"Broken Walls, Burdened Hearts” Scripture Reading Nehemiah 1:1-4

Pastor Cassi Betker Memory Verse: Psalm 34:18

**SLIDE 1: Title**

When you saw or heard about what our next sermon series was, you might have been like me 10 years ago and asked who is this Nehemiah and when did it become a book in the Bible. Ok, maybe that was just me but I hope like me after this series you will come to find Nehemiah's story as inspiring as I do. Unlike a lot of other old testament writers Nehemiah was not a king, or a prophet or priest, he was just an ordinary man working a secular job with a heart for God and his people. Nehemiah's story isn't just a historical account for us to learn about; it's a guiding roadmap, leading us through our own brokenness towards a path of healing and restoration.

So who is this guy? Nehemiah, a trusted cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes. Brief history lesson: In those times a cupbearer held a significant and trusted role in royal courts or among the elite. The cupbearer was responsible for ensuring the safety and quality of the beverages served to the king or other high-ranking officials. This role carried substantial responsibility and required a high level of trust, as the cupbearer had to protect the ruler from potential poisoning or harm by tasting the drinks before they were presented. In addition to this primary duty, cupbearers often held a close and privileged position in the court, having access to the ruler and being privy to confidential information. Their proximity to the king or influential figures allowed them to wield some influence and sometimes act as advisors.

 Imagine Nehemiah, a man whose footsteps echoed through the grand halls of power and influence, entrusted with the sacred responsibility of serving as the cupbearer to the mighty Persian King. His days were adorned with opulence, his presence sought after in the highest echelons of society. Yet, within the confines of his esteemed position, his heart harbored a longing for something beyond the glittering veneer of his existence. Nehemiah, this man of remarkable influence and stature, received news that pierced the depths of his soul – the ruins of Jerusalem's walls and the anguish of its inhabitants. His response in the face of this brokenness holds invaluable lessons for us today.

When the news arrived about Jerusalem's shattered walls and the plight of its inhabitants, it was as if the earth itself trembled beneath Nehemiah's feet. We read in verse 4 of chapter 1 Nehemiah's immediate reaction: "As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven."

**SLIDE 2: "As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven."**

Here, we witness Nehemiah's raw and unfiltered response to the brokenness that engulfed Jerusalem. His heart, burdened by the devastation, led him to a place of mourning and prayer.

The emotions Nehemiah went through, that whirlwind of feelings inside him, they're just like what we feel when we face brokenness. It's not only about walls crumbling or a city in ruins—it's about carrying a weight of sadness and hopelessness in our hearts, something we can all relate to. In a world that often feels like it's spinning out of control, Nehemiah's reaction is so relatable. Our own daily struggles, the cracks in our lives, the mess in our communities, and the chaos around us, they hit home. It's calling us to do something, to take action when we see things falling apart.

Everywhere we turn, we confront brokenness. It's in shattered dreams, leaving individuals striving to find their footing in an unforgiving world.

Understanding this crucial point of Nehemiah is like unlocking a door to our shared human experience. It's vital to grasp that this brokenness isn't some far-off concept, distant and irrelevant. Instead, it's an integral part of our lives. Think about it—those wounds from the past, those times when we've felt let down or hurt, they aren't just faded memories. They're like marks etched deep within us, reminders of the struggles we've faced and the battles we're still fighting. They linger, sometimes quietly and other times more prominently, influencing how we navigate through life. And it's not just our own experiences; it's also the stories of others. When we see someone else struggling with similar issues, facing their own version of brokenness, it strikes a chord within us. It's like an invisible thread connecting us all, a silent understanding that we're in this together.

**SLIDE 3: So what do we learn from this Old Testament guy?**

So what do we learn from this Old Testament guy? Nehemiah's response was not one of despair or resignation. No, his heartache ignited a flame within him, a passion to rebuild, to mend, and to restore. It was a call to action rooted in compassion. He turned to prayer, seeking guidance, wisdom, and strength from the Almighty. Through his faith and trust in God's provision, Nehemiah stepped forward with a plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. His compassion fueled his determination to address the brokenness before him.

We are Nehemiah. We are not mere bystanders to the brokenness that is part of our existence; rather, we are called to be active participants in the act of healing and restoration. As those who have been saved from eternal brokenness through Christ we have a different worldview: this acknowledgment of shared brokenness doesn't lead to despair. Instead, it points us towards empathy and compassion, echoing Jesus' teachings on love for others. It's in recognizing our own brokenness that we can extend grace and understanding to those around us. Like Nehemiah standing before the crumbling walls of Jerusalem, we are summoned to respond actively and resolutely.

In the midst of life there's a call from a God who cares deeply, nudging us to be part of the healing process. It's not just about noticing the cracks around us; it's an invitation to roll up our sleeves and join in this mission of making things right, starting from deep within ourselves. Getting started on this journey to healing is like taking that first brave step: acknowledging the heavy stuff weighing us down. It's about having the guts to peel off the layers of indifference that often blind us to the pain in our world and within our own hearts. Instead of shrugging things off or pretending the brokenness isn't there, it's facing those hard truths head-on.

Let's not let our hearts grow numb to the hurt and unfairness swirling around us, leaving wounds that ache for healing. Those cries for help, —these aren't whispers meant to fade away. They should stir something inside us, firing us up to take action, just like Jesus taught us to, with love and grace. When we recognize these burdens and let ourselves feel the emotions they bring, something amazing happens. It's like a spark that lights up within us—a spark of hope and faith that the Holy Spirit brings. This call isn't just about watching things fall apart; it's about diving in and being part of the story, fixing what's broken, and spreading God's love and renewal where it's needed most.

We are called to embody compassion, a central theme in the teachings of Jesus. Compassion isn't merely a feeling; it's an action that springs from a heart moved by love and empathy for others. When we look to the life of Christ, we witness a compelling example of what it means to live compassionately. In the Gospel’s it is mentioned 24 times that Jesus was moved with compassion. Here are just a few of those examples

**SLIDE 4: Scripture examples**

Jesus showed compassion through miracles, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and comforting the afflicted, displaying His deep compassion for humanity. He didn't just empathize; He acted. He met people in their pain and need, offering healing, restoration, and hope. His actions teach us that compassion involves tangible, sacrificial deeds, not just sympathetic words.

Jesus often taught compassion through parables like the Good Samaritan. In this story, a despised Samaritan showed care for a wounded stranger when others passed by. It challenges us to break through barriers, biases, and social norms to extend kindness and aid to anyone in need, regardless of their background or circumstances.

But living out compassion in our daily lives can be challenging. Often, our busyness, prejudices, or fears can obstruct our willingness to engage with others' suffering. Jesus, however, calls us to overcome these barriers. He invites us to step out of our comfort zones, embrace vulnerability, and prioritize relationships over convenience.

Practicing compassion means actively seeking opportunities to serve and support others, whether in our families, workplaces, or communities. It's about lending a listening ear, providing practical help, and offering encouragement to those in distress. It's the willingness to see beyond our differences and extend grace, just as Christ did.

By cultivating a spirit of compassion, we mirror the character of Christ. It's not just a moral obligation; it's a transformative way of living. As followers of Jesus, we are tasked with reflecting His love and mercy to a broken world.

Let us heed Jesus' call to live compassionately.

**SLIDE 4: Let us heed Jesus' call to live compassionately.**

May our actions align with His teachings, spreading kindness, healing, and hope in a world hungering for empathy and understanding. As we journey together, may our hearts be moved by the compassion that Christ abundantly bestowed upon us, and may it overflow into the lives of others.

Once we commit ourselves to living the life Christ has called us to, we act out of an abundance of love and grace. This is where the heart guides our actions.

Volunteering becomes our instrument of change—a testament to our commitment to rebuilding broken walls and shattered lives. It is in these selfless acts of service that we weave threads of hope into the fabric of our communities, fostering a spirit of togetherness that transcends barriers.

Advocating for change becomes our battle cry—a rallying call for justice and equality. It is our impassioned plea for societal transformation, a relentless pursuit of dismantling structures that perpetuate brokenness and erecting new foundations built upon empathy and inclusivity.

Offering support and empathy to those in need becomes our sacred duty—a testament to our unwavering commitment to stand alongside the downtrodden. It is in these moments of shared humanity that we lend our shoulders for others to lean on, offering solace and understanding in times of distress.

Our actions, whether grand or seemingly small, serve as catalysts for healing the brokenness that permeates our world. Each act of compassion, every gesture of kindness, contributes to the mosaic of restoration—a mosaic that paints a picture of resilience, hope, and transformation.

Next week, we will reflect on Nehemiah's example, looking at the power of prayer in addressing the brokenness that surrounds us. Showing us how to emulate Nehemiah's humility, seeking divine guidance, and placing our trust in the Almighty as we embark on our journey towards healing and restoration.

May we, like Nehemiah, be stirred by compassion, fortified by faith, and guided by prayer as we strive to rebuild what is broken, offering hope and healing to a world in need.

Amen

Benediction: Lord, please fill us with your wisdom and your compassion for others. May you bless us with your never-ending love.

**Memory Verse:** Psalm 34:18 “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he saves those whose spirits are crushed.”

**Scripture Reading:**

There are times where a single piece of news alters the course of our existence. Let's dive into these verses, In Nehemiah 1:1-4 we witness the stirring of a compassionate heart and the ignition of a restorative journey.

Loss of Jerusalem

**1** These are the words of Nehemiah, Hacaliah’s son.

In the month of Kislev,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%201&version=CEB#fen-CEB-12298a)] in the twentieth year,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%201&version=CEB#fen-CEB-12298b)] while I was in the fortress city of Susa, **2** Hanani, one of my brothers, came with some other men from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had escaped and survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

**3** They told me, “Those in the province who survived the captivity are in great trouble and shame! The wall around Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire!”

**4** When I heard this news, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

**WORSHIP SCRIPT: BULLETIN ORDER**

**1.7.24**

**FOREST HILLS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Preparation song:

Welcome: Pastor Andrew

Welcome new people

Memory Verse

Songs:

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 1:1-4

Christmas Camp Recap - Sue LaVigne

Message: "Broken Walls, Burdened Hearts” Pastor Cassi

Communion/ Offering / Prayers: Pastor Andrew

Sending song:

Benediction: Pastor Cassi

Memory Verse: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he saves those whose spirits are crushed.” Psalm 34:18

Blurb for Bulletin: Next week, Pastor Andrew

Blurb for Wednesday Email: Pastor Cassi will start us off on a new series that comes from the

book of Nehemiah. Join us on a journey of restoration as we discover what new things can be

learned from an old story.