

**Nehemiah: Calling**  
Nehemiah 1:1-11

**MAIN POINT:** When we sense or receive a “calling,” we are moved to meet some need in a way that connects us to a purpose and task larger than ourselves.

**Introduction:**

**Development of a Call:**

[NOTE TO LEADERS: For your background information, read 2 Kings 25:9-21 and Ezra 4:7-24, attached below at the end of this discussion guide. These passages will give you an idea of the sequence of events that set the stage for Nehemiah’s calling. If you think it will help the group, feel free to read these passages in the group setting, too.]

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Nehemiah 1:1-4; then ask the group to respond to these questions:

- **Why is Nehemiah so upset when he hears of Jerusalem’s plight?**
- **What was his relationship or connection to the need?**
- **Are there any examples of circumstances similar to that of Jerusalem in our world today?**
- **When news of exiled people, brokenness, hunger, lostness comes to you, how do you respond? Despair? Worry? Acceptance? Prayer? Action?**

**Prayer of Confession:**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Nehemiah 1:5-7; then ask volunteers to respond to the following questions:

- **Why do you think Nehemiah felt the need to confess his sins and those of his family?**
- **Can one person seek forgiveness on behalf of another? What are some examples (biblical or in our times)?**
- **What role do you think confession should play in our corporate worship or prayer?**

**Plea for Help**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Nehemiah 1:8-11; then ask volunteers to respond to the following questions:

- **Why do you think Nehemiah spent time reminding God of God’s promises before making his request? What might that look like in the way we practice prayer?**
- **Based on Nehemiah’s prayer, what does he think about God? To what extent would you agree?**
- **Do you think Nehemiah had a plan in mind at this point in the story? Why or why not?**
- **What resources did Nehemiah have?**
- **What help did Nehemiah need?**
- **What is Nehemiah’s specific request of God? Why do you think Nehemiah took this approach?**
- **So far in the book of Nehemiah, God has not spoken or acted. What significance do you see in that?**

## **Our Calling**

Ask volunteers to respond to these general questions about calling:

- **Pastor Andy said that our calling can arise from being moved by the needs of others. There are lots of heartbreaking needs in the world. How do we know which ones are the basis for our calling?**
- **How do you know it's a calling and not a passing fancy?**
- **Does a calling have to be for a lifetime or can it be for a limited time?**
- **How would you distinguish between these three ways of responding to a calling: (1) professional vocation; (2) a volunteer involvement with some organization outside of your work life; (3) a personal interest or passion.**
  
- **Pastor Andy also said that our calling can arise from some painful experience in our own lives. What needs or painful personal experience have moved you recently?**
- **Have you sensed God calling you to respond to those needs?**
- **What can you do today to start?**
- **How can we help?**

**Prayer:** Jesus, Divine Caller of vocations,  
You invite some to chosen professions,  
Others to distinctive spiritual work!  
Your call may reflect one's ambitions,  
Or may be a command to a special calling.  
Inspire us to always know within our hearts,  
What particular type of work is fitting  
To do Your will at that particular time.  
Your many callings vary immensely.  
They are all reflections of Your holiness.  
Help us to discover our unique calling and  
Respond in obedience to You.

## **Nehemiah 1:1-11**

In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign,<sup>[a]</sup> I was at the fortress of Susa. <sup>2</sup> Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire."

<sup>4</sup> When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Then I said,

"O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands, <sup>6</sup> listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! <sup>7</sup> We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.

<sup>8</sup> "Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. <sup>9</sup> But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth,<sup>[b]</sup> I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honored.'

<sup>10</sup> "The people you rescued by your great power and strong hand are your servants. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me.<sup>[c]</sup> Put it into his heart to be kind to me."

In those days I was the king's cup-bearer.

## **2 Kings 25:9-21**

Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard and an official of the Babylonian king, arrived in Jerusalem. <sup>9</sup> He burned down the Temple of the Lord, the royal palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem. He destroyed all the important buildings<sup>[d]</sup> in the city. <sup>10</sup> Then he supervised the entire Babylonian army as they tore down the walls of Jerusalem on every side. <sup>11</sup> Then Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took as exiles the rest of the people who remained in the city, the defectors who had declared their allegiance to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the population. <sup>12</sup> But the captain of the guard allowed some of the poorest people to stay behind to care for the vineyards and fields.

<sup>13</sup> The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars in front of the Lord's Temple, the bronze water carts, and the great bronze basin called the Sea, and they carried all the bronze away to Babylon. <sup>14</sup> They also took all the ash buckets, shovels, lamp snuffers, ladles, and all the other bronze articles used for making sacrifices at the Temple. <sup>15</sup> The captain of the guard also took the incense burners and basins, and all the other articles made of pure gold or silver.

<sup>16</sup> The weight of the bronze from the two pillars, the Sea, and the water carts was too great to be measured. These things had been made for the Lord's Temple in the days of Solomon. <sup>17</sup> Each of the pillars was 27 feet<sup>[e]</sup> tall. The bronze capital on top of each pillar was 7 1/2 feet<sup>[f]</sup> high and was decorated with a network of bronze pomegranates all the way around.

<sup>18</sup> Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took with him as prisoners Seraiah the high priest, Zephaniah the priest of the second rank, and the three chief gatekeepers. <sup>19</sup> And from among the people still hiding in the city, he took an officer who had been in charge of the Judean army; five of the king's personal advisers; the army commander's chief secretary, who was in charge of recruitment; and sixty other citizens.

<sup>20</sup> Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took them all to the king of Babylon at Riblah. <sup>21</sup> And there at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king of Babylon had them all put to death. So the people of Judah were sent into exile from their land.

## **Ezra 4:7-24**

<sup>7</sup> Even later, during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia,<sup>[c]</sup> the enemies of Judah, led by Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel, sent a letter to Artaxerxes in the Aramaic language, and it was translated for the king.

<sup>8</sup> <sup>[d]</sup>Rehum the governor and Shimshai the court secretary wrote the letter, telling King Artaxerxes about the situation in Jerusalem. <sup>9</sup> They greeted the king for all their colleagues—the judges and local leaders, the people of Tarpel, the Persians, the Babylonians, and the people of Erech and Susa (that is, Elam). <sup>10</sup> They also sent greetings from the rest of the people whom the great and noble Ashurbanipal<sup>[e]</sup> had deported and relocated in Samaria and throughout the neighboring lands of the province west of the Euphrates River.

<sup>11</sup> This is a copy of their letter:

“To King Artaxerxes, from your loyal subjects in the province west of the Euphrates River.

<sup>12</sup> “The king should know that the Jews who came here to Jerusalem from Babylon are rebuilding this rebellious and evil city. They have already laid the foundation and will soon finish its walls. <sup>13</sup> And the king should know that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, it will be much to your disadvantage, for the Jews will then refuse to pay their tribute, customs, and tolls to you.

<sup>14</sup> “Since we are your loyal subjects<sup>[g]</sup> and do not want to see the king dishonored in this way, we have sent the king this information. <sup>15</sup> We suggest that a search be made in your ancestors’ records, where you will discover what a rebellious city this has been in the past. In fact, it was destroyed because of its long and troublesome history of revolt against the kings and countries who controlled it. <sup>16</sup> We declare to the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the province west of the Euphrates River will be lost to you.”

<sup>17</sup> Then King Artaxerxes sent this reply:

“To Rehum the governor, Shimshai the court secretary, and their colleagues living in Samaria and throughout the province west of the Euphrates River. Greetings.

<sup>18</sup> “The letter you sent has been translated and read to me. <sup>19</sup> I ordered a search of the records and have found that Jerusalem has indeed been a hotbed of insurrection against many kings. In fact, rebellion and revolt are normal there! <sup>20</sup> Powerful kings have ruled over Jerusalem and the entire province west of the Euphrates River, receiving tribute, customs, and tolls. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, issue orders to have these men stop their work. That city must not be rebuilt except at my express command. <sup>22</sup> Be diligent, and don’t neglect this matter, for we must not permit the situation to harm the king’s interests.”

<sup>23</sup> When this letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai, and their colleagues, they hurried to Jerusalem. Then, with a show of strength, they forced the Jews to stop building.

<sup>24</sup> So the work on the Temple of God in Jerusalem had stopped, and it remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.