

Small Group Material: New Walls, New Heart 1&2

The State of the Nation

Nehemiah becomes aware of the state of the nation of Israel, physically and spiritually. It grieves him deeply and moves him to prayer. Have we looked around us at where 'the walls are down'?

Welcome (10 mins) Where is 'home' for you? How long have you been away from your roots?

*Leader: You may want to watch this video about the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in the group but **please watch the video first yourself and decide whether it would be appropriate for your group.** The narrator speaks very fast. There are also issues raised in the video which might be uncomfortable for folk in your group and not helpful!*
<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/ezra-nehemiah/> (8.36 mins)

Worship (15 mins) Ask everyone to find a promise in the Bible about God's faithfulness and restoration. (The Psalms are a great place to look) Read them round in a circle. Thank God for his promises of mercy and hope. Listen to 'Even when it hurts'. by Hillsong
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSvFEaFDn00>
or sing together Waiting here for you
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AF5i3Z7M5Vo>

Word (40 mins)

Read Nehemiah 1.1-11

Why is Nehemiah so concerned about Jerusalem?
What does he learn about its condition from Hanani and others? v2-4.
How does Nehemiah respond? v4
What does it tell us about his relationship with God?
What do you see of God's nature through Nehemiah's prayer?
What does Nehemiah see in himself the more he focusses on God?
(Discuss the importance of confessing our sins, including the sins of our nation, in intercession.)
What does he recall as he persists in prayer? v8-10

What then is the basis for his final appeal? (cf Deut 30.1-6, esp v4)

For discussion: How grieved are you about the physical and spiritual state of God's people? What actions does it drive you to? Enough to pray? Fast? Act? (In Vietnam, many of the house churches spend all Saturday praying and fasting!)

Asking from the heart (if time)

Read Nehemiah 2.1-9

In the intervening three months, what do you think Nehemiah has been doing? cf 1.11

What does King Artaxerxes notice and why? Why has it taken so long for Nehemiah to express his grief?

What does he request the king to do? What three questions does the king have?

In Nehemiah's ready response to the king, what do you see that demonstrates his practical wisdom? His dependence on God and on human resources?

For discussion: How easy do you find it to make your needs known to your king?

Witness (20 mins)

Confess together and pray for:

- the state of the church in this country
- the church's witness in areas of great need (eg housing estates in cities)
- church planting initiatives happening all over the country (eg Messy Church, Fresh Expressions, Café Church, Alpha Courses etc)
- the church's witness to schools, among university students, and the 20-30's age group (the missing generation in the churches)
- the training of new church leaders (our own curates and ordinand, Gareth), theological colleges,
- the church's witness in the public sphere through the media (think of people you know who have a public voice)