

BUILD MY LIFE

"A REASON TO CELEBRATE"

NEHEMIAH 12:1-47

We worship the One True God. But our forms of worship can be many. While our God is one, there are a variety of ways we worship this solitary God. We may worship God through prayer, biblical study, singing, service, and generosity. Each fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - can celebrate God in meaningful worship.

Worship can also take place in many different locations. We can worship the creativity of God in the beauty of his creation. We can worship the holiness of God in the silence of a cathedral. We can also worship the saving power of God in the squalor of a lost world. Anywhere we are, we can worship God, for he is there.

Worship is an intensely personal experience. You may worship God in the quietness of the morning before others enter your day. Others may pull away from busy workday crowds and seek God in the solitary silence of night. Just as our tears of joy or sorrow most often fall when we are alone, so our heart's cry for God is often most deeply experienced when no one else is listening. Private connection with God should be a frequent pursuit of worship in the life of every Christian.

Private worship is not the only form of worship. Much is to be gained from gathering to worship

Corporate worship is a regular gracious reminder that it's not about you. You've been born into a life that is a celebration of another.

– Paul David Tripp

God together. Corporate worship can move us into an experience of God that surpasses our own private limitations and confusions. Gathering with other believers to sing, pray, and explore God's word can transform us just as much as doing these practices privately. Sharing communion and celebrating baptism together creates a bond with others that can strengthen faith and commitment to Christ. We can learn humility by following others in worship. Often, joy expressed in corporate worship can lift our own spirits in ways we would never experience on our own.

Which do you gravitate to more - worshipping God in private or worshipping God with others? Don't stop doing what is most meaningful to you. But as you pursue God, consider adding ways of worship that challenge your conventions. Be careful: the way you worship God can easily become what you worship instead of God. If you are a private worshipper, push yourself to gather with others to experience God in ways that are beyond your invention. If you gravitate to worship services with loud and vibrant crowds, consider seeking God in quiet places where no one else can be found. Seeking God often involves finding him in the places beyond comfort or familiarity.

This Week's Core Competency

Worship – Psalm 95:1-7 I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Our Core Competency of Worship may be interpreted by many to teach that the experience of worship is primarily private. To celebrate God for "what He has done for me" is an cont. pg. 2

important and vital practice of our faith. But often, to focus on what God has done for me alone is to forget what God has done for others. What God has done for others can be of great encouragement to each of us and should also be included in our understanding of worship. We are reminded that our life and faith are not only ours but are also shared with a larger community of believers. The Core Competency of Worship could also be stated, "We worship God for who He is and what He has done for us." Worship that is shared in the family of believers can be worship that is more rich and multifaceted. Corporate worship is important to pursue as a practice of the Christian faith. Our time together in singing, scripture reading, preaching, communion, baptism, and prayer is just as important as private times of devotion and praise. Worship focused on God should include both dimensions of the individual and the broader body of Christ. One-dimensional worship is not enough.

In Nehemiah 12, the people of God dedicated the newly completed wall of Jerusalem through a grand corporate worship experience. Great rejoicing (Nehemiah 12:43) was both the purpose and the result of this exhilarating corporate worship experience. Our worship together today can equally be life-changing and proclamational to a watching and listening world.

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Nehemiah 12:27-47

(Consult your Bible for the complete chapter)

27 At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. 28 The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem—from the villages of the Netophathites, 29 from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the musicians had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. 30 When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.

31 I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate. 32 Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them, 33 along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, 35 as well as some priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zakkur, the son of Asaph, 36 and his associates—Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani—with musical instruments prescribed by David the man of God. Ezra the teacher of the Law led the procession. 37 At the Fountain Gate they continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the site of David's palace to the Water Gate on the east.

38 The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together

with half the people—past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, 39 over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped.

40 The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials, 41 as well as the priests—Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets— 42 and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. 43 And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.

44 At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites. 45 They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the musicians and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon. 46 For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the musicians and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. 47 So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the musicians and the gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

Only in 12:27-47

*Circle each group of people indentified in Neh. 12:27-30.

*Circle each group of people indentified in Neh. 12:31-37.

*Circle each group of people indentified in Neh. 12:44-47.

*Underline the focus of the dedication in Neh. 12:27.

*Double underline the activity of the priests before the celebration in Neh. 12:30.

*Place brackets around each occurrence of direction in Neh. 12:31 and 38.

*Draw a box around each expression of worship found in Neh. 12:40-43.

*Draw a line from "They" in Nehemiah 12:45 to the group that is identified in Neh. 12:44-47.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Which groups of people are identified in Neh. 12:1-26? Why are they identified here in Nehemiah?
2. What activities are involved in the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem?
3. What does Neh. 12:30 contribute to our understanding of worshipping the One True God?
4. What words are used to describe the emotional tone of this dedication?
5. Describe the path of each group and final destination of these groups as described in Neh. 12:31-43.
6. What was the result of this dedication of the wall of Jerusalem?
7. What authoritative sources governed the activity of Neh. 12:44-47?
8. Who was Zerubbabel and why is he mentioned (Neh. 12:1, 47)?
9. Many critics of organized religion argue that funding for religious worship is a waste of money and resources. From what you have learned from Neh. 12, how would you respond to such a criticism?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Nehemiah, and the people he assembled, completed the re-construction of the wall of Jerusalem in just 52 days. What an amazing accomplishment showcasing God's provision and protection! We learn of this impressive accomplishment midway through the book of Nehemiah (Neh. 6:15). One would expect a "ribbon cutting" ceremony or wall dedication to take place shortly after construction completion. Once the wall was dedicated, then the business of what happened inside the walls could commence. Nehemiah operated in reverse. Before the celebration of a wall dedication, Nehemiah built, with equal precision and determination, the people who would inhabit and frequent the contents of the city of Jerusalem. The wall was important, but not as important as the people of God who would congress with a holy God inside this holy city (Neh. 11:1,18). A prepared people made holy by the word of God (Neh. 8-9), serviced by holy priests and Levites (Neh. 10-12), would then be ready to celebrate appropriately all that God had provided for them in the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem.

The first half of Nehemiah 12 is focused on the priests and Levites who returned to Jerusalem and who would have been active in the rebuilt temple. The book of Nehemiah records an impressive number of lists of people who built, inhabited and surrounded the city of Jerusalem. These lists serve as proof of the authenticity and historicity of Nehemiah's writing. The book of Nehemiah has many theological and moral lessons for its readers. But equally important, Nehemiah accurately described the return of the Chosen People to the Promised Land of the Covenant. The claim of the Jewish people possessing the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 12 & 15) had historical credence and the sovereign blessings from the Persian empire of Nehemiah and Ezra's day. A distorted or manufactured "work of history" often only spoke of heroes and their victories. Nehemiah's mention of ordinary people raises the historical quality of his narrative. "Unexciting as the first half of the chapter is, it has a point to make by its refusal to treat bygone generations as of no further interest. And if

history-writing inevitably distorts reality by its concentration on outstanding people and on the forces of change, here is something to redress the balance" (Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, 121).

The second half of Nehemiah 12 describes the joyous spectacle of the "dedication of the wall of Jerusalem" (Neh. 12:27). Nehemiah organized a parade of choirs, musicians, priests, Levites, and leaders of the people. This large band of people included people from inside and outside the city. This procession was divided in half with the first group traveling "to the right" (Neh. 12:31) mirroring Nehemiah's original survey of the wall upon his arrival in Jerusalem. This group is recorded traveling as far as the Water Gate. They may have continued to travel along the Eastern Wall until they reached the Temple. This first group was led by Ezra the priest, highlighting his leadership in the rebuilding of the temple and his authoritative teaching of the Law (Neh. 12:36). The second group headed in the opposite direction, visiting a number of the gates restored on the west and north side of the wall. The start of the procession for both groups most likely occurred at the Valley Gate on the lower southwest portion of the wall. Both groups would ultimately proceed north and meet at the temple for a final grand performance of praise and worship to God who gave them great joy (Neh. 12:40-43).

You can imagine the spectacle of such a parade! Marching atop the walls would be a grand sight. "The walls were wide enough for the procession referred to. According to Kenyon's excavations, Nehemiah's wall was nearly nine feet wide" (Mervin Breneman, *The New American Commentary*, 266). Choirs and musicians singing and playing in unison and/or antiphonally on top of the walls would have been quite a site. "Their walking on top of the wall visually demonstrated that the walls were strong, a rejoinder to Tobiah's earlier mocking claim that the wall would be so weak that even a fox on top of it would break it down (4:3). Perhaps Nehemiah wanted Tobiah to see that with God's help the project was completed in spite of his and others' opposition. Since the people now carried no spears,

swords, or bows (cf. 4:16,18), the enemies had no doubt withdrawn. Seeing the two large processions marching on the walls must have been an impressive sight" (Gene Getz, Nehemiah, Bible Knowledge Commentary, Vol. 1, 694).

Both groups make their way from the Valley Gate to the Temple. The distance traveled by each group would be approximately half a mile each. The total circumference of the city wall would have been anywhere from one to three miles depending upon how large the city was at the time of Nehemiah's return to the city. People inside the city could have seen and heard both choirs. People outside the city may have seen both choirs at times depending where they stood. The Temple section of the city would have been the widest distance between the walls of the city. Even here, both choirs would be only 300 to 500 yards apart, plenty close enough for cymbals, trumpets and choir shouts to join in shaking the city with joy. This grand finale of praise and worship on the Temple grounds enveloped all the people from the lofty priests to the lowly women and children. The noise of such blessed rejoicing was heard far beyond the new boundaries of Jerusalem.

After this grand dedication, Nehemiah, with his administrator's skill, set up the support of the ministry of the Levites, priests and temple worship musicians (Neh. 12:44-47). The dedication of the wall and the celebration of worship in the temple was not to end after the dedication of the wall. The major purpose of the wall was to protect and support the important work of the priests and Levites in the Temple for the people of God. Worship of God by the people of God required

means and faithful administration of resources to ensure that such worship continued for generations to come. The continuation of temple worship was just as important as the inauguration of renewed devotion. Nehemiah, ever the wise administrator, valued both spectacle and sustainability. Nehemiah was careful to base this administration upon the Word of God (Neh.12:44) and the example of godly leaders (Neh. 12:45-46).

God's people coming together to express gratitude and joy because of who God is and what God has done is life changing. Corporate worship is a powerful reminder to a forgetful people of God. Corporate worship can even be a form of testimony to those outside the walls of biblical community. Corporate worship is not the only expression of ministry of the people of God, but it should also not be neglected or forgotten. Worship ministry may at times be costly and may require sacrifice from many people. The end results of a purified, skilled and dedicated worship ministry can bring great glory to God and great joy to God's people and be a powerful witness to those not yet members of the family of God.

How important is worshiping God with other believers to you? Are you casual about your participation in corporate worship or are you passionate and even financially supportive of the efforts of your church to worship God together? Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength includes worshiping God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Loving your neighbor includes worshiping God together with others for mutual encouragement and witness of the goodness of God.

day 4 EMBRACE – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

*Some days, celebrate the greatness of God in big ways with many others.
On other days, support the great work of God with generosity and service. In both ways, God will be honored and people will be changed.
And you just might enjoy it!*

Our desire is to not be hearers of the word only, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

What ideas from Nehemiah 12 would apply to Christians today?

How can you improve your worship of God?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 27 **thanksgiving** This word, *towdah* in the Hebrew, is repeated throughout this passage (Neh. 12:27, 31, 38, 40). In its root form, the word literally means "to use or hold out the hand" or "to physically throw (a stone, an arrow) at something." Often it is used of praise, especially to revere or worship with extended hands. The word for "choirs" in Nehemiah 12 is this same word, literally "the company of those who give thanks."

v. 27 **music** Literally, "singers" or "music makers." Can refer to either vocalists and/or those skilled on a variety of instruments. Word is used in Neh. 12:36 for "musical instruments" and in Neh. 12:46-47 as "singers" or "musicians."

v. 28 **musicians** Literally "sons of the singers." "The Levites were gathered from their places to sing joyful songs, and now the 'sons of the singers' are collected from the same places and for the same purpose. 'Sons of the singers' means those skilled in song" (Loring Batten, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, International Critical Commentary, 280). These singers are mentioned as a distinct group of temple servants from the same towns as the Levites and therefore were most likely Levites as well (Neh. 12:29,42,45,47;13:5,10).

v. 30 **purified** How the priests purified themselves is difficult to determine. Perhaps the priests did so "by sprinkling the water of purification upon them, by which the tabernacle and sacred utensils were purified; (Numbers 8:7) by solemn prayers and sacrifices; and especially by keeping themselves from all impurity. And purified the people - By sprinkling, it is probable, the same water upon them, and by prayers and sacrifices" (Joseph Benson, *Nehemiah 12*, Commentary on Old and New Testaments, www.studylight.org). Holiness and purity before God were precursors to joyous praise of God. Purification may have included actions similar to the occasion when King Hezekiah called for a purification of the nation and temple (2 Chronicles 29).

v. 31 **top of the wall** "Much turns upon the meaning of the preposition here used. The words in the Hebrew, 'from above, with respect to the wall' have been considered by some to mean 'beyond, at a little distance from the wall;' by others 'over against the wall.' But a comparison with its use in 2 Chronicles 13:4 ('upon'), Jonah 4:6 ('over') shows that the rendering of the English version may very well be defended" (Herbert Edward Ryle, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, *Nehemiah 12*, Cambridge Bible Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

v. 40 **house of God** "The destination was the house of God, for the walls were, appropriately, the circumference, not the focal point of the celebrations, and it was the choirs, not the officials, who led the way. So while Ezra the scribe (v.36) headed the first procession, Nehemiah's place in the other group was after the choir (v.38); and the climax was the offering of great sacrifices... with great joy (v. 43)" (Kidner, 127).

v. 43 **rejoicing** Hebrew "*samach*" means "to brighten up the face" or "to make glad or merry." Often it refers to loud expressions of joy, including jumping or leaping. The word is often used in connection with festivals Also found in Nehemiah 12:27. The word is emphasized repeatedly in the climax of this dedication in Nehemiah 12:43 with the word "rejoicing." This rejoicing is so loud that those far away from Jerusalem are reported to hear it. This "rejoicing" is a play on words with the word "sang" in Neh.12:42. "Sang" would be better translated "sang loudly," coming from the Hebrew "*shamah*." The word "*shamah*" is most often translated "hear", but can express "that which is heard" or "that which is loudly heard." So the choir is loudly pronouncing its "*shamah*" (Neh. 12:42) and the people are responding with exhilarating "*samach*" (Neh. 12:43). Another alliterative word is used in Neh.12:43, the word "*simkha*" which also means "joy." This word is also used in Neh. 12:27. This word is used as the gift of "great joy" given to the people by God. Literally the phrase is repeated "God made them rejoice (*'samach'*) with joy (*'simkha'*) greatly!" God is responsible for both the agency and the provision of great joy.

v. 47 **Zerubbabel** Literally "offspring of Babylon." "A prominent Israelite who returned to Palestine after the exile and functioned as the governor of Jerusalem under the Persian ruler Darius... Some of the Hebrews, having returned to Judea under the leadership of Zerubbabel, began work on the reconstruction of the temple... The prophets Haggai and Zechariah furnished necessary moral and spiritual impetus for the work of rebuilding. Haggai castigated the Jews for their selfishness, indifference, and neglect, spurring Zerubbabel on to give proper oversight to the work in hand" (R. K. Harrison, "*Zerubbabel*," Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 5). Nehemiah would have been governor (Neh. 5:14) of Jerusalem after Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was instrumental in rebuilding the temple (Ezra 3:8). Ezra was significant for re-introducing the Law to the Chosen People (Ezra 7:10; Neh. 8:1). Nehemiah's rebuilt wall was culmination of all that Zerubbabel started in his return to Jerusalem from Babylon.

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Raise your hand if you have a lot happening this week. Children's Ministry has so many great things in the works for the week including flipping the switch to Central Bible Church, completing the Basix renovation, launching our new KinderKix area and preparing for Move Up Sunday. Many of our PantegoKids are starting back to school and we can't wait to celebrate with your family. Change can bring a myriad of emotions: excitement, concern, wonder, uncertainty, anxiety and joy. I remember the roller coaster of emotions the week before school and as far as I can tell not much has changed for our kids. They are nervous about what their new normal will look like. They wonder if their teacher will be nice and if their classes will be difficult. They are curious if they'll still have the same friend group after the summer break. Our circumstances may change but "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The Israelites celebrated their new beginning with joy and praise. How will your family celebrate this season of new beginnings? Why not start something new this week by beginning your day with a family devotion or prayer before the crew heads out the door? I recommend you take a look at 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." We are praying for a joyful new beginning this week!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Nehemiah 12:27-47

1. Why were the people celebrating?
2. What did the people do to celebrate the completion of the wall?
3. What did the leaders and members of the choir walk upon while celebrating?

What Do You Think

Read Nehemiah 4:3. How important do you think it was for the people to celebrate on top of the wall?

What R U Going To Do

How has God blessed you? Write a song of praise to celebrate!

Core Comp

Joy - I am happy on the inside no matter what's happening on the outside.

Memory Verse

Psalm 105:5 Remember the wonders He has done, His miracles, and the judgments He pronounced.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.