

Life Group Topic #2
Life is more Like a River than a Lake!
Nehemiah 1:11- 2:10

WELCOME: (15 minutes)

Which of the following would you first choose to do and why?

- Spend a day hiking along a raging river
- Spend a day canoeing across a peaceful lake
- Spend a day reading a book on the beach of an expansive ocean.

WORSHIP: (15 minutes)

Use whatever means possible to turn the group's attention to the wonder and majesty of our God- including music, prayer, meditation on the Psalms, and other art forms.

WORD APPLICATION: (45 minutes)

Briefly read or paraphrase the following sermon summary before moving to the heart of this section: the discussion around the application questions.

Nehemiah 1:11-2:10

Life is more like a river than a lake! In a lake we take our towel to the beach, place it in a dry place and go out into the water fully expecting that the towel and the beach will remain where they are and we will come back to them. When we enter a river, we never leave our towel on the beach expecting that we will get out on the same beach that we entered at. We assume that a river will carry us along and we will not even know that we are moving except by the changing scenery along the bank. When we decide to get out of the water we are at a place that is different from where we entered the river.

Today I am going to invite you to get out of the river of life for a few moments and look at the shore you are now on, look at the current in the river and decide whether it is time for you to resist the currents that have carried you.

Nehemiah had an awakening moment at the citadel of Susa...in a moment of time; God swept away the web of disinformation that had entangled him for so long. In a moment of clarity he saw God's view of reality...the things that were most important to Him...and he was overwhelmed and moved to weep, mourn, fast and pray. He got out of the river that had carried him for a lifetime and saw a shore that was so different than what he had assumed. .

Nehemiah's awakening moment immediately moved him to prayer...he was overwhelmed with the status quo that God revealed and prayer was the only answer.

We have read the words of Nehemiah's prayer and noted that it was...

- In faith
- With identification
- With pleading

But we must not miss that it was **with listening**. I have no idea how many times he may have repeated that prayer in his weeping, mourning and fasting but it went on for days. Sometimes we have that limited view of prayer when God intended prayer as a dialogue between us and him. That requires me to listen. Is it strange to you that in John 10 Jesus sheep hear and know His voice? Have you ever prayed Samuels's prayer from I Samuel 3:10...*Speak, your servant is listening?*

Over those days of weeping, mourning, fasting and praying God began to speak to Nehemiah and answer his prayer...*please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me.*

Prayer involves...

- **Listening and Waiting**

Four long months went by and there are no entries in Nehemiah's journal during that time...just a repetition of the prayer. But 1:11 made clear to us that Nehemiah's insight and perspective were changing...God's delays are not God's denials. Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Romans 8:22-25 says ...*Waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting.*

God speaks! To think that the details of his interaction with the king were not a part of the discernment that God gave Nehemiah means that his waiting on God was a waste of time. God told him what to do down the details...

1. **His sad demeanor was planned** so that the king introduced the subject...it was a dangerous ploy because the king noticing grief in a palace context that always was concerned about the security of the king was a fearful place. Would he interpret the sadness as the evidence of some possible palace coup...Nehemiah *was very much afraid*.
2. **He appealed to the king's personal and national abhorrence** for the desecration of the graves of someone's forefathers when he spoke of the city where his ancestors were buried

- **Action**

1. **The plan and dream of God was to have Nehemiah leave his job for 12 years**. In this ancient setting that was absolutely unheard of, impossible and mind-boggling!
2. **Give me letters of safe conduct to the Persian governors** west of the Euphrates River...he knew that they were critical of the Jews
3. **Give me a letter to the keeper of the king's forest**---he even knew his name. He knew the forest nearest Jerusalem and asked for the raw materials to do the job.

These were huge requests but not only was each of them granted, the king sent along a military escort for protection and the declaration of his endorsement and authority.

Can I remind you of where it all began?

- God intervened and told the truth so disinformation was shattered
- Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted and prayed
- Nehemiah listened and God spoke
- Nehemiah acted and God intervened

The whole series of steps are saturated in prayer.

Word Application Questions:

1. Read through Nehemiah 1:1-2:10. Note that out of his time of weeping, pray and fasting (1:4), came a clear understanding of what God was asking him to do. What are the lessons in that for us today?
2. What has been your experience of listening prayer?
3. The focus of the text is not how Nehemiah recognized God's voice, but his courageous obedience to what God prompted him to do. Where do we need courage?
4. Look at the four progressive steps above that brought about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Which of these demonstrates the greatest roadblock to the rebuilding God wants to do in your life? In your family? In our church?
5. What concrete steps might God be prodding our Life Group towards this year as we consider these four steps?
6. Would you be willing to give 20 minutes of each day for prayer...not just a listing of requests but taking an opportunity to listen to God. It will not be a clearing my mind kind of listening but a focus on the Word of God and time to allow the Holy Spirit to speak.

WITNESS: (15 minutes)

This section is a vision-casting time designed to get the group strategizing and making concrete plans towards reaching outward to a lost world. Relational outreach always has the goal of ultimately enfolding those we reach into the Life Group.