilding project.

From Luke 6:46-49 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17, what role does the Word of God play in the transition times of life?

From Luke 6, God's Word is the foundation on the rock upon which our lives are built. Specifically, hearing and being obedient to God's Word. From 2 Timothy 3, we see that God's Word equips us for good works as it teaches, corrects, and trains us. Simply put, we cannot rebuild on any kind of a solid foundation without the Word of God.

God's people don't just hear the Word, they respond to it. Read Nehemiah 8:13-18. What is their response to this second reading of the Law? Why is this such an important milestone for them?

They read the Word and again and find a festival that they had not been observing. And they respond by actually being obedient. They rejoice greatly for the blessings of being faithful to God's commandments. This is an important milestone not only because it demonstrated an obedience to God's Word and a turnaround from their previous ways, but also was another opportunity to hear again God's Word on a daily basis. God works through His Holy Spirit coming to us through the Word to strengthen our faith, and so being immersed in it for a week straight had to have been such a benefit to God's people.

The people have gone through a festival of rejoicing, but now their attention is brought towards their own sin. Read Nehemiah 9:1-3. How do the people respond to their sin?

They don't dismiss, discount, or deny it. Instead, they mourn and grieve their sin. They confess and repent to their God.

Read 1 John 1:8-9. Why is confession and absolution (receiving forgiveness) such a crucial part of any rebuilding process?

When we deny our sin, the truth is not in us. But when we confess, God forgives us and cleanses us. This allows us to actually start anew, without the baggage from whatever came before. Only through confession and absolution can we truly look at improvements in rebuilding versus just the continuation of a negative cycle.

Staying Connected (15 minutes)

Nehemiah, Ezra, and the other leaders of Israel knew that if they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, but didn't return to worshipping God, they wouldn't have fixed the main problem. They centered their rebuilding in worship and in study of God's Word. For us today, one of the main issues with times of transitions, change, and rebuilding is that we can disconnect ourselves from the church and from

receiving God's gifts in worship. How do each of these try to disconnect us from worship and from God's church, particularly in seasons of life change?

Shame- When we feel ashamed of our behavior or that we haven't been in church in a while, we can convince ourselves that we don't belong in worship or that we wouldn't be welcome. So we stop coming.

Guilt- If we feel guilty for what we've done or for what we haven't done that we should be doing (like going to church), oftentimes we'll try to fix the problem on our own. "I'll get my life together and then come back to church". And yet that never works.

Busyness- This is perhaps the most common for many. "I'll get back to church when things slow down." But the reality is that we make time for what we need. So whenever we think worship is optional or just something to do if we happen to have room, the core issue is we've forgotten our need for God and His people.

Exhaustion- Burnout can lead us to not wanting to go anywhere or do anything, even church.

Isolation- If we're at a new place or trying out a new church and we don't know anything or at least fear we won't know anyone, oftentimes it seems easier to just stay away. It's hard to be the only one to be somewhere that doesn't seem part of the group.

Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Disconnecting from the church in order to "fix ourselves" is not going to work! Instead, God invites us in. And He gives us the specific gifts that we need. How do each of these gifts which God gives to us in the Divine Service not only respond to, but overcome those things which seek to disconnect us from Christ and His Church?

Cleansing- In Holy Baptism, your sins are washed away. You are cleaned and redeemed. Your shame is washed away. You are no longer "unclean" or on the outside looking in.

Forgiveness- In Absolution, your guilt is removed as your sins are forgiven and removed from you as far as the east from the west. This same forgiveness is proclaimed in the sermon and given in baptism and in the Lord's Supper: "given and shed for YOU for the forgiveness of sins"

Purpose- You're here on earth not just to be busy, but to make a difference because Christ has given you new life through the Gospel! We go forward through life with the blessing of God who keeps us and gives us His peace wherever we go. God's Church reminds us of His promises of what really matters and what actually lasts.

Rest- The Sabbath rest that God gives in the Third Commandment is not just a physical day of rest but is meant to be centered in the words and promises of God, offering true rest.

Community- Even in a new place or congregation, we can find belonging because of our God who unites all of His people together in Himself. We are one body, with many

members. What united us in Christ is greater than anything that differentiates us, and so we become an authentic community in Him.

**Here's the main point of this question: the things that the enemy tries to use to keep us from worship are the very same things that God actually takes care of through His gifts in worship! The solution to the problems in the first question is never found in avoiding worship. Only through receiving God's gifts can we find healing. That's why Satan tries so hard to get and keep us disconnected.*

Because of the amazing gifts that God gives us to us in the means of grace, it is essential to remain connected to a congregation that is going to consistently and faithfully share those means of grace with you. What are some resources to find such a church wherever your life changes take you?

This question is especially geared towards situations where a life change takes you away from your congregation, whether it's a move or going away to college or the military. You can always talk to your pastor about churches in that new location, utilize family or friends that are in the area, or use the LCMS church locator ([Find LCMS Church - The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod](#)) to find an LCMS church in a specific location. Consider actually demonstrating how the Locator works and typing in a few examples to help your group gain familiarity with it.

Conclusion (5 minutes)

"Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1). God is the primary builder in your life. He works through His Word, Sacraments, and people even through times of transition or change to forgive your sins, strengthen your faith, and center you in His promises.

Take a few minutes to journal a prayer to God, using the following prompts:

Make sure each participant has a copy of the journal outline and something to write with. Encourage them to take a few minutes and actually write out their prayer rather than just silently praying it.

A simple example is outlined below:

A Prayer to My God

God, even though I'm dealing with...

The end of my sports season and trying to figure out what comes next

You have promised me...

That you are always with me and that I am your child no matter what

Thank you for...

Giving me purpose and value in You rather than in my abilities or talents

Help me to...

Find ways to encourage others and be a witness of your grace in all things

"Rebuilding: How to ENDURE During Life Changes"

Leader's Guide

Session 4: A Way Forward

Overview

Summary: The city has been rebuilt! What do God's people do? They renew a covenant with their God, in order to avoid the problems that got them in this mess in the first place. There are certainly limitations to this, as the people are not going to be faithful to the covenant, but their God will continue to be faithful. The key to the sustainability of our rebuilding is not in our willpower, but in the receiving of God's gifts which sustain us.

Learning Goals: That participants will...

- Know that Christ is the only solid foundation for their lives
- Reflect on God's good work in their lives with thanksgiving
- Appreciate the importance of the community of faith in a sustainable rebuilding process

Key passages: Nehemiah 10:28-39, Nehemiah 12:27-30

Corresponding Devotion Title: "Stopping the Cycle"

Lesson Plan

Introduction (7 minutes)

Agree/Disagree Statements: On a scale of 1-6, with 1 being "completely agree" and 6 being "completely disagree", rate your reaction to the following statements:

Completely Agree	Mostly agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6

1. Planning is a waste of time, everything changes so quickly anyways
2. Christians don't need to plan because God has it under control
3. In order to succeed, I just need a good plan and everything else will fall in place
4. Christians can wisely plan ahead, while at the same time trust in God whether the plans succeed or not

For this activity, it may help to have a brief discussion after each statement is rated. The goal isn't to achieve consensus necessarily, but to help the group reflect on the connection between planning and trust. Sometimes these are pitted against one another, and that doesn't have to be the case.

A New Foundation (3 minutes)

Proverbs 16:9 tells us, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." Nehemiah and the other leaders both planned for the future, and trusted the Lord to establish each step. They knew that without setting up new boundaries and routines, they would revert back to their old ways.

What types of things are out of the control of the Israelites and their leaders?

They can't control the nations around them, their military strength, the weather or other elements they face, how each individual Israelite responds to their leadership and to God's Word, etc.

In the midst of a whole host of things that they couldn't control, God's people recommit themselves to the few things that are in their power: their habits and their attitude.

Renewed Covenant, Renewed Habits (10 minutes)

While they can't control how the nations around them are going to act, the Israelites recognize that their own habits are worth reforming. So they renew their covenant with God and recommit to a set of positive practices. Read Nehemiah 10:28-32, 39. The three main habits centered in this renewed covenant are:

- To marry only those who share their faith
- Observe the Sabbath day of rest
- Tithe and take care of the house of God

These restored habits are meant to keep God's people centered in His Word and in receiving His gifts. And that's exactly what we need in our lives as well!

How are the following crucial aspects of our own rebuilding plans?

- Maintaining a key core of Christian friends

While not all of our interactions with others will be among Christians, it's important to have a core group of believers who are encouraging you, sharing the Word with you, and praying for you. They will help to keep you on the right path as you navigate the life changes that you're experiencing.

- Regularly receiving God's gifts in worship

This connects back to the previous session. Without God continually restoring us through His Word and Sacraments, we will be building on a foundation of sand that is bound to collapse whenever the next storm comes in our lives.

- Taking care of the "house of God" through offering, service, and prayer

God generously gives us His gifts, and so we respond with faithful and cheerful giving. It's not just about attending a church, but being blessed through active participation in the life of that church.

What would it look like for you to implement each of these habits in your current season of life?

This question is an opportunity for each person to reflect on how they're doing on these habits currently, and what a next step could be in these areas. This would be a good opportunity to write,

pair, share (give 2 minutes to write down thoughts, 2 minutes to talk with a partner near them, and then 2 minutes for some individuals to share in large group discussion).

A few ideas could be: Start a group text with some youth group friends you don't see every day, do a Bible reading plan or devotion on the Bible app with a small group, commit to weekly worship attendance, find a service project at your church this upcoming month, pray for your pastor this week, etc.

Renewed Attitudes of Thanksgiving (10 minutes)

The completion of the wall of Jerusalem was a major accomplishment. Why would it be so tempting for Nehemiah as the leader, or even any of the other Israelites, to boast in themselves at the completion of this milestone?

It would be so easy to say, "Look at what I did!" Or even "Look at what we did!" This is tempting with any milestone. We forget all the work that God or others did, and want to take the claim and glory for ourselves, because deep down we want to find our identity and value in our achievements.

Instead, God's people dedicate all their hard work to their Lord. Read Nehemiah 12:27-30, 43. What is their attitude towards God and towards their own work?

They respond with thanksgiving, gladness, and exuberant praise to their God for all that He has done. They are joyful for the great work that has been done, but not boastful in themselves at all.

How does remaining thankful to God for all He has done help to keep us on a faithful path following any major life change, transition, or rebuilding?

Whenever we are thankful to God, it helps to remind us that He got us this far, we need to stay in Him going forward. If we don't, it'd be like snorkeling to the bottom of the ocean and then trying to take off your scuba gear. The gear that you got you there is the same stuff that's going to sustain you while you're there.

As you consider your own life, especially whatever times of transitions or rebuilding you've experienced, what are 3 specific things that you can thank God for?

Consider having your group not only reflect on these on their own, but share with a partner, and then compiling a large list as a whole group. Maybe have each person write them down on a sticky note and place them on a giant poster board or around the room.

Conclusion- God's Not Finished Yet (15 minutes)

In reading through the text thus far, it seems like we're in for a triumphant conclusion. The Israelites have done it! They've rebuilt not only the walls of Jerusalem, but also their lives! And yet the text is not done. Chapter 13 outlines Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem and he finds that so much of what the Israelites had promised in chapter 10, they had already stepped away from. They were marrying outside of the faith, neglecting the needs of the temple, and not honoring the Sabbath day. Why is this kind of "relapse" or setback so common when we work to rebuild our lives?

Simply put, because we're still involved in the process, the whole rebuilding process is impacted by sin. We will get out of good habits, run out of will power, or get distracted by less important things. The key is not to continue perfectly, but to live a life of continual repentance. Ultimately, endurance through life changes is never centered in our goodness or abilities. It's always centered in our God's faithfulness in all things!

Instead of giving up on the Israelites, God sends Nehemiah (again) to bring them back and call them to repentance. Because that's who our God is: the faithful One who keeps His promises, even when His people do not. This who our God is for you too. He calls you back again and again. He is not finished with you yet! No matter the storm, transition, sin, conflict, struggle, or change you're experiencing in life, God is still holding you. His promises do not change. His love endures. His faithfulness remains. To quote the famous hymn: "On Christ the solid rock I stand: All other ground is sinking sand."

Make sure each participant has a copy of the journal prompts and something to write with. Give them time to work through each prompt, and encourage them to actually reflect on them. Consider playing the music of "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less" or "Cornerstone" in the background as they journal.

Journaling Prompt:

We trust in Christ's work alone, for in His life, death, and resurrection we find true and lasting hope. Using the words from Edward Mote's hymn ("My Hope is Built on Nothing Less, LSB #575) as a guide, reflect on how Christ is your solid foundation on whom everything else is built:

"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness"- How is Christ's death and resurrection the only solid foundation for life?

The Gospel is the only thing that truly lasts. It never changes and is what gives us life. Everything else comes as a result of it- Christ is always the cornerstone.

"No merit of my own I claim but wholly lean on Jesus' name"- What "merits" or achievements are you tempted to build your life around? Why are they foundations built on sand, which won't last?

Examples include: Sports achievements, music awards, compliments from others, good church attendance, great knowledge of the Scriptures, strong family background, healthy finances, good relationships, being a leader in the youth group, etc. Not that these are negative or even bad things, but they are never our ultimate hope. Achievements come and go and it's never why God chooses us as His children. He is not impressed with your resume, only with Christ's.

"In every high and storm gale my anchor holds within the veil"- How is your hope in Christ an anchor for you, keeping you steadfast in the midst of the storms of life?

Because of Jesus, I know that I am not alone in the storm. I don't need to look for my identity or meaning at all, because even though my vocations and circumstances may change, those never do. I am forgiven, loved, and called into God's family.

"His oath, His covenant and blood support me in the raging flood"- How do God's Word and Sacraments sustain you, even in the hardest times of life?

God gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation through the means of grace. He strengthens our faith through His Word. He reminds us of who we are, who He is, and what truly matters through His promises. He gives us true rest in Him.

"When every earthly prop gives way, He then is all my hope and stay"- Sometimes the need for rebuilding is caused by something else in your life "giving way"- your health, a relationship, a specific goal you had for your life, etc. Why is it important to remember that these good gifts from God are not the greatest gift He gives us in Jesus?

Everything else may fail, even good things. But Jesus never will. "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39)

"When He shall come with trumpet sound, oh, may I then in Him be found. Clothed in His righteousness alone, redeemed to stand before His throne"- How is the resurrection of the body on the Last Day into the new creation the ultimate and final rebuilding process?

Whatever things in our life that we simply can't fix or rebuild, God will restore fully in the new creation. For every lament we have, every scar we bear, every good thing we lack in ourselves, every regret we carry, and every loss we grieve will be undone when Jesus returns. They all have an end date, Jesus does not.

Until that Day, God's not finished with you. He will continue to work in and through you, that you may endure through Him no matter what comes.