

# The Rebuild that Matters Most

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NEXT: From Northwest Houston to the World | March 8, 2026 | Nehemiah 8:1-18; Nehemiah 9:1-38; Nehemiah 10:1-39

*Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.*

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All right, Nehemiah chapter 8. Grab your Bibles, find Nehemiah chapter 8, and we are going to, for the sake of time, jump right on in.

Last week, we ended Nehemiah chapter 7. I encourage you nearly every week, if you miss any of these messages, go online or download our app and listen to these messages. They build on top of one another.

We left Nehemiah chapter 7 last week with basically this roll call of faith. Nehemiah is giving honor to the people who have come back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The walls had been in disrepair for a century - 100 years. And because of the people's work ethic, because of their commitment, because of their faith, these walls that had lain in ruins for 100 years were rebuilt in just 52 days. It was a miracle.

When we get to Nehemiah chapters 8 through 10, it covers what happens after the physical rebuilding of the walls. I'm titling the message today, if you're taking notes, "The Rebuild That Matters Most."

The physical wall needed reconstruction, no doubt about it. Without it, there was no safety. There was no security. Anybody could attack the city of Jerusalem at any time. You had physical danger that existed. On top of that, what struck Nehemiah the most, and what he was most concerned about, was that with the city of God in disrepair and threatened to be under attack, he felt that was a shame to the name and the glory of God.

And so he led this rebuilding effort. Up to this point, Nehemiah has kind of been the hero. He's been the one leading the charge. He's been the one getting all of the people together and giving them their different work to do. But when we get to this chapter, we start seeing a transition take place, and Nehemiah actually goes to the backdrop. We won't read his name very many times after Nehemiah chapter 7. It's just a few times in the rest of the book.

What we see is the people coming forward, and they begin to take ownership and responsibility in following the Lord. It really is beautiful.

They know that what's been accomplished wouldn't have happened without the help of their God. We looked at this last week in Nehemiah 6:16. They know that. And so, after rebuilding the physical wall, the people want to do a rebuild on their lives spiritually. That's why I'm calling it "The Rebuild That Matters Most."

We're going to look today at Nehemiah chapters 8, 9, and 10 and what Israel did to begin rebuilding their lives from a spiritual standpoint.

Now, this is important as it relates to our NEXT initiative as well. We can renovate this worship center, and we

can move forward in expanding the North Klein campus. We can do digital ministry expansion and broadcast ministry expansion. We can start a campus up in North Magnolia. We can plant churches all over the world.

But if we do all of this to grow and expand our church, but we're not growing and expanding spiritually and personally, if our hearts aren't growing and expanding in a love for God, and our hearts aren't growing and expanding in a love for people who are far from God, then does what we physically build really matter?

If we're not building walls around our marriages and building a godly community of faith where we love one another and care for one another, if we just build physically but don't build spiritually as well, we're missing the mark. Nehemiah teaches us the importance of doing both.

What does this rebuild look like? There are three actions Israel takes.

## A Renewed Commitment to the Word of God

They're going to rebuild spiritually, and it starts with a renewed commitment to the Word of God. Look at what they do, starting in Nehemiah 8:1:

*And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel.*

— Nehemiah 8:1

Again, the people are taking ownership. Nehemiah doesn't have to tell Ezra to bring the scroll. The people tell Ezra to bring the scroll. And they assemble right there at the Water Gate. This is a place in the old City of David where the majority of people could gather in one place.

They tell Ezra to bring the scroll, and they read from the Book of the Law of Moses. It's the first five books of our Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

*So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they were hearing, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it, facing the square before the Water Gate, from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand.*

— Nehemiah 8:2-3

For six hours, they listened to the reading of the Law of God. From the light of day, literally, is what the Hebrew says, to midday. All right? We all know what it is to binge-watch a television show. Well, they're binge-listening here to the Word of God, okay? Six hours.

*And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose.*

— Nehemiah 8:3-4

This is the idea of where a pulpit comes from. It's built up so that what is exalted is the Word of God being declared.

Scripture lists 13 names of people, and we don't know exactly who these people are. It could be a mixture of priests and Levites and laypeople, but they're standing at attention, giving attention to the reading of the Word.

*And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it, all the people stood.*

— Nehemiah 8:5

They're just showing reverence and honor, right? A judge walks into a courtroom, and everybody stands. If we were to say the Pledge, everybody would stand. At a wedding, when that bride comes down, everybody stands. It's just a symbol of honor and respect. And so they stand at the Word of God.

*And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.*

— Nehemiah 8:6

Then verse 7 lists a number of men, as well as Levites. Look at what these men did:

*They helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places.*

— Nehemiah 8:7

It's very important that we don't just read the Word of God, but that we understand the Word of God. That's one of my main responsibilities as a pastor - to proclaim the Word of God and then explain it in a way that you can understand.

I was with a group of pastors this week, and they asked me for some preaching advice. What was the greatest preaching advice I've ever been given?

I said, "You know, it's interesting. The greatest preaching advice I've ever been given was not by a seminary professor. It was not by a pastor. The best preaching advice I was ever given was by my dad, who was a blue-collar bricklayer."

When I started preaching, I'll always remember him telling me, "Jarrett, put it on a shelf where everybody can get it."

Meaning, don't make it so elementary that those who are senior saints and have been studying the Word for years feel like it's just so simple that they're wasting their time. Don't put it up here where only somebody with a PhD, some scholar, or some theologian can handle it. Instead, teach the Scripture and then explain it in a way where everybody can get it.

That's what these men are doing.

*They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*

— Nehemiah 8:8

If we want to rebuild spiritually, it begins right here with a renewed commitment to the Word of God. It's giving

God's Word its proper place in our lives.

The people of Israel had grown so distant from God. One of the reasons they were in exile is because they weren't putting the Word of God into practice. They weren't giving their lives to it. Then they're in exile, and they no longer spoke Hebrew. Most of them were illiterate. We have five or six copies of the Bible in our houses. They didn't have a copy of a scroll to read from.

This is why they needed somebody to read them the Word and then explain the Word to them - to give sense to what they were hearing.

I'll just tell you, when we live in rebellion, when we choose, like Israel, to go our own way and do our own thing, what happens is there is a natural drift away from the Lord. If you trace that drift back, you'll always see that it comes from the same place: You start drifting away from the Word of God.

I promise you that's the case. You're here this morning or watching online, and you're not as intimate with the Lord as you once were. You're not walking with the Lord as closely as you once were. I promise you, trace it back and you will find that, slowly but surely, you started drifting away from the Word of God.

Let me remind you that the enemy's best friend is busyness. He doesn't have to make you bad. He just wants to make you busy so that you neglect God's Word and begin to neglect spending time alone with God in His Word.

If he can distract you, make you busy, and occupy you with other things - even good things - he knows that if he can get you out of that time alone with the Lord in His Word, the drift is going to happen.

I've likened that drift - you've heard me say it before - to when I was in college and would get with my buddies and go float down a river. We'd buy those inner tubes and get in the river. Do you know what we did to float down the river? Absolutely nothing. We just sat in those inner tubes, and the current took us.

If you don't stay tied to the Word of God, that's what's going to happen to you. Because of the current of this world, combined with our sinful nature and our flesh, if we aren't aggressive in giving ourselves to the Word of God, we will look up and realize that distraction leads to distance every single time. We will just drift away from the Word, and the enemy knows this.

He knows what the Word is according to Jeremiah 23:29:

*Is not my word like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*

— Jeremiah 23:29

Do you think the enemy wants you reading the Word and breaking up that hard heart of ours? No, he doesn't want that.

He knows what the Word of God is according to Hebrews 4:12:

*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

— Hebrews 4:12

If the Word of God is taught right and applied right, it's like spiritual surgery every single week when you come in here. It's like taking a scalpel. And look, surgery hurts. It's never fun, but it's what we need.

Left on our own, we'll avoid spiritual surgery at all costs. The enemy knows that. He knows, according to Psalm 19, that the Word of God is perfect, right, and sure.

*The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure,  
making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure,  
enlightening the eyes.*

— Psalm 19:7-8

I'm just telling you, he'll do anything and everything he can to keep you from the Word of God.

I've seen it through the years. You can look like you have it all together on the outside. You might not even have any struggles or trials going on. But I'm telling you this: If you're not giving yourself to God's Word, your life will crumble. You'll crumble spiritually, void of any power. Whatever you're building on is not a solid foundation.

We need to take a page out of the nation of Israel's history today and realize that if we're going to spiritually rebuild our lives, it starts by doing exactly what they did. They renewed their commitment to the Word of God.

They started reading God's Word, and it had such a powerful effect on their lives. They start crying. They start weeping because they see how awesome God is and how awful they are. That's what happens when we get to know the Lord. We see how incredible He is, and we see how sinful we are.

Oftentimes, what happens is we can get discouraged in our walk with the Lord. It's like the closer we get to the sun, the hotter we're going to feel. The closer we get to holiness, the more unholy we're going to feel. Sometimes we want to give up and quit, but that's a good thing because it's showing us that we need the mercy of God. It's showing us that we need the grace of God.

These people see the glory and goodness of God, and they see their sin, so they begin to weep. Nehemiah says, "Don't weep. This is a time to celebrate."

*Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord.*

— Nehemiah 8:10

This is what it's all about. Nehemiah says, "Man, we've rebuilt the physical walls. That's great. But this is what it's all about. It's about rebuilding our spiritual lives. You've returned to the Lord."

So he says:

*Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

— Nehemiah 8:10

And do you know what they do? If you keep reading Nehemiah chapter 8, they come back the next day, in verse 13, for more of the Word. They want more of the Word and more explanation of the Word. That's what happens when you start taking in God's Word: You want more and more of it.

Notice that what follows hearing and understanding the Word is doing the Word and putting it into action.

We're in our Experiencing God study on Wednesday nights, and this is what we've been talking about the last two weeks. What Henry Blackaby says in his Experiencing God study is, "Obedience is the outward expression of my love for God." What he says is, "If we have an obedience problem, we have a love problem."

What you see in the nation of Israel is that they're falling back in love with God. They fall back in love with the Lord and say, "We'll do anything You tell us to do."

They're listening to the Book of Moses being read, and they realize in verse 14 that Moses called them to celebrate with this festival called the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths. It finds its root in Leviticus chapter 23. Just write that text down and look at it in your time alone with the Lord.

Moses commands Israel that, for a week, they're to take off work and essentially live in tents. For a week, they are to honor the Lord through celebration, feasting, prayer, and listening to the Word of God. They are to commemorate God delivering them out of the bondage and slavery of Egypt. That's what the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles, was.

It had been kept sporadically throughout the nation of Israel's history, but it hadn't been kept in a long time. Nehemiah notes in verses 17 and 18:

*And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so.*

— Nehemiah 8:17

That's about a thousand years.

What Nehemiah is saying is that when Israel got right with God and renewed their commitment to the Word of God, they didn't just hear it and understand it. They did it.

They didn't cut any corners. You read about it. They took the exact kinds of trees and branches that were to cover their tents. They met as a solemn assembly, together as one. No cutting corners. They did exactly what the Word of God said, by spirit and by letter. This is how serious they were about renewing their commitment to the Word of God.

Nehemiah notes that it hadn't been done this way in a thousand years.

What an example Israel is for us. Does your life need spiritual rebuilding? Are you in a dead marriage that

needs spiritual rebuilding? Give it to the Word of God. Did your integrity crumble or crash because of a decision or choice that you made? How do you rebuild your integrity? You give your life to the Word of God. Whatever needs rebuilding - your family or anything else - give it to the Word of God.

## A Renewed Commitment to Prayer

Secondly, we see a renewed commitment to prayer, specifically to confession and repentance of sin.

Nehemiah chapter 9 is actually the longest prayer we have in Scripture. If we were to take time to read it, it would take all of about seven minutes. Isn't that interesting? The longest prayer in the Bible is about seven minutes.

What's the lesson? It's not long prayers. It's the heart behind the prayers, right? It's the sincerity behind the prayers and the honesty behind the prayers. If this prayer is anything, it is sincere and honest.

You've got this track on repeat, if you will. It begins with the people praying and fasting. By the way, they observed the Feast of Booths, the Feast of Tabernacles, which was a week long. Then, one day later, they come back and do what we see in Nehemiah chapter 9.

In other words, when I talk about commitment, these people were committed. They were all in.

They fast. They withhold the physical in order to seek the spiritual. They don't want to just say they're sorry to God for sinning against Him. They want to show they're sorry. So they fast, and they wear sackcloth, something that would be extremely uncomfortable. Can you imagine how itchy that would be?

But they're putting all of that away because they want to show God that they mean business.

Let me just ask you a question: How long has it been since you showed God that you mean business with Him? You want Him to come through. You want Him to do something. You're broken over your sin. How long has it been since you gave up a meal? How long has it been since you gave up the physical in order to seek the spiritual?

"God, I'm not just saying I'm sorry. I'm showing You I'm sorry."

These people begin to read the Word of God. Scripture says in Nehemiah 9:3 that they listened to the Word of God for a quarter of the day. They're listening to the Word of God, and they know they've broken His commands. You can't listen to the Word of God and be honest with yourself without knowing you've broken His commands.

In fact, look at verses 9 through 15 of Nehemiah chapter 9. I'm not going to read it all, but I want you to underline in your Bibles how they reflect on the goodness of God. Just notice the language:

*You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt.*

*You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh.*

*You knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself.*

*You divided the sea before them.*

*By a pillar of cloud you led them.*

*You came down on Mount Sinai.*

*You made known to them your holy Sabbath.*

*You gave them bread from heaven.*

— Nehemiah 9:15

This is what Nehemiah 9 is. It's all of these things God has done that they're reflecting on. Then, as soon as they reflect on the goodness of God and how great He is, they remember and reflect on how they and their ancestors spit in God's face and rebelled against Him.

*But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck.*

— Nehemiah 9:16-17

That's the track playing on repeat throughout Nehemiah chapter 9: "God, You've been awesome. You've been faithful. You've been good. We have not been."

It uses words like rebellious, hard-hearted, acting presumptuously, stubborn, and stiff-necked. Those are just some of the words used in Nehemiah 9 to describe the people's heart and attitude toward God.

You'd better believe they needed to confess and repent. And we do too.

Listen, the Christian life is one of confession and repentance. There's a one-time repentance where we turn from our sin, make a U-turn, and follow Christ. That's a repentance that leads to salvation.

But then, for the Christian, every single day we live a life of repentance. Why? Because every single day we live a life of sin. So we've got to get really good at repenting.

We were in our First Saturday Prayer time yesterday, and we had a time of private confession where it was just silent before the Lord. We searched our hearts and confessed our sins to the Lord.

I told them that confession is like cleaning pipes, all right? I've got four girls at the house, so we keep Drano near us, all right? There's a lot of hair in those drains. We've got to unclog them.

Well, that's what confession is. It's unclogging the drain. When we come before the Lord, we call our sin out. That's what Israel does. They didn't make excuses. They didn't say, "Yeah, but." They didn't blame somebody else. They owned it. They said, "This is our sin."

That's what confession is.

If we want to rebuild our lives spiritually, it starts by doing an honest assessment and saying, "Okay, God, this is how far I've drifted. I'm sorry, and I'm asking Your forgiveness."

The Bible says:

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

— 1 John 1:9

Look at David's life. Psalm 32 is a confession of his sin. He said:

*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

— Psalm 32:3-4

But when he confessed, in Psalm 51 he said:

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation.*

— Psalm 51:12

Some of us have no joy in the Lord because we're living in sin, and we haven't confessed that sin. You're out of fellowship with God.

Adrian Rogers, the great pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, said, "The most miserable man on earth is not an unsaved man. The most miserable man on earth is a saved man out of fellowship with Jesus Christ."

I believe that to be true.

This is why we've got to get good at confession and repentance. As believers, if you're a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will never live in habitual, consistent sin and be happy with it. God will make you miserable. It's part of the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

It reminds me of the preacher who woke up one Sunday morning and didn't want to go to church that day. It does happen from time to time, you know. But he was the one preaching.

He didn't care. He called his staff and said, "Hey, I'm sick. I'm not going to be able to preach today."

He wasn't sick. He just didn't want to go to church. So do you know what he did? He went to the golf course.

God looked at one of the angels and said, "I'm about to make him absolutely miserable."

The preacher lines up on a par three. He hits it clean. It's his first-ever hole-in-one. He's so happy. He's so excited. He can't believe it. His first hole-in-one!

The angel looks at the Lord and says, "I thought You were going to make him miserable."

God said, "Who can he tell?"

He skipped out on church and lied about it. You can't sin and get away with it as a believer. The Lord will make you miserable.

Confession combined with repentance is good for the soul. This kind of prayer - honest confession - is what helps rebuild a life spiritually.

This is what it takes. In order to rebuild spiritually, Israel had a renewed commitment to the Word of God and a renewed commitment to prayer and seeking God's face, specifically through confession and repentance.

## A Renewed Commitment to Practical Holiness

Then they had a renewed commitment to practical holiness.

The people are broken over their sin, and after confession, do you know what they do? They resolve to covenant with God. That's how serious they are.

*Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.*

— Nehemiah 9:38

This covenant is outlined in Nehemiah chapter 10. You have religious leaders coming together with civic leaders to follow and do what God tells them to do.

Now that's revival, right? When the religious leaders and political leaders come together and say, "God, we're going to do what You want us to do."

They commit to practical holiness in three areas of their lives.

One is the home. You see it there in Nehemiah 10:30:

*We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.*

— Nehemiah 10:30

This is all about living distinctly holy lives. This wasn't racially motivated. This isn't ethnic cleansing. It's about corporate purity.

Israel looks back and realizes that when they intermarried with the nations, that's when idolatry crept in. So they resolve, "We're not going to do this again. We're not going to be spiritual adulterers," because that brought the judgment of God and the exile of God.

Israel comes together and says, "We're going to be pure and holy in the most intimate relationship in the home, specifically between a husband and a wife."

The second area of practical holiness is in their business - the way they work.

*And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forgo the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.*

— Nehemiah 10:31

Here Israel is enacting the Chick-fil-A rule, okay? "We ain't working." In this case, Saturday. Chick-fil-A, Sunday.

Do you know what Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A, said when they asked, "Why don't you work one day a week?"

He said, "Because we want to give our competition a chance to catch up."

That's God's chicken, and it is good. I've never had a bad meal at Chick-fil-A.

Here, the Israelites were committing not to do business the way the world did it. They would observe the Sabbath. They were committed to holiness in their business dealings, even if it hurt their bottom line. They wanted to obey the Lord more.

The third area of practical holiness they committed to was in the church. Here in the Old Testament, it's the temple. But when you read verses 32 through 39, they decided they were going to give their best to the Lord.

Do you know what their best was defined by? Their first.

*We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord; also the firstborn of our sons and of our livestock, the firstborn of our herds and our flocks.*

— Nehemiah 10:35-36

Then verse 37 mentions the first of their dough and their contributions, and the fruit of every tree. The first, the first, the first.

This is the principle of the tithe. We give our first, and we give our best to the Lord.

Look at the last part of verse 39:

*We will not neglect the house of our God.*

— Nehemiah 10:39

They are saying corporately, "We're not going to let this happen again. We're going to care about and take care of the spiritual needs of our nation."

Spiritual rebuilding meant a renewed commitment to living practical, holy lives in everyday living, starting in the home, in business, and in the church.

Now, just a word here. We know that through Jesus in the New Testament, this isn't a command. We don't have to keep holy days anymore. We don't have to tithe the firstborn anymore. We can intermarry with other

nations. All of that is done away with in Christ, but the principle remains the same.

We're not under law. We're under grace. But the principle remains the same: God wants our best.

And what is our best? Practical holiness unto Him.

That's what 1 Peter 1 says:

*You shall be holy, for I am holy.*

— 1 Peter 1:16

When we're holy, we're giving God our best.

## Next Steps

Three questions - what I would call our next steps - and we'll call it a day. I'm going to fly through these.

Number one is just a question that you have to answer. Put it in the first person: How's my commitment to the Word of God?

I'm telling you, if something is broken, if something needs rebuilding in your life, it could be your business, your marriage, or your family. I don't know what it is. Your finances could be broken. How do I start the rebuilding process? You get to the Word of God.

Let me just say this: We can renovate, build, expand, and do all of these things, but your prayer for your church in the midst of all of this should be that we would always be a Word-centered church. Pray for us in that. We'll build everything on the Word of God.

The second question is: How's my commitment to prayer, specifically to confession of sin?

Next week, we're going to have a prayer and praise service, much like the one we had last year. My friend Daniel Henderson is going to be here to help lead us in this service. We're going to have a prayer and praise service as we prepare to celebrate Celebration Sunday on March 20th.

We're going to have a time in that prayer and praise service for confession. When we confess our sins before the Lord, with purity, there's power. So if you have sin in your life, let's confess and repent and be ready to meet with the Lord next week.

Then, third, I would just ask you: How's my commitment to practical holiness?

Let me ask it like this: Is God getting your best? Is He getting your best at home? Is He getting your best in your business?

You might think, "Man, I hate what I'm doing right now. I don't like the people I'm working for."

Hey, I want to remind you: You don't work for man. You work for God. And so your workplace ought to be getting your best.

Is the church getting your best?

It's one of the things about the NEXT offering that I love. We had to put our commitment out there. But it's not just in our giving. It's in our serving. It's in our showing up.

Is God getting our best? He wants our best. He's worthy of our best.

I want to encourage you: Rebuild that which matters most, and that's the spiritual walls in our lives, to the glory of God.

Would you pray with me?