

Small Group Study Guide



January 12, 2020

A Different Approach

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you are the source of the very life into which we awakened this morning. Keep us grateful for your gifts and humble in heart as we seek to use them in your service. Keep shaping and guiding us in all we do. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE : Nehemiah 1:1-11

1The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, 2one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. 3They replied, ‘The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.’ 4 When I heard these words **I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.** 5I said, ‘O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; 6let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. 7We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses. 8Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; 9but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.” 10They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. 11O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!’ At the time, I was cupbearer to the king.



INTRODUCTION

This is that time of year when we become painfully aware of where we are not, who we are not, and what we need to do differently. Traditionally, the New Year is a season of self-absorption. It's all about what we can do to make ourselves better people. The result is that health clubs, debt counselors, and vitamin shops do a booming business.

But we tend to forget that the people we respect the most didn't devote their lives to becoming the best versions of themselves. They devoted their lives to making a difference in the world . . . or in someone's world.

Nehemiah's heart broke for the people of Jerusalem. He was stirred into action and he led the people of Israel in constructing the wall in Jerusalem, expanding its population, correcting social abuses, and improving the worship life in the community.

QUESTIONS

- Did you make a New Year's resolution? If so, what motivated you to make it?
- Talk about one of your heroes—either someone from history or someone you knew personally. What qualities did that person have that made you look up to him or her?
- During the message, Eric said, "Jesus taught that devotion to God is measured in terms of our devotion to others." Respond to that statement. In what ways does it challenge your assumptions about faith?
- What are some things that prevent you from moving from just feeling compassion for others to acting compassionately on others' behalf?
- What is one thing you can do this week to begin to identify what breaks your heart? What can this group do to help and support you?

FINAL APPLICATION

What breaks your heart? What needs to be done around you? If you really want to become a better person, do something to make the world a better place. Be a means to an end.