

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES *for* LEADERSHIP AT WORK

# LEAD COURAGEOUSLY



workmatters®



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# LEAD COURAGEOUSLY

**workmatters<sup>®</sup>**

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**LEAD COURAGEOUSLY** was written by Workmatters' David Roth and Catherine Gates, published by Workmatters, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit launched in 2003 in Fayetteville, Ark. Our mission is to help you pursue God's purpose for your work. These studies help you push beyond sitting in rows at events where you learn, to sitting in circles in groups where you grow.

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# workmatters<sup>®</sup>

Participant,

Congratulations for taking this step to grow as a **leader who courageously obeys God's calling at work!** We believe you'll discover greater meaning and purpose in your work as you learn from Nehemiah's example of leadership and begin applying the biblical leadership principles he demonstrated to your own life and work.

We're confident you'll gain insights that will help you recognize God's calling at work through this study and the discussions you have in your group. When you act on those insights and apply the **leadership principles** you learn, your work will go from being ordinary to extraordinary. You'll experience even greater growth as you share what you learn in community with other believers.

Workmatters wants to be a resource for you long after you complete this Workmatters Study. Be sure to visit our website at **workmatters.org** to discover additional resources to support your biblical leadership growth.

We pray that this study helps you recognize God's voice while also helping you pursue God's purpose for your work with courage!

Your work matters,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Roth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Roth  
President & CEO  
email: droth@workmatters.org

**“ Whatever you do,  
work at it with all your  
heart, as working for  
the Lord, not for human  
masters, since you know  
that you will receive an  
inheritance from the Lord  
as a reward. It is the Lord  
Christ you are serving. ”**

- Colossians 3:23-24

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“ So whether you eat  
or drink or whatever  
you do, do it all for the  
glory of God. ”

- 1 Corinthians 10:31

# Introduction

The stories in the Bible can teach us how to live and work today. But it can be challenging to see how we can learn from people who lived thousands of years ago in another culture. They were very different times with very different people doing very different work—or were they?

## WHY NEHEMIAH?

### NEHEMIAH'S POSITION

Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes who held Nehemiah in high esteem. The word cupbearer, or *mashqeh* (mash-keh'), means "one giving drink." The position was typically held by an officer of high rank at ancient oriental courts, whose duty was to serve the wine at the king's table. Since there was constant fear of plots and intrigues in those times, a person must be regarded as thoroughly trustworthy to hold this position. He must guard against poison in the king's cup and was sometimes required to drink some of the wine before serving it. The person holding this position enjoyed confidential relations with the king and great influence with the people.

This position is first mentioned in Scripture in Genesis 40:1 and is also written as "butler" in some translations. The phrase "chief of the butlers" supports the fact that there were often a number of these officials under one chief. Nehemiah's financial skills (Nehemiah 5:8, 10, 14, 17) indicate that the office was a lucrative one.

Excerpt from the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* definition of Cupbearer written by Benjamin Reno Downer.

### NEHEMIAH HAD A CALLING

Nehemiah's position was one of great responsibility. His skills and experience helped him to do his work with excellence. It also made him the perfect candidate to lead the much-needed work that had to be done to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem and build up the people of Israel.

God put Nehemiah where he was for this very purpose, and Nehemiah recognized God's calling when the time came. When you follow God in your work, it doesn't matter where you work. Your work is a calling.

### AUTHOR

Much of this book is written in the first person, suggesting Nehemiah as the author. Ezra most likely served as editor.

## SETTING

Zerubbabel led the first return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. In 458, Ezra led the second return. Finally, in 445, Nehemiah returned with the third group of exiles to rebuild the city walls.

## DATE WRITTEN

Approximately 445-432 B.C.

## TIMELINE

### FROM EXILE THROUGH NEHEMIAH

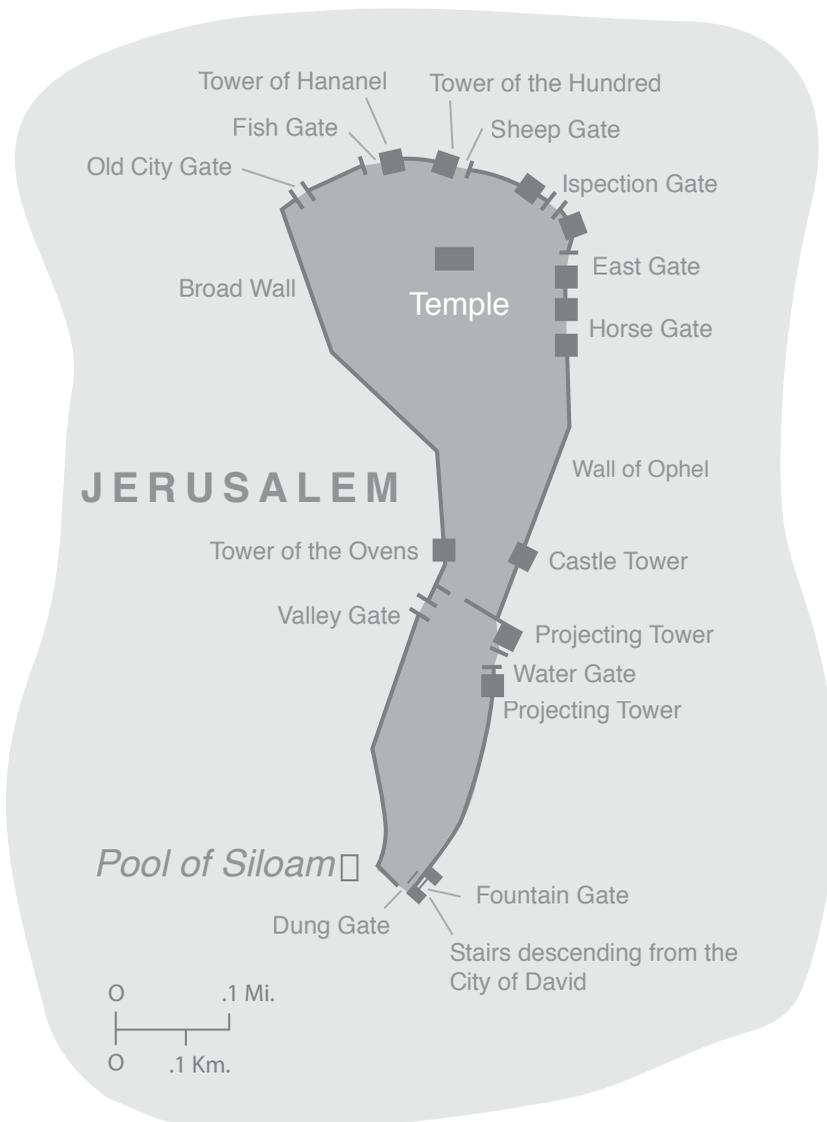
432 B.C.	Nehemiah goes back to Jerusalem
443 B.C.	Nehemiah returns to Babylon
445 B.C.	Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem; wall completed
458 B.C.	Ezra comes to Jerusalem
465 B.C.	Artaxerxes I becomes king of Persia
486 B.C.	Xerxes becomes king of Persia
516 B.C.	Temple completed
520 B.C.	Temple work resumes; messages of Haggai Zechariah
522 B.C.	Darius I becomes king of Persia
530 B.C.	Temple work halted
536 B.C.	Temple construction begins
538 B.C.	Led by Zerubbabel, first exiles return to Jerusalem
539 B.C.	Babylon overthrown by Cyrus
586 B.C.	Jerusalem destroyed; exiles go to Babylon
⋮	
722 B.C.	Northern tribes of Israel defeated and scattered

## PURPOSE

Nehemiah is the last of the Old Testament historical books. It records the history of the third return to Jerusalem after captivity, telling how the walls were rebuilt and the people were renewed in their faith.

## THE WALL AROUND JERUSALEM

The completed wall was 2.5 miles in length with an average height of 39 feet and average thickness of about 8 feet enclosing about 90 acres of land. It included 34 watchtowers and 8 gates. Here is an image of the wall.



## Getting The Most Out Of This Study

Work is incredibly demanding. The economy has tightened the workforce, creating even higher expectations from marketplace leaders. Technology continues to make our work available to us 24/7. Add to that an increasingly busy personal life, and we begin to scream for help, for answers. We begin to ask, “Where does God fit in?”

**Your work matters to God.** The Bible is filled with instruction on how to be successful leaders who obey God’s call at work. It is **the** resource to guide and direct us in our lives and our work! You may or may not have organizational leadership, but you still have influence in life and in work. We want to equip you to lead well and with courage.

The book of Nehemiah holds answers that are relevant to today’s workplace challenges. Nehemiah saw a problem and he turned to God. God called him to motivate the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls, so he took action. Nehemiah left a responsible position in the Persian government to do what God wanted him to do. He organized, managed, participated, encouraged, met opposition, confronted injustice, and kept going until **the walls were rebuilt in just 52 days!**

This 12-session study is designed to help you see how the leadership principles in the book of Nehemiah apply to our lives as leaders—not just in theoretical or theological ways, but in very practical ways that we can put to use to manage current and future challenges.

We all have things God is calling us to do at any point in time. These are things He puts on our hearts that we need to act on. For Nehemiah, it was the building of a wall. Whatever it is for you, we can all learn from the leadership skills Nehemiah demonstrated as we drive toward successfully confronting the challenges we face.

You have four ways to grow:

- Through **reading the Scriptures** and **providing thoughtful answers** to the questions.
- Through **participation in the discussion** with your group.
- Through **application of the principles** studied and discussed during the next 12 sessions.
- Through the **community** of believers you are building.

The activities for each session can usually be done in about an hour, but the insights you gain will stay with you for years to come.

## HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE STUDY

- **Pray for God to open your heart** and mind to His will and His message.
- **Mark your calendar for the scheduled meetings.**
- **Sessions will begin and end on time.** We want to respect and honor everyone's time by making the most of it.
- **Participate as fully as possible.** If you're a talker, challenge yourself to listen more. If you tend to be quiet, challenge yourself to share.
- **Maintain confidentiality** to provide a safe space for people to share experiences, insights and ideas.
- **Read the content** for each session along with suggested Scriptures.
- **Answer the questions** prior to each discussion, if possible.
- As you read, **put yourself in the story.** Relate the experiences to your work experiences to bring the Scriptures to life for you.
- **Pray about specific ways you can apply the principles** from this study to your work.
- **Pray about what you can do to hear from God about your work** based on what you learn from each session's discussion.

By the end of this study, you should have:

- A solid understanding of Nehemiah's story and how it is **relevant** to your work today.
- An actionable list of **biblical leadership principles** based on Nehemiah's example.
- A clear understanding of how to **apply** the biblical leadership principles to your daily work and in community.
- **Growth** in your relationship with Christ.
- Prayed about your calling—**what God is calling you to do** that compels you to take action toward a solution in your work or community.

## ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

Workmatters has additional resources that can augment your small group discussions. Make sure you visit:

- **[workmatters.org/videos](https://workmatters.org/videos)** for our latest Leadership Videos.
- **[workmatters.org/blog](https://workmatters.org/blog)** for our blog.
- **[workmatters.org/workplace-devotions](https://workmatters.org/workplace-devotions)** for YouVersion devotionals.
- **[workmatters.org/workplace-scripture](https://workmatters.org/workplace-scripture)** for Workplace Scripture.
- **[workmatters.org/audio](https://workmatters.org/audio)** for audio content.

## For the Facilitator

We are very excited that you are facilitating a Workmatters Study. Your facilitation will help you grow as a leader and help other people pursue God's purpose for their work. This group can also fulfill the desire many people have for community.

### TIPS

Here are some simple tips to support your facilitation:

- Be sure to **get everyone's email address** so you can communicate before and after meetings.
- These studies are designed to be **facilitated discussions**. Avoid teaching. We encourage you to learn from one another.
- Focus on **quality discussion**. Don't be concerned about discussing every question or reading the questions word for word.
- Make time to discuss the **Leadership Principles** at the end of each meeting. A complete list of suggested Leadership Principles for each session is provided at the **end of this guide**.
- Encourage everyone to **apply at least one lesson they learned** from each session.
- **Build in accountability** by discussing how participants applied the principles and the difference it made.
- Make it a priority to create a **safe environment** for open conversation. Encourage confidentiality and respect for different perspectives.

### FACILITATOR RESOURCES

If you'd like a bit more detail on facilitating, or additional resources to support you through the process, we've got you covered. Visit [workmatters.org/studies](https://workmatters.org/studies) to find the following:

- Workmatters Studies
- Facilitator Guide
- Leadership Principles templates
- Serving Together—Tips for Where to Serve in Your Community

## ONE FINAL NOTE

Thank you for your investment in not only your own leadership, but also in others. You may never know just how big an impact you have, simply by being the one to start a Workmatters Study in your organization, community or church.

The marketplace needs more people like you—people who are willing to invest in others, stretch out of their comfort zones a bit, and take the initiative to start the next study.

**Keep your eyes open** for those who have the potential to facilitate a study. Let them know about the potential you see in them, encourage them and walk alongside them.

- Be a **multiplier**.
- God has placed **future facilitators** in your group.
- **Encourage two participants** in your study to start and facilitate a Workmatters Study!

## For the Individual

We are very excited that you've chosen to participate in a Workmatters Study.

**FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS:** Keep in mind that meetings are designed to be facilitated discussions that encourage a rich flow of sharing experiences and insights. We encourage you to share your questions, answers and insights with the group.

**FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDIES:** This study can also be used as a personal Bible study. We recommend that you answer the questions thoughtfully.

Keep in mind that you can gain even deeper insights and a richer experience simply by discussing the content and the answers to the questions with one or two other people.

### ONE FINAL NOTE

Thank you investing in your leadership. You may never know just how big an impact you will have through the example you set as you apply the biblical principles you learn to your work.

The marketplace needs more people like you—people who are willing to invest in their own leadership. You can multiply your impact by taking the initiative to start the next Workmatters Study in your organization, community or church.

If you will prayerfully consider being a multiplier, you can trust that God will equip you if it is what He is calling you to do.

“ I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ”

- Philippians 1:3-6

**“ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ”**

- Philippians 4:6





## CALLING MATTERS AT WORK

[ 10 MINUTES FOR 30-MINUTE DISCUSSION ]  
[ 30 MINUTES FOR 60-MINUTE DISCUSSION ]

### FACILITATOR:

- Set the stage for this study by helping people see that their work is a calling.
- We are all called to pursue what God calls us to do with courage.

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

– Ephesians 2:10

**God is a worker.** Genesis 1:1 starts by telling us that God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:27 tells us that God created mankind in his own image, male and female. Fast forward to Genesis 2:2 and “God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.” He created us in His image to work (Genesis 2:15).

**All work matters to God**, and all work can be a calling. The word vocation is rooted in the Latin word *vocare*, which means “to call.” If we actively follow Him through our work assignments, our work is a calling and God is leading us.

**God calls us to follow Him courageously.** God has created each of us with unique abilities, talents, passions and opportunities to express His image and join Him in His work (Psalm 139:13–16, Romans 12:3–8). It doesn’t mean we’re exempt from facing obstacles and challenges. We can expect them. But with God at the helm, we can face our trials with courage.

**Our work becomes worship when we align our talents with His purposes.** God gives us different assignments throughout our careers and will hold us accountable to them (1 Corinthians 7:17, Matthew 25:1–14). It is our responsibility to ask where and how our talents and our work can be most useful to God.

Calling matters in our work.

### WHAT’S YOUR CALLING?

Nehemiah’s heart broke for the things that broke God’s heart. Does yours?

**Pray to be able to discern what God is calling you to do.**

This is the exercise you will engage in each session to help you focus on anything related to your work that you may need to elevate, pray about and potentially take action on. Your “calling” could be a leadership challenge you face or simply something God puts on your heart. It can change from time to time. Keep in mind, it may not be something that can be resolved in a day or a week or even a month.

Pray for God to reveal the thing He wants to do through you that you can’t accomplish on your own. In other words, **pray big**. As the legendary missionary William Carey said,

“Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.”

Your calling might be:

- A project God wants you to get involved in.
- A new initiative He wants you to start or an initiative already in the works that He wants you to support.
- Using your work skills and talents on a project in the community.
- A relationship that needs to be healed or an individual who needs your mentoring.

Whatever it is for you, it most likely will take courage to pursue it. You’ll revisit this exercise each session to discuss how it’s going and your experiences. You don’t have to develop and execute a plan for a project in the next 12 weeks. Just open your heart to hearing from God and to opportunities for God to put your talents to use in ways that serve His purposes.

That’s it. That’s the challenge: Pray about your “calling.” Where it goes from there is up to you ... and God.

**► What do you most want to get out of this study?**

Be sure to write it down. You’ll want to refer back to it in Session 12.

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**FACILITATOR:**

Explain you will all be praying about what God is calling each of you to do in your work and lives, and praying for the courage to pursue it.

## ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNERS

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### FACILITATOR:

- Having an accountability partner can make a big difference in each person's success.
- Encourage the group to identify one person they will connect with weekly to share commitments, challenges and successes.
- It may not be practical for everyone in the group, but it will be very beneficial for those who do it.

You can experience even greater support by **choosing an accountability partner**. This is someone in the study you partner with to hold each other accountable to the specific commitments you both make as you go through the study.

When you share your commitments with another person who cares about your success, you'll see that it helps you rise above the challenges that might otherwise hinder your progress and supports you in staying motivated even when it's hard.

“ God is the ultimate source of all power and influence. He gives it to various human leaders for a season, and He warns us that He will hold us accountable. Thus, we are called to use power and influence with grace and truth and to exercise power and influence in service to Him and for the good of others.\* ”

—Dr. Kenneth Boa, President & Founder of Reflections Ministries

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\* Dr. Boa, K., (2005 Oct 28) "Power and Influence," (accessed on November 7, 2014); bible.org

## WRAP UP

[ 5 MINUTES ]

**READING:** Read Nehemiah Chapter 1. Answer the questions based on your reading and your experience.

**PRAYER:** Pray about what God is calling you to do and for the courage to pursue it.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** Pray about and connect with one person who can be your accountability partner. Ideally, that person will be a fellow participant.

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**FACILITATOR:**

- Let everyone know you'll send an email reminder of the activities and invite them to contact you if they have questions.
- Ask them to let you know if they will not be able to attend a session.
- Close in prayer.

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**FACILITATOR:**

- Don't do this alone! Invite participants to facilitate the session of their choice.
- No pressure. Not everyone is comfortable facilitating discussion.

## MORE OF GOD AT WORK

### GOD'S PROMISES ON CALLING

As you go through this study, we challenge you to notice how you handle overwhelming challenges. Hit the pause button and be intentional about seeking God's direction. This challenge comes with several promises. Not promises for worldly riches, but for things of much greater value.

Consider these promises of God when we commit to hearing from God and taking action in obedience to his direction:

- **Numbers 11:23** “The Lord answered Moses, ‘Is the Lord’s arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you.’”
- **Joshua 1:9** “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”
- **1 Samuel 26:23** “The Lord rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness. ...”
- **Psalms 5:12** “Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.”
- **John 15:7-8** “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”
- **Ephesians 3:20-21** “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.”

So, with such promises in mind, you have a tremendous opportunity to see God working even more powerfully in your work: Love God and love others by studying God’s commands and doing them at work. You will be a light to everyone you come in contact with!

**“ When you share your commitments with another person who cares about your success, you’ll see that it helps you rise above the challenges that might otherwise hinder your progress and supports you in staying motivated even when it’s hard. ”**

-Workmatters

“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’”

- Psalm 119:1-3



## SESSION 2 | Nehemiah's Prayer

# 2

[ 5 MINUTES FOR 30-MINUTE DISCUSSION ]  
 [ 10 MINUTES FOR 60-MINUTE DISCUSSION ]

**Briefly share insights into assignments God is calling you to at work or in another area of life.**

### SCRIPTURE: WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES

#### Nehemiah 1:3-4

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

#### FACILITATOR:

- Start the meeting promptly at the agreed upon time.
- Open with a word of prayer as the Spirit leads you.
- Give thanks for the opportunity to study God's word as it applies to the workplace.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide the discussion, provide insight and wisdom.
- Ask for God's blessing on your time together.

## DISCUSSION

[ 15 MINUTES ]

Nehemiah received tragic news. He could have responded in any number of ways. He could have become hopeless. He could have become paralyzed by fear and worry for his people. He could have jumped into action to try to save the day.

What Nehemiah chose was to turn to God in prayer.

### 1. When you are confronted with tragic news or an extremely challenging situation, what do you do?

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#### FACILITATOR:

Encourage everyone to put yourselves in Nehemiah's shoes. What do you do when you get bad news?

**Review Nehemiah 1:5–11.**

Nehemiah was very intentional about how he prayed.

**2. What are five elements of effective prayer?**

- i. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_
- iii. \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. \_\_\_\_\_
- v. \_\_\_\_\_

Nehemiah began his prayer with praise and reverence for God. He confessed the sins of his people, himself and his family. Nehemiah also prayed God’s promises over the situation. Then he made a specific request of God and asked for success.

**3. What do you think about the appropriateness of asking God for success?**

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“May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands.”  
– Psalm 90:17



**FOR 60-MINUTE DISCUSSION,  
CONTINUE STUDY BELOW**

[ 20 MINUTES ]

**FACILITATOR:**

Use the modern business example provided, or a current example from the news or your own experience to connect the themes of this session's lesson to the experiences we face at work today.

**DEFINING MOMENTS**

Most of us know exactly where we were the day the World Trade Center towers in Manhattan were hit. You didn't need to live in New York on 9/11/2001 to feel the impact. On Sept. 10, 2001 if someone asked you if you had ever been to New York and what you thought about the people who lived there, you may have had any number of responses.

But one day later, after tragedy struck it would have been a rare person who didn't feel a sense of unity and pain at the tremendous loss. Lives came abruptly to an end, businesses were crippled and a large city on a small island was under siege.

It stopped you in your tracks. Maybe you wept. Maybe you prayed. Maybe you considered how you should respond.

That is exactly what happened to Nehemiah.

Based on actual events.

**6. How might the story of Nehemiah be applicable to everyone, regardless of position? How is this story applicable to you?**

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**7. What difficult challenge have you faced recently or are you facing right now?**

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## WORK APPLICATION

*[ 10 MINUTES FOR 30-MINUTE DISCUSSION ]*  
*[ 15 MINUTES FOR 60-MINUTE DISCUSSION ]*

We're all going to face unexpected bad news that rattles us to the core. The question is, how will we respond? Reacting out of fear, anger or hopelessness is unlikely to yield positive results. Nehemiah provides a powerful example of embracing the feelings that come up, but not being controlled by them. We have a mighty God on our side who wants us to turn to Him for help.

► **What one lesson can you take from the discussion and apply to your work this week?**

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## WHAT'S YOUR CALLING?

Share insights and questions you have related to what God is calling you to focus on right now. Write notes on what other people share so you can keep them in prayer.

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### FACILITATOR:

- Encourage participants to choose one leadership principle from those discussed that they will practice this week.
- Ask them to share how they will put it into practice.

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### FACILITATOR:

- The group provides a great place for people to share their challenges and successes with respect to hearing from God.
- Encourage everyone to share. Someone may need to hear what another group member is experiencing.
- Encourage everyone to be persistent. God wants them to hear from Him!

**NEXT STEPS**

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**FACILITATOR:**

Remember to invite participants who are interested to facilitate one session.

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**FACILITATOR:**

- Let everyone know you'll send an email reminder of the activities.
- Invite them to contact you if they have questions.
- Ask them to let you know if they will not be able to attend a session.
- Close in prayer.

**PUT IT TO WORK:** Practice the actions you wrote down over the next week. Use this space to make a note of the results you notice.

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**READING:** Read Nehemiah Chapter 2. Answer the questions based on your reading and your experience.

**PRAYER:** Pray about what God is calling you to do and for the courage to pursue it.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** Meet with your accountability partner for at least 15 minutes to discuss how you are living out the actions you identified.

Share your biggest insight from this session on social media and tag it #myworkmatters

**“ We have a  
mighty God on our  
side who wants  
us to turn to Him  
for help. ”**

-Workmatters