

# Praying for Renewal

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] All right. Good morning, everybody. Hope you're doing well. My name is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here. So good to be with you. Beautiful day outside and a beautiful day to start a new series. So we've been going through the book of James and now we're going to pick up a new series in the book of Nehemiah today. So Nehemiah is actually in the Hebrew Bible. It's kind of part of a one book, Ezra, Nehemiah. They're put together, but in the English Bible, we separate them. And so we're going to start to look at that today. But out of the gate, I think it's really helpful for when you start a new series in general, but particularly when we do a book in the Old Testament. I think it's good to pause and just quickly give an overview of kind of big picture story of where we're at. Just a little bit of the history of where we're at in the story.

So I'm going to give like a little three minute catch you up on all of the Bible to Nehemiah here. For those of you that love history, you're probably going to dig it. For those of you that don't, I'm going to try to keep it to three minutes. So that's how we'll do it. But so if we were, if we're kind of looking at where we're at in the biblical story, right? So the first part of the Bible, Genesis and the first several books are really about God creating the world, right? And in that, I mean, there's really big themes, right? That like, we're not a mistake. God creates us and he creates us because he wants to have a relationship with us. He wants to, you know, know the people that he has created. But because of our sin, we fall from that. Like we're cast out from that. And during that period, what happens is people kind of thoroughly forget who God is and what he intends. And really the story that you start to see unfold is God laying out this plan for how he's going to reintroduce himself to this people he's created and a much larger plan he's got of how he's going to save them, right? And so what you start to see happening is God's kind of first move in this is of his own good pleasure. He shows up to this man named Abraham and he says, I'm going to start this thing through you. And he's like, through you and through your family, all peoples are going to be blessed.

And as that story unfolds, what you see is he does that. Like through Abraham and then through his children, he starts to form this nation. And he's like, this nation that's going to come to be called Israel is going to be a method. It's going to be a nation through which I'm going to remind people who I am. And there's a lot of twists and turns to that story. That nation shortly after it's formed through a series of events finds itself in slavery in Egypt. And this is kind of one of the crescendos in the Old Testament. You know, one of those high points that a lot of people have heard about, right? In that they're in slavery and God decides to bring them out. And it's to show that not all the powers of the powerful nations of the world can stop what God's going to do. And so he delivers his people in this exodus and they come out and cross the Red Sea. But then the road to get to being this nation that reveals him is kind of a long one. So they get out of Egypt and God establishes through this man named Moses. He gives them law and he makes a covenant with them. But that's a long winding road. They don't just immediately get into the land that God has promised them. They go back and forth between faithfulness and unfaithfulness. You've got this series of judges that are like a lot of the Old Testament books. Deborah, Gideon, Ruth, Samson, Samuel kind of go through. And then eventually we get to this place where the nation has become established. Like all 12 tribes living in one nation under a king. The United Kingdom. And so you've got three kings. Saul, David, Solomon who reign over that.

And that's really kind of the high point of Israel's influence and power in that region. The temple to the Lord is built there. It's the installation of the promise that God's been waiting for, right?

And there's again this kind of crescendo as the nation is together, right? But after that we see a series of events that really lead us up to what we're going to talk about in the book of Nehemiah.

[ 4 : 21 ] Kind of the first one that happens is the northern part of Israel, right? So there's a lot of civil strife, a lot of family strife, and effectively a civil war breaks out. And so what you have is those two kingdoms split. So like the southern kingdom where Jerusalem is, is called Judah after that tribe.

And then the rest of the tribes of Israel are in the north, which is still called Israel with its capital in Samaria. And so those two nations really split. And then God starts to send prophets to both of them. He sends them to the north to just let them know like, if you keep doing wicked things, if you keep turning from me, I'm not going to continue to strive with you. I'm going to judge you. And in the north, you basically just see a series of wicked king after wicked king. And then God does that. And so in 722 BC, the Assyrians come in and they completely conquer the northern kingdom and the capital of Samaria. And they carry all of those Israelites off and they never come back.

Like that kingdom is never reinstituted the same as it is. And all of the kind of cultural and ethnic and religious heritage gets intermingled with the Assyrians and the other nations in there.

And incidentally, if you've ever wondered when you get to the gospels, right? Like what, why is there all this animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans? Like what's that all about? That's it. It goes back to all the strife around this civil war that happens. And then the fact that all this, the nation has come in and it's not really, there's kind of a vestige of Jewish culture and Jewish religion left, but it's intermingled with all this other stuff. And so it creates that strife. Now in the southern kingdom, they hang on a little bit longer. So God gives them warnings through prophets and they kind of waffle back and forth between heeding it and repenting and doing what God has told them to do and then falling back into idol worship and apostasy and walking away from God. And so that goes on for a little while longer. And then eventually God brings judgment on them as well. And for them, it comes in the form of the Babylonians and somewhere around 586 BC, they lay siege to Judah. They capture it and they completely destroy Jerusalem. Jerusalem is torn down and then they, just as before, exile. They pull all these people and deport them to Babylon. But the difference is there's a story of them in exile. Like they still constitute a people while they're in exile in Babylon. And that's really kind of where the events that lead into where Nehemiah is start to take place. So you've got this group of exiles, Jewish exiles in Babylon. And somewhere around in there, the Babylonians are conquered by the Persians. And when the Persians conquer them, there's this famous decree. And you can read about it in the Bible, but you can also just read about it in world history. It's a pretty famous decree where the King Cyrus lets people go back to some of the lands they've been deported from. He opens the door to say, you can go back and there's some leniency for worshiping the gods from where you came, right? And so that picks up in this Ezra and Nehemiah, two books together, where Ezra precedes Nehemiah down there. He goes when Cyrus, when this decree is issued, they go to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and to start to re-institute the things of

God. And so that's Ezra. And then we get to Nehemiah. And an interesting thing about Nehemiah is it's really the end of the Old Testament story. Like I know if you look at your Bible, it's not the last book in the Old Testament, but the Old Testament's not in chronological order. And so those books that come after it, there are things that document some of what the prophets and other things that God did that were kind of contemporaries of this. But when we read the book of Nehemiah, the reason it's really important is because it's kind of the last thing that the Bible has to say before the intertestamental period of world history where the Bible is silent. And the next thing we pick up at is a manger in Bethlehem. So when you see Nehemiah, it's a really interesting portion of the story. Now setting the stage here, so Cyrus has issued this decree. People have gone down there, but there are several of the exiles who have stayed behind in Babylon like Nehemiah himself. Ezra has gone. They know that the temple has been restored, but they're curious as to what's going on. What we're going to see in this opening passage is that Nehemiah gets this report from the people living in Jerusalem, and it's pretty bleak. They're going to tell him that the city is in ruins, that the walls have been torn down, that their people are oppressed. And it really, the whole entry into the story of Nehemiah is how he responds to that. Because for Nehemiah, it is a crisis, and it's a crisis really on two levels for him. The first is this. It's a humanitarian crisis, right? So like to have a city without walls really meant you had no security to own. This is something that's really hard for us to conceptualize because we don't protect our cities like that anymore, right? Like if you go to New York or Los Angeles or Chicago or wherever you go, like there's not some giant wall around it that's the protection for the city. That's because later in world history, modern weapons made that an infeasible way to defend the city anymore. There's other ways we defend cities, right? So we don't think about what it means to have walls, and so it's kind of hard to conceptualize. Probably the closest thing we could get to is if I were to tell you, you have to live in a house and you can have no doors on it. Like people can come in and they can go out at their pleasure, and you can't have a security system or anything of that. You just can't secure your house. And even if you had other things in the house, weapons that you thought you could defend yourself, you know you would still have some level of anxiousness just by the fact of if we leave, people can come in and out. Or if we're here, they can come in while we're sleeping.

[10:23] You wouldn't have the security to flourish. And that's really what it meant for this city is anything you tried to build, you could never really be sure it was going to stick because anybody who wanted to, anybody who had an army or raiders could just come in and take advantage of you. So it's a humanitarian crisis. But more than that, for Nehemiah, it's also kind of a spiritual and theological crisis because Jerusalem isn't like our house. It was the city of God.

Like it was part of this story that God had been doing to reintroduce himself to humanity. It's part of his plan for redemption. And so for Nehemiah to hear that, it strikes at the part of him that is spiritual, that connects to the Father. It's a theological crisis.

Okay, so for those of you who don't like history lessons, that's over, right? And maybe to get to a more real question, so why are we reading this story today, right? Like what can the story of an ancient building project in ancient Israel teach us today? Well, the first thing I'd submit to you is that in the New Testament, the New Testament makes it pretty clear that all of the heroes in the Old Testament find their greatest expression in Jesus Christ. Like in Hebrews, it actually even says that these things in the Old Testament were a shadow of a greater reality that God was doing. And so when we read stories about Abraham or Moses or David or Nehemiah, all of them have a way of pointing us back to Jesus. And that's important to do. I think we can also see some echoes of greater things in this rebuilding of Jerusalem too, though, because throughout this study, we're going to talk a lot about restoration and renewal. And there's probably a lot of applications for that, right? To like your personal life, to a family, to a people, to a nation. But given the significance of what Jerusalem meant to Nehemiah, maybe the best application for us will wind up being to a church or to the church.

You know, the body of Christ that we see revealed after Jesus, which is, you know, holding out the greatest revelation of who God is, what he's done in Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus even says, you're intended to be a city on a hill from which that light of the gospel is seen by all people. But just like ancient Jerusalem, we kind of know things aren't exactly as they should be. Like the church is supposed to be this mighty fortress that gives light to the world. But oftentimes, the body of Christ just feels dilapidated or irrelevant or in disrepair. And if you feel like that, like if you have any sense at all that, like something has gone wrong in the world and in the church, and it's not as it should be, the Nehemiah is a great book for you. And so that's what we're going to do. We're going to begin that journey in Nehemiah today. And we're going to start with specifically looking at what a spirit of renewal might look like. So that's a really long intro. So I'm just going to take a moment here and just pause, and we're going to pray together and kind of invite God in, and then we're going to read this in

Nehemiah. So Father, we thank you for the opportunity to open your word. We thank you for this journey into the book of Nehemiah. We are completely dependent on you, and we just ask in this moment you will open it up to us and help us to see in these words what was relevant to them and what is relevant to us. Father, please be in this moment. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

[14:17] Nehemiah chapter 1, starting in verse 1. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hakaliah. Now it happened in the month of Kislev, in the 12th year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived exile concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, the remnant there in the province who survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and the gates are destroyed by fire. And 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. 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 his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to the ear 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. We have acted very corruptly against you and not kept your commandments, the statutes and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. Remember now the word that you commanded your servant Moses saying, if you are unfaithful, I will scatter you amongst the peoples. 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. They are your servants and your people whom you have redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. 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 the cupbearer to the king.

So as you're going to see throughout this story, Nehemiah is kind of an extraordinary person, right? Like he's somewhat of what we might hold up as kind of the quintessential leader. Nehemiah is a man of action. He's intelligent, he's decisive, he's diligent. Like if we were, if we're going to write one of those like things about, you know, five steps to being a good leader, you could probably put Nehemiah in that, right? You're going to see all throughout this, he has all of those qualities. But that's not what we're going to talk about. Like that's important that Nehemiah is an extraordinary man. But the other thing we see in the beginning here is not only is he just a good leader, he's an extraordinary man of prayer. So Nehemiah hears this news that Jerusalem is devastated. And because he's a man of action, I can guarantee you, he wants to do something. He wants to do something to help. His first instinct might actually be to go and do something. But the first thing he actually does is to stop and weep and pray. He wants renewal, but the first step to renewal seems to be simply this, to care. And so that's what he does. When we consider what renewal and restoration might look like in our day, we really need to start in the same place that Nehemiah did. A spirit of renewal weeps for walls that are broken.

Now one of the things we see throughout scripture is that the people of God can never be indifferent about the things in the world that are broken or the suffering of others. Like you see this writ large all throughout Jesus's ministry in the gospels. He is surrounded by brokenness and sickness and sin. And it says over and over that he has just moved to compassion because they are like sheep without a shepherd. He's not angry. He's filled with compassion. It is right when you see something beautiful like the city of God in ruins, it is right to weep. Like when the people of God are exposed to danger and darkness, it is right to weep about that. And that might be a place you could say we find ourselves today. I mean this certainly isn't unique to our moment in history, but right now it's not super in vogue to be a follower of Jesus. Like we are immersed every day in a sea of ideologies that are contrary and in some ways even hostile to the good news of Jesus. And that should rightly grieve us. We have to be careful in that because there's a lot of things that actually come easier than grief. Like sometimes contempt is easier than grief. Like if I'm looking at people walking away from the faith and walking away from church, it's a lot easier to just criticize them than to grieve. Like frankly anger feels better than sadness a lot of times. I think another thing that's easy to do is just kind of put your head in the sand, right? Like you could very easily say, hey look, my family, me, my kids, we're following the Lord. It's good. And you can kind of shut out all the brokenness and hurting around you. And in fact, we're going to see later, Nehemiah was actually someone who could have done that. Like he has a pretty good gig in the Persian empire and he could have very easily just put his head in the sand and not worried about what was happening in the rest of the world. But when this report comes, it grieves him and he weeps for his brothers and sisters in

Jerusalem, 800 miles away. It is good and we practice praying for the persecuted church. Like we actually do that fairly often here, partly because one of our dear ministries is kind of like setting up house churches in the Middle East. And so like we know what it is to like pray for those who are persecuted. But one of the things we actually just saw in the James series we just came out of was James gives us this kind of hard but true word that the worst thing that can happen to you is actually not that you're persecuted and that you suffer. Like the worst thing that can happen to you is that you abandon the faith. That you take the bait and you believe it's not worth it to follow Jesus.

[ 20 : 45 ] And if we look around, it seems like that's actually a little closer to the situation. It feels like we've kind of been dealt here in our time and place. You know, so there's some research out there that shows that if you kind of look at the American church in the last 25 years, there have been more people have walked away from the faith than the number of people that came to faith during the first great awakening, the second great awakening, and all of the Billy Graham crusades combined.

It's a lot of people that don't have a place for the church and for Jesus in their life. And you know, this is a big room. So, you know, it's quite possible and I would understand this for many of us if like the de-churching of America doesn't really bother you that much or concern you. And I'll certainly, I'll say there's certainly some complexity to this, right? Because for a lot of people, their only experience of the church of Christ was in a church that was unhealthy that kind of did them more harm than good.

And so there's a certain way as you see that start to come down, it can kind of feel like, yeah, that's good, like that that facade is falling away. And that's understandable. But I would say behind those concerns, people are still turning away from the living God. It means people are still living without the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Without hearing the gospel of the good news of Jesus, like the promises of salvation and resurrection. And we don't have those things in our together life anymore. And so we've taken that and we've replaced it with nothing good, or at least nothing we can agree about, right?

And unsurprisingly, because of that, despair, depression, confusion seem to reign over the most fundamental aspects of life. People are hurting. And whatever you think about the institutional church, you should care about that. You should care about the fact that our neighbors, our brothers and sisters around us are hurting. A spirit of renewal weeps for walls that have come down.

But weeping isn't the only thing we do. When Nehemiah finishes his mourning, he immediately goes to pray, and this is how he starts his prayer. Oh, Lord of God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keeps his commandments.

[ 23 : 28 ] Nehemiah prays this because he remembers what God promises to be, and that's what a spirit of renewal does. A spirit of renewal remembers who God has promised to be.

Now, this is kind of classic Bible praying by Nehemiah here, right? Like, he starts with worship. And you see that, like, if you've ever seen in a lot of little Bible guys or, like, you know, the little acronyms on how you pray, it's always something about, like, adoration or worship.

Like, there's something at the beginning where you worship, right? And Nehemiah's got all of the reason in the world not to worship, right? He's a captive in exile. He's just heard that Jerusalem is in tatters.

Like, this appears to be a situation that God is not in. God is absent. And despite all of that, what Nehemiah does is he starts by rehearsing back to God what he knows is true.

You are the great and awesome God. You keep your covenant. You keep your promises. You show steadfast love to those who keep your commandments.

[ 24 : 37 ] And that's kind of the place we start, right? Like, if you are facing a crisis, anxiety, you're losing your nerve, you start with worship. Like, one of the best ways to keep your nerve in a tense situation is to start by rehearsing the praise you know.

You can say to God, God of heaven, you are the great and awesome God. You are the one who said you would never leave us nor forsake us. You are the one who said that you don't leave a single sheep behind.

You're the one that said to us the gates of hell would not prevail against your church. You say those things back to God when it seems like darkness is winning because it reminds you that God is never actually losing, right?

So if you find yourself going into prayer with anxiousness or worry, there is nothing better than to start with reminding yourself who is really in charge around here.

And then the next thing Nehemiah does before he launches into his list of requests, he takes a moment to confess his sin and the sin of his people.

[ 25 : 46 ] Because the spirit of renewal is going to be quick to confess the things that separate us from God. Now we've talked about this quite a bit recently that like when a community of people want to see God really move, something you see all throughout history is that they become really quick to confess their sins.

They want to see whatever is broken in them made right personally, and they want to see whatever is broken in their community be made right corporately. They confess their sins, and they don't deny the things their church has done wrong.

It's interesting, in the book of Revelation, Jesus at the beginning gives these letters. They're just basically words to different churches. And there's some encouragements in there, but he also has some hard things to say.

And it's interesting that he doesn't direct it to individuals. He addresses the churches. He says, to Ephesus, you've lost your first love. To Sardis, you have a reputation of being alive, but you're actually dead.

To Laodicea, you have forgotten me. You're lukewarm because you've forgotten, you've become enamored with the things of the world. And I'm sure like everybody in those churches wasn't equally guilty of that, but everybody had a part in making it whole.

[ 27 : 09 ] It does kind of make you think there's kind of an interesting side road here where like, I wonder what Jesus would have to say to one harbor, like if we asked him.

And part of this series is going to be seeing that we can do that. Like we can ask God to reveal to us where our walls are broken down or what sins we have committed.

We can trust him to do that and we can trust him to be forgiving and merciful. But as a church, we can't skip over the confession part or the part where we've had any dealings with darkness.

And actually, it's also one of the reasons you can't have contempt for people who are walking away from the faith, right? Because that is a way to deceive yourself into thinking you've got no stake in it.

You've got nothing. You're totally clean, right? So it's appropriate for us to say, Lord of heaven, we at times have lost our first love. At times, we have not done the good works that you prepared for us.

[ 28 : 08 ] At times, we have become enamored with the things of this world. And confession, one of the reasons it's really hard is not just because it's embarrassing. It's because if you confess, you lose all your leverage.

Like if you confess to God, you can no longer bargain with him. And that's exactly what God wants. He wants to give you grace.

God refuses to be bargained with, but he loves to be sought after. And so confession adds power to your prayer because you've positioned yourself now where when you come before God with your request, your request doesn't rely on any of your qualifications to ask for it.

You've relinquished that, right? But now your request actually just relies on God's willingness to graciously answer it. His good will and good nature to do it.

And so Nehemiah's prayer highlights this. He says, God, you promised that if we return to you, you would bring your people back to Jerusalem. And they are your servants and your people and you have redeemed them by your strong hand.

[ 29 : 23 ] He confesses his sin. And then, after he's done that, he boldly makes his request. He says in verse 11, Now we're going to see in coming chapters, Nehemiah is going to have to make a big ask of the Persian king.

Like, he's going to have to go into the Persian king Artaxerxes and ask not only for permission to go back to Jerusalem, but he doesn't have anything. So he's going to have to ask him, I need you to kind of empty out the royal treasury.

I need some wood and some gold and some stone. And could you do all that? That seems like a tall ask, right? Moreover, we know from the book of Ezra that this king has already said no to that.

And so Nehemiah is going to have to go in and ask this thing. But before he goes and makes that ask, he makes an even bigger ask of God. He says to God, Be who you promised to be.

Do what you promised to do. And I love the language he used there. It says, Grant me favor and mercy in the sight of this man. It's kind of interesting that like, it's almost a cheeky way to say it, right?

[ 30 : 51 ] Like this is one of the most powerful kings in the world. And he just refers to him as this man. Because Nehemiah knows the real ask is to the one who's really in charge. And so that's where he starts.

And we, brothers and sisters, can do that same thing. Like we are also children of the King, capital K. And we can ask him boldly to do things he's promised to do.

Like if we're a church in crisis, we don't ever have to feel like all is lost. There is always hope when Jesus is sitting on the throne. And so we can do that same thing.

And then as we kind of wrap up chapter 1, there's this last line in here, which seems like a bit of a throwaway line, but I actually think sets up everything that's going to come later in the story.

Nehemiah says, Now I was cupbearer to the king. And in this last thing, I think we see something that's easy to miss, but it's really crucial for stepping into a spirit of renewal.

[ 31 : 56 ] A spirit of renewal does not despise the moment that has been given. I think one of the easiest things to do when you feel like you're in a moment or a place in history where it just, it looks like everything's going wrong, or it seems like all the things you've cherished and cared about are being torn away or fallen apart, or maybe it's like you look into the future, and you just can't see anything getting better.

Like you just, all you can see is it getting worse and worse. Like it's really easy in a moment like that to just simply say, Why is it my fate to see these evil days? Why did I have to be born into this?

Like why am I stuck with being here to watch all the beautiful things fall apart? Or maybe if you're looking in the future, like why won't my kids get to experience the same world I did?

Like why do they have to go into a harder world than I did? You know, it's interesting. The only reason Nehemiah is alive to have a part in this story is because of another hero of the exile that we learn about a little before him named Esther.

And so in the book of Esther, which comes before Nehemiah, what we find is in that book, there's this plot that is hatched to literally wipe out every Jew that is in exile, to kill them all.

[ 33 : 26 ] This plot by the people that hate them. And their only hope of survival is that Queen Esther, who is one of them, will do something she's not supposed to do and go into the king.

And this is a move that if she's wrong, will wind up costing her life. She's got a good gig. She's the queen. But now she's faced with a choice.

And there's this really epic scene. I'll be honest, it's one of my favorite in the Bible, where she's discussing what to do with her cousin Mordecai. And Mordecai is a little bit older than her, so he's kind of been like a father to her.



And in that interchange, Mordecai says to her, he says, look, if you don't do your part, God will save us some other way. It's kind of interesting that his faith is still in God, not in Esther, right?

Like if you don't do the thing you're supposed to do, God will find a way to save us. But then there's this line where it's kind of echoed throughout the ages where he says, but Esther, who is to say that you didn't come to this moment, like your whole life isn't about this very moment.

[ 34 : 31 ] Who is to say that you weren't placed here for such a time as this? And then Esther, to her credit, kind of has one of the most baller responses of all time too, right?

So she's like, and then she's like, okay, gather everybody up, pray for me, and I'm going in. And if I perish, then I perish.

Esther doesn't despise the moment that is given to her. She doesn't ask, why is this happening to me? Why am I the one that has to do this hard thing?

She trusts that God has made her for such a time as this. And so her people are saved. And because she does that, now we find a few years later, Nehemiah in the same place.

You know, it tells us he's a cup bearer. And again, that sounds a little bit like a servant to us. And it's a servant, but it's a servant who has tremendous wealth and influence. Like if you think about that, if you were a cup bearer, that meant you had real access to the king and the king's court.

[ 35 : 41 ] It also meant like if you were a cup bearer, you didn't get that role unless you were trusted by the king, right? Because there's the whole like you get poisoned and you die thing, right? So if you're a cup bearer, you have to have some trust with the king.

And it probably meant you were living in the palace or something adjacent to the palace. He was wealthy, right? Like he has a good gig, right? And now he's got a choice to make as well.

If he's going to act and help his people in Jerusalem, it could cost him everything. But as we're going to see, he doesn't despise the moment either.

So if you're feeling that way, like if you're feeling the weight or the sadness of this moment in history that's given to you, I would just invite you to consider that the times that are given to you are not a mistake.

And I don't think it's too bold for me to say to you, you were made for such a time as this. Probably the most famous scene in The Lord of the Rings is this moment where the hobbit Frodo is starting to feel all of the weight and the pain of this task that he's been given to destroy this one evil ring, right?

[ 36 : 53 ] And he's really starting to understand what it's going to cost him to do the thing he's been called to do. And there's this really well-known line in there where he stops and he ponders that and he says, I wish this ring had never come to me.

I wish none of this had ever happened. And the wizard Gandalf's response to him is, so does everyone who lives to see such time as these, but that is not for them to decide.

The only thing you get to decide is what to do with the time that is given to you. So as we go into this study of Nehemiah, friends, I would say let's do that.

Let's decide to live in the spirit of renewal for ourselves, in our families, in our church. Amen? All right, as the band comes up, a couple of ways we can respond today.

So if you are here and you're not yet to follow Jesus, and thank you so much for coming. It's a joy that you're here with us. I hope some of this has meant something. Maybe this story doesn't resonate with you.

[ 38 : 01 ] It just sounds kind of like a Jewish history book, and I would understand that. But even if you don't connect with this, I would say if you're like any of us, if you're human, you're probably not immune to the nagging feeling that something has gone wrong in the world.

Like the world is not the way it's supposed to be. Like you don't have to be a follower of Jesus to see that the world is full of confusion and depression and despair. And this message of renewal that we see in Nehemiah for this city and for a people and for a church isn't just for the broken things in the world.

Like the good news we try to hold out every week is that Jesus cares not just about the brokenness out there, but the brokenness in here too. It's a much more intimate renewal he starts with.

And so if that's something you're feeling for yourself, there'll be a prayer on the screen that you can pray if that expresses what you want to say to God. We'll have pastors and some men and women down here to pray with you if you'd like to bring that before Jesus.

He cares about not just the big broken out there, but the broken in here too. If you are a follower of Jesus, I would say if you want to see renewal, what is the thing that the Spirit kind of highlighted you for today?

[ 39 : 19 ] Like what was the thing that just popped out the most to you? Maybe it was just the fact that you realized I need to care. Like I need to not just put my head in the sand. Maybe it's something that he revealed you need to confess, like a way in which you're not moving towards him.

Maybe it might just be that you've learned, you know, he kind of convicted you of, I need to embrace that I was made for such a time as this.

Like this isn't what I would have asked for. I know like I was thinking about this in between services. You know, if I was young at this moment in history, I would be looking at all the unpredictability and going, why do I have to go into that world, right?

And if I was older, I would think, you know, why is it my fate that I like I have to watch? You were made for such a time as this. Maybe that's what we need to embrace.

So as we go as believers and take communion, you're going to go to these tables and take the elements back to your seat. And we remember in this that Jesus went every mile to see this story that God is weaving to completion.

[ 40 : 28 ] Like the ultimate renewal is not just the renewal of a city. It's the renewal of all things. And it is made possible because Jesus paid it all. And so in this moment, take it back to your seat and you can just whatever thing God laid out, just give that to him, invite him into it.

And then take the elements in faith that Jesus is going to be with us every step of the way. Let's pray. So Father, we give this moment to you, this sacred time.

I just pray that this time of communion, you would move in this place. God, I pray that for somebody today, maybe they just, it's been a long time since they've touched you or felt you in a way that seemed real.

Maybe they just need some hope. Jesus, I pray you would do that today. I pray you would meet them in this moment of communion in a way that lets them know you are very close, not far away.

Spirit, we invite you to have your way in this moment. In Jesus' name. Spirit, we invite you to have your way in this moment.