



Session 1- Honesty and Faith

Introduction

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

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?

Current:

Near Future:

The Mess in Jerusalem

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?

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:

Genesis 12:1-3

Exodus 19:3-6

Judges 17:6

2 Kings 17:5-15

2 Chronicles 36:15-20

The Root Cause

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?

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?

A Faithful Response

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")

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

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

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:

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

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

Conclusion

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?

"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]

Text: Entered into the public domain in 2019



Session 2: Prayer and Vocation

Introduction

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

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

-Prayer as a conversation with my loving Heavenly Father

Nehemiah's Prayer

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?

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

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

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

Nehemiah’s Vocations

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?

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 4:14. What is the relationship between prayer and vocation?

Application

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

Prayer

Adoration:

Confession:

Thanksgiving/Torah (Scripture):

Supplication (Request):

Vocation

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

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

Conclusion

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.



Session 3: Word and Worship

Introduction

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:

Spiritual concerns:

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

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?

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?

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?

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?

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

Staying Connected

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

Guilt

Busyness

Exhaustion

Isolation

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

Forgiveness

Purpose

Rest

Community

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?

Conclusion

“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:

A Prayer to My God

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

You have promised me...

Thank you for...

Help me to...



Session 4: A Way Forward

Introduction

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

A New Foundation

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?

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

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

- Regularly receiving God's gifts in worship

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

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

Renewed Attitudes of Thanksgiving

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?

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?

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?

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?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Conclusion- God's Not Finished Yet

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?

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."

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?

"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?

"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?

"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?

"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?

"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?