

## Reflective questions #153 for the pulpit message's Text 'Rise and Rebuild', 09 Jan 2022- Nehemiah 1.

The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, <sup>2</sup>Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." <sup>4</sup>When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Then I said: "LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup>let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. <sup>7</sup>We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup>"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, <sup>9</sup>but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' <sup>10</sup>"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. <sup>11</sup>Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

### Main Idea

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to Artaxerxes. He was a servant in the intimate and trusted circle of King Artaxerxes. Though born in exile and lived in Persia, he identified with his fellow Jews in Jerusalem. Being passionate for God's glory and was driven by empathy for his fellow Jews. When he learned the full extent of the violence the Judean Jews had suffered, he was grieved for his people. He sought God's grace for devising a plan to restore Jerusalem.

- 1. The extent of problem ---that Nehemiah perceived [Nehemiah 1:1-3].** Nehemiah's brother, Hanani & some men from Judah came to Susa to give Nehemiah a report of the situation in Judah. They came during the months of Kislev [November/December]. It was the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Nehemiah's service as a cupbearer [about 446/445 BC]. They reported about [A] the condition people of God in Judah [v3] and [B] the condition of Jerusalem city. The people were in distress. Their life was in danger. They faced shame, disgrace, scorn, insult, contempt, and threats. This is the result of God's judgement for their sins [Ezekiel 5:13-15]. "The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire" [v.3]. This tragedy happened in 587/586 BC [ 2 Kings 25:8-10]. Nearly 140 years later, Nehemiah received this news. It was hard for him to process, given that Ezekiel also prophesied the regathering and blessing of God's people [Ezek. 28:25-26].
- 2. Nehemiah was a man of prayer [vv.4-11].** This the longest of 9 prayers by Nehemiah. He exemplified "praying without ceasing". At times he seems to be carrying an ongoing conversation with God. Prayer was not the last resort. It was his first call of duty. Nehemiah's prayer conveys both a confidence in God's word and a commitment to God's work. Nehemiah's response to the report reveals his deep emotions & commitment [v.4]: He "sat down and wept and mourned". He cared deeply for the well-being of the people of God & also God's reputation. But he did not just wallow in his grief---he would then risk bold actions to remedy the situation. He persisted in his prayer [v.4]. He fasted & prayed "for days" [v.4] and "day and night" [v.6]. His response was not based on a whim or an emotional knee jerk reaction. He is convinced that only God can answer his prayers. It is not until four months later that Nehemiah gets the opportunity to take further action and sees God begin to answer his prayer [Neh. 2:1-11].
- 3. The deep confessional content of Nehemiah's prayer [vv.5-11].** Nehemiah's prayer confesses that God is covenant-keeping. He is the only God who is omnipotent and able to answer his prayer [v.5]. He confesses that Israel has broken their covenant with the Lord. Whereas, God has been faithful to the covenant [vv.6-7] Nehemiah bases his prayer on God's promises. Nehemiah recognizes that God who is faithful to carry out his judgment is also faithful to reconcile and restore His people [vv.8-9]. Nehemiah's prayer is based on the identity of Israel as the people & servants of God [v.10] And God is the Redeemer. Eight times the word "servant" appears in this prayer. He refers to himself, Moses, and to all of Israel as God's servants. Nehemiah's prayer recognizes the importance of ministering in the context of the community of faith; that God's people work together for God's purposes. Nehemiah's prayer reveals his faith in God, his submission to God and his dependence on God to give him success as His servant [v11]. Nehemiah recognizes that all people are under God's authority, including the great king of Persia. Nehemiah is willing to patiently wait on God to move the heart and mind of "this man" [v.11].

## **Bible Discussion Questions**

<b>Q1</b>	<p>a) <b>What was the nature of the problem of God’s people in Jerusalem that Nehemiah found out? Why did Nehemiah cry? What would make you cry? [v.4]</b></p> <p>b) <b>When was the last time you were deeply burdened and moved to prayer and fasting concerning the condition of the people of God today: in your church/your family/your friends? [Reflect and share]</b></p> <p>c) <b>If you receive a prayer request in your inbox, to pray for someone you know who is facing some health issue for instance, would you pray for that person? How committed are you to intercessory prayer on behalf of that person or for other believers? What do you think are obstacles to intercede for others? [Discuss and share]</b></p>
<b>Q2</b>	<p>a) Nehemiah is a great example of someone whose desire was to please God and glorify Him. His intentions and aspirations were God-focused rather than self-focused. When he heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and God's people were living in distress, God’s driving purpose for Nehemiah kicked in. Nehemiah prayed a profound prayer of praise, adoration, submission, and request. <b>Is your dominant purpose in life like Nehemiah to glorify God and do His will as revealed in Scripture? If not, what can be done to align yourself to God’s purpose for your life [Personal reflections and sharing]</b></p> <p>b) Nehemiah understands that both he and his people were called to be servants of the Lord. Eight times the word “servant” appears in this prayer. He refers to himself, Moses, and to all of Israel as God’s servants [vv.8-10]. <b>Do you see your identity as a servant of God? Why do you think it is important for us to recognize that this is our identity?</b></p>

## Notes for Leaders/Those leading the Word

### Main Idea

#### The Biblical and Historical Context

Moses foretells of the Israelites exile and the return of the exile in the book of Deuteronomy [Deut. 28:45-52; Deut. 29: 24-28; Deut. 30:1-5]. The first deportation into exile happened in the 8<sup>th</sup> century by the Assyrians. They deported the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom, Israel after the capture of Israel's capital, Samaria, in 722 BC. Then, only Judah [the Southern Kingdom] was left. Judah found itself in a precarious position, politically. Four superpowers of the day: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia were vying for power and were determining the political landscape. At the battle of Carchemish [605 BC], Babylon & its Persian allies defeated Assyria and Egypt. Assyria ceased to exist and Egypt retreated back home. Babylon emerged as the ruler over "the whole land of Hatti" [Syria, Palestine, including Judah]. Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiakim, Judah's king swear allegiance to Babylon. This was during the time Daniel and his companions were taken captives to Babylon [Dan. 1:1-2]. Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in 601 BC after remaining loyal for 3 years. The revolt was quelled [2 Ki 24:1-7]. Nebuchadnezzar's main target was Egypt. So, he met Pharaoh Neco in the battle at Migdol on Egypt's border. Both sides suffered heavy casualties. Nebuchadnezzar suffered heavy casualties and retreated back to Babylon. Jehoiakim took this as an opportunity to withhold tribute and forged friendly relations with Neco. Nebuchadnezzar, consolidated his forces and in 598 BC started his war campaign against Judah. Jehoiakim died, and his 18-year-old son, Jehoiachin became king of Judah. Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians after a month's siege [2 Ki. 24:14-16]. Nebuchadnezzar led away into exile all Jerusalem and all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, 10,000 captives, all the craftsmen & the smiths. So he led Jehoiachin, the king's mother and the king's wives and his officials and the leading men of the land, into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. All the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all strong and fit for war, and these the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon. Ezekiel from the priestly was also led away ["Jeremiah 52:28 indicates that only 3,023 captives were taken, but the smaller figures of Jeremiah probably represent only men of the most influential families (Edwin Yamauchi)]. Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah [Jehoiachin's uncle], king of Judah. Zedekiah revolted in 589 BC with the support of Egypt. Jerusalem was thus besieged by the Babylonians. The Egyptians withdrew support because they were outnumbered. Jerusalem was besieged in 588 BC and fell in 587/586 BC. Zedekiah was captured. He watched the execution of his sons and his eyes were gouged out. The Babylonians took captives, Zedekiah, and all the people of Jerusalem [2 Ki. 25:8-21]. But the commander, Nebuzaradan left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields [2 Ki: 25:12].

#### The Rise of the Persian Empire

Cyrus the Great of Persia invaded Babylon in 539 BC. At the battle of Opis on the Tigris, the Babylonians were defeated. Cyrus ordered the conquest of Babylon which fell in Oct 539 BC. The Babylonian king, Nabonidus could not defend Babylon. In Daniel 5, the prophet described how Babylon fell while Belshazzar [king's son] was having a feast [*"Babylon was accustomed to drink and revel all night long"* (Xenophon)]. *"The Babylonians themselves say that owing to the great size of the city the outskirts were captured without the people in the center knowing anything about it; there was a festival going on, and even while the city was falling they continued to dance and enjoy"* [Herodotus---Greek historian]. Belshazzar was killed and King Nabonidus, imprisoned.

#### The Return of the Exiles

Cyrus had the policy of allowing conquered peoples to worship their own gods and establish some semblance of autonomy as long as they paid their taxes to the empire and remained loyal citizens. He encouraged people who had been uprooted from their homelands and to return home and reestablish the worship of their gods with the blessing and support of his government [The Edict of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-2), 539 BC]. Thus, a group of about 50,000 exiles returned to Judah under the leadership of **Sheshbazzar** [Ezra 2:64-65]. **Zerubbabel** became their governor. **Joshua** served as the high priest. Cambyses II became king, when Cyrus died in battle. He was assassinated and one of his officers, Darius 1 became king after putting down the insurrection. **Cambyses II supported the enemies of the Jewish returnees and stall the reconstruction of the Temple.** But **when Darius 1 became king, he upheld, the 'Edict of Cyrus' and allowed the reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple** [Ezra 4-6; see Hag 1:1, 15; 2:10; Zech. 1:1, 7; 7:1]. Xerxes was the next Persian

king. He married Esther, a Jewish woman whom God raised to save the Jews from extermination. Xerxes was assassinated in his bedchamber in 465 BC by Artabanus, an influential courtier. Artaxerxes, the third son of Xerxes succeeded in 464 BC [reigned till 424 BC].

**Nehemiah was the cupbearer to Artaxerxes.** He was a servant in the intimate circle of King Artaxerxes. As such, he knew that the Persian government had sanctioned actions against Jerusalem. Though he was born in exile and lived in Persia, Nehemiah identified with his fellow Jews, particularly those living in Jerusalem. He was passionate for God's glory and was driven by empathy for his fellow Jews. When he learned the full extent of the violence the Judean Jews had suffered, he was grieved for his people. He sought God's grace for devising a plan to restore Jerusalem. As a royal cupbearer: He would have been well trained in court etiquette [cf. Dan 1:4, 13, 15]. He would certainly have known how to select the wines to set before the king. He would have been a convivial companion with a willingness to lend an ear at all times. Nehemiah would have been a man of great influence as one with the closest access to the king, and one who could well determine who got to see the king. Above all Nehemiah would have enjoyed the unreserved confidence of the king. The great need for trustworthy attendants is underscored by the intrigues that were endemic to the Achaemenid [Persian] court. At least four of the Persian kings had been murdered, and at least a half-dozen of them reached the throne by way of some conspiracy. Therefore, a most trusted individual had to fill the position of royal cupbearer.

**1. The extent of problem ---that Nehemiah perceived [Nehemiah 1:1-3].**

**a) The context of the report about the People of God in Judah [v.1-2]**

The writer of the book is identified as Nehemiah. The name means “*Yahweh comforts*”. His father is Hakaliah meaning: “*hope in Yahweh*” or “*wait on Yahweh*”. The account happens in the “month of Kislev in the twentieth year” [v. 1]: which is during the months of November/December. “Twentieth year” probably refers to the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Nehemiah’s service as a cupbearer about 446/445 BC [also possible that it refers to the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Artaxerxes’ reign]. Nehemiah’s brother, Hanani & some men from Judah came to Susa to give him a report of the situation in Judah.

**b) The content of the report about the People of God in Judah [v.3]**

- i. The report is twofold. It gives **a description of the people**, and it provides a description of the physical condition of the structures of the city itself. **Two words describe the people:** 1) *rā’â*, usually translated “distress,” is perhaps the strongest word in the Hebrew language that depicts danger, disaster, calamity, or misery. It basically describes a condition detrimental to life. 2) *herpâ*, depicts reproach, shame, disgrace, scorn, insult, contempt, and threat [Hartley]. The situation is exactly what Ezekiel prophesied would happen as a result of Judah’s sin and the Lord’s judgment [Ezekiel 5:13-15]. **They were in a situation of great distress that threatens their life as a result of their sin and God’s judgement.**
- ii. **Description of the dilapidated physical condition of Jerusalem city:** “*The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire*” [v.3]. This tragedy which happened in 587/586 BC was described in 2 Kings 25:8-10 “*...Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. <sup>9</sup>He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building, he burned down. <sup>10</sup>The whole Babylonian army under the commander of the imperial guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem*”. Nearly 140 years later, Nehemiah described the condition as received, that was as bad since the destruction by the Chaldeans [=Babylonians=modern day southern Iraq]. The report is difficult for Nehemiah to process, given that Ezekiel also prophesied the regathering and blessing of God’s people [Ezek. 28:25-26]. The People who had been scattered had indeed returned and reclaimed some of their land, including Jerusalem. Shortly after they arrived, they set out to repair the walls and rebuild the temple, but their efforts were thwarted by the false reports of their enemies, who claimed the returned exiles were planning to rebel against the king as soon as they were able. So the king put a stop to their efforts, under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest [Ezra 4:8–24]. About 90 years have passed now, since the exile first returned. The prosperity and security that the prophet Ezekiel spoke of [Ezek. 28: 25-26] has not materialize yet.

## 2. Nehemiah was a man of prayer [ vv.4-11]

This prayer is the first and the longest of 9 prayers by Nehemiah. He is an example of what it means to “**pray without ceasing**”. At times he seems to be carrying an ongoing conversation with God. Prayer was not the last resort. It was his first call of duty. The structure of the prayer is simple: (1) Nehemiah begins by addressing God and acknowledging who God is, (2) he confesses the sins of Israel, (3) he asks God to restore his people, and (4) he asks God to give him success in serving the Lord toward this end. Nehemiah’s prayer conveys both **a confidence in God’s word and a commitment to God’s work** [Betts]:

### a) Nehemiah’s response to the report reveals his deep emotions & commitment [v.4]:

He “*sat down and wept and mourned*”. His response shows that he is a godly man who cares deeply for the reputation and well-being of the people of God & also God’s reputation. He is committed to the glory of God, as well as the flourishing of God’s people. He is deeply grieved by the great distress and reproach of God’s people and the dilapidated city of Jerusalem. He feels for the people. And he feels what the people were experiencing [cf. Lk. 19: 41-44, Jesus weeps for Jerusalem]. But he did not just wallow in his grief---he would later risk bold actions to remedy the situation.

### b) Nehemiah understands the power of prayer and fasting [v.4].

Biblical fasting is a believer’s voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. Fasting enhances fervent prayer. It shows that our desire for prayer is greater than what our body desires. If there is not a spiritual purpose it is merely a diet. “*Fasting is calculated to bring a note of urgency and importunity into our praying, and to give force to our pleading in the court of heaven. The man who prays with fasting is giving heaven notice that he is truly earnest*” [Arthur Wallis].

### c) Nehemiah is persistent in his prayer [v.4]

We don’t know how long Nehemiah “weep, mourn and pray”. We are told he does it “for days” [v.4] and “day and night” [v.6]. His response was not based on a whim or an emotional knee jerk reaction. His perseverance in prayer and fasting shows the depth of his faith in God. He is convinced that only God can answer his prayers. It is not until four months later that Nehemiah gets the opportunity to take further action and sees God begin to answer his prayer [Neh. 2:1-11].

## 3. The deep confessional content of Nehemiah’s prayer [vv.5-11]

### a) Nehemiah’s prayer is confessional [vv.5-7].

The Hebrew word *yādâ* often appears as “**confess**” in the NIV in verse 6. The basic meaning is “to know”. Thus, it means he acknowledges the truths of the people and God and the people’s sins. The full confession is in vv.5-7. In verse 5, he acknowledges important truths about God, and in verses 6–7, he acknowledges important truths concerning him and his people, Israel.

- i. Confessional about God [v.5]: Nehemiah prays to “Lord [Yahweh], the God of heaven.” His prayer recognizes the personal, covenant-keeping God of Israel who reigns over all creation. He addresses the one and only God who is omnipotent and able to answer his prayer. The covenant keeping God is both fearsome and faithful. “The prayer, then, is essentially an appeal to God’s mercy, based on a knowledge of His character expressed in His covenant with Israel” [McConville]. Therefore, a proper perspective of the Holy and faithful God produces faith in us, who are to respond to Him in love and obedience. It produces also repentance. When we have a proper perspective of God we can begin to gain a proper perspective of ourselves and the world around us. **For some of us, it may be that a lack of prayer and a lack of answered prayers occurs because we fail in truly knowing the One to whom we pray** [Betts]
- ii. The prayer is confessional concerning Israel [vv.6-7]: Nehemiah knows himself and God’s people: Israel has broken their covenant with the Lord. Whereas, God has been faithful to the covenant. The terrible condition in which the people of God find themselves is the result of their own sin. Israel has become its own worst enemy. Nehemiah acknowledged his own guilt and the guilt of his own forebears along with the rest of Israel in sinning against the Lord. Nehemiah had not been born when all the events happened that led to Babylonian exile, yet Nehemiah’s personal identity in the Lord is bound to his identity with Israel, God’s covenant people [cf. 1 Cor. 12:26: Paul’s teaching concerning the body of Christ. We are members of one another, and the actions of one affect the whole].

**b) Nehemiah's prayer is founded on God's promises [vv.8-9]**

Nehemiah recalls how God promised Moses to bring about judgment and finally exile for Israel's infidelity to God, and he recalls God's anticipation of Israel's repentance and promise to restore the nation when that happens [Lev 26:40; Deut. 4:27; 12:11; 30:2, 4; 1 Kgs 8:28–30; 2 Chron. 6:19–21]. The first part of the promise, Israel's unfaithfulness and exile, has happened. Now Nehemiah is saying, "As we come to you in repentance, please fulfill the second part of your promise to restore your people and their land." **Nehemiah recognizes the God who is faithful to carry out his judgment is also faithful to reconcile and restore His people.** Though Nehemiah cares about the economic conditions of his people, Nehemiah's concern is about more than that. He is concerned about God's people exalting God and serving God. It is about their fulfilling their purpose as a kingdom of priests [Exod. 19:6]. The phrase: "I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name" [v.9], recalls what it means for Israel to live as God's covenant people [Deut. 12:5, 11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2]. Nehemiah wants Jerusalem no more to be a reproach [see Deut. 4:6; 1 Kgs 8:41–43]. Instead, he wants to see it become what it once was, the place where Yahweh chose for His name to dwell [v.9].

**c) Nehemiah's prayer is based on the identity of Israel as the people of God [v.10].**

Nehemiah understands that both he and his people were **called to be servants of the Lord**. Eight times the word "servant" appears in this prayer. He refers to himself, Moses, and to all of Israel as God's servants. When God's law was given to Israel by Moses, such an understanding was made clear: "For the sons of Israel are My servants; they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God" [Lev 25:55]. Nehemiah's emphasis on their identity as servants of the Lord reveals his submissive disposition before God and his sense of purpose in respect to God. Israel's existence as God's covenant people centers on their service to Yahweh. They were chosen to be his servants.

**d) Nehemiah's Prayer Recalls God's Work of Redemption on Behalf of Israel [v.10]**

Nehemiah recognizes Yahweh, Israel's covenant-keeping God, is Israel's Redeemer. The Hebrew verb *pādâ*, translated "redeemed," is closely associated with the redemption of the firstborn in Israel and with the idea of salvation. In the book of Deuteronomy, the redemption of Israel from Egypt assures Israel that God will continue to care for them. Nehemiah's confidence in God in his present situation rests on the assurance that Yahweh is Israel's Redeemer.

**e) Nehemiah's prayer is shared by others [v.11]**

Nehemiah recognizes there are others who are faithfully praying for the restoration of Jerusalem. He realizes the importance of ministering in the context of the community of faith. **He knows he cannot do what God has laid on his heart alone, and neither is he meant to do it alone.** The book of Nehemiah highlights the importance of God's people working together for God's purposes. On a number of occasions both the Old and New Testaments show how important the community of faith is to prayer and service. All too often believers underestimate the power of corporate prayer. It unifies, encourages, and inspires the people of God—all necessities for doing God's work, as seen in the book of Nehemiah.

**f) Nehemiah's prayer reveals his faith in God, his submission to God and his dependence on God to give him success as His servant [v11]**

Nehemiah's confidence in God is in the face of huge obstacles. His first is the Persian king. Artaxerxes will need to overturn his decree that put a stop to the rebuilding of Jerusalem [Ezra 4:21]. The kings of Persia were not normally permitted to rescind a decree once they made it. For instance, King Darius is distraught when he discovers Daniel is to be put in a lion's den because of the king's edict. When Darius seeks to release Daniel, Daniel's enemies remind the king, "Recognize, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or statute which the king establishes may be changed" [Dan 6:15]. As cupbearer of the king, Nehemiah is very familiar with this law. King Artaxerxes needs to somehow rescind or circumvent his previous decree. Nevertheless, Nehemiah understands the king is just a "man," while the Lord—He is God. All people are under God's authority, including the great king of Persia. Nehemiah is willing to patiently wait on God to move the heart and mind of "this man". The Lord not only moved in the heart of Nehemiah, but he providentially put Nehemiah in the proper place to act on behalf of Jerusalem. It is just one more instance in the Scriptures where one sees God at work on a grander scale while at the

same time working in the lives of particular individuals in specific situations. Even though Nehemiah serves the Persian king, he is first and foremost a servant of the Lord [Betts].

### **Bible Discussion Questions**

**Q1** a) **What was the nature of the problem of God's people in Jerusalem that Nehemiah found out? Why did Nehemiah cry? What would make you cry? [v.4]**

b) **When was the last time you were deeply burdened and moved to prayer and fasting concerning the condition of the people of God today: in your church/your family/your friends? [Reflect and share]**

c) **If you receive a prayer request in your inbox, to pray for someone you know who is facing some health issue for instance, would you pray for that person? How committed are you to intercessory prayer on behalf of that person or for other believers? What do you think are obstacles to intercede for others? [Discuss and share]**

#### **Suggested answers/pointers**

a) **See NOTES**

b) People cry during movies or while listening to a song. They cry for profound reasons or for no apparent reason at all. It can be simple or complex, sorrowful or petty. Or perhaps we are among those who don't believe in showing our feelings. Perhaps nothing moves us to tears.

Nehemiah sat down and cried because the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates were burned. He suffered in his soul because God's city and his people were treated with contempt. The hardships of his countrymen moved him. He was troubled by the sins of his people and his own implication in all that Israel had endured.

Human emotions are rich, and they reflect part of the image of God that we bear. But it might do us well to consider what bothers us, what stirs the deep well of our emotions. How many times do our sins, or the failures of others, unsettle us to the point of such caring? Are we passionate for God's reputation and that of his church? Are we distressed and driven to prayer on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who suffer for their faith?

c) **Open sharing**

**Q2**

a) Nehemiah is a great example of someone whose desire was to please God and glorify Him. His intentions and aspirations were God-focused rather than self-focused. When he heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and God's people were living in distress, God's driving purpose for Nehemiah kicked in. Nehemiah prayed a profound prayer of praise, adoration, submission, and request.

**Is your dominant purpose in life like Nehemiah to glorify God and do His will as revealed in Scripture? If not, what can be done to align yourself to God's purpose for your life [Personal reflections and sharing]**

b) Nehemiah understands that both he and his people were called to be servants of the Lord. Eight times the word "servant" appears in this prayer. He refers to himself, Moses, and to all of Israel as God's servants [vv.8-10].

**Do you see your identity as a servant of God? Why do you think it is important for us to recognize that this is our identity?**

**Suggested answers/pointers**

a) **Personal reflections and sharing**

b) **See NOTES**