

The God Who Rebuilds

FINDING FAITH TO
BUILD WHAT GOD
HAS PUT IN
FRONT OF YOU



Table of Contents

Ten Strategic Initiatives 2

Two-Year (2024-2026) Strategic Initiatives for “Revive”..... 3

Biblical and Theological Context of Ezra-Nehemiah..... 4

The God Who Rebuilds..... 6

Our Best Attempts Come Up Short..... 7

A Better Way..... 10

A Word About Building For a City on the Rise..... 10

Weekly Sections 13

Week 1 - “Stirred” / Ezra 1:1-11 13

Week 2 - “Three Builders, One Hand” / Ezra 1; 7:6-10; Neh 2:1-817

Week 3 - “Four Months on In Prayer” / Nehemiah 1.....21

Week 4 - “Opposite Their Own House” / Nehemiah 3 25

Week 5 - “Consider Your Ways” / Haggai 29

Week 6 - “Sword and Trowel” / Nehemiah 4-6 33

Week 7 - “Bring the Book” / Nehemiah 8:1-8 38

Week 8 - “The Joy of the LORD” / Nehemiah 8:9-18..... 42

Week 9 - “The Wall of Fire” / Nehemiah 10 & 13, with Zechariah 246

Week 10 - “I Will Build My Church” — Matt 16:13-18..... 51

Ten Strategic Initiatives



- Hub of Prayer and Spiritual Renewal
- Cultivating Vibrant Creative Community
- Activating our Deacons for Connection and Support
- Deep Discipleship and Biblically Focused Growth
- Enhancing our Team to Carry the Vision for Nashville
- College and Young Adult Ministry
- Faith and Work Ministry
- City Engagement
- Global Missions
- Radical Generosity

These 10 Strategic Initiatives are intended to guide our ministry goals from 2025-2035.

These are broken up into several segments with "Revive" kicking off the plan from 2024-26.

Two-Year (2024-2026) Strategic Initiatives for “Revive”

Our two-year strategic ministry plan is built around a vision for spiritual renewal, deep discipleship, and community transformation.

A deeply revived city requires a deeply revived church, simply a collection of deeply revived people. It starts with each of us turning and returning our entire selves to God and asking him to make us whole.

In 2026, we are continuing to emphasize:

Developing a Culture of Prayer: Prayer is the foundation of spiritual awakening.

Building a College and Young Adult Ministry: We are passionate about reaching the next generation.

Engaging the City: Our vision is to see Nashville transformed by the gospel.

Equipping Our Deacons for Future Development: To better serve our church and city.

Staffing for the Future: We want to ensure our staff is equipped and aligned with the church's vision and strategy.



Biblical and Theological Context of Ezra–Nehemiah

In your Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are two books. In the Bible Jesus read, they were included together on one single scroll — one story, told across a hundred years. Here is what you're stepping into.

The story starts in the middle of a real mess. God's people knew exile, ruin, and discouragement. In 586 BC Babylon burned Jerusalem: walls torn open, Solomon's temple in ashes, the people marched east in chains. The exiles knew exactly why; the prophets had spent generations saying covenant-breaking would end this way. Psalm 137 keeps the sound of it: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept." Then God said the strangest thing: settle in, unpack, build houses, plant gardens, prepare for the long haul, He told them through Jeremiah. Marry off your children. Seek the peace of the city that broke you. They did — for seventy years, long enough that Babylon began to feel like home. So when the road home finally opened, taking it meant leaving home. Most stayed.

The door opened overnight. In 539 Persia swallowed Babylon almost without a fight, and the new empire ran a new policy: send the captive peoples home, let them rebuild their temples, have them pray for the king. Within a year Cyrus signed the decree, and the first wave went up under Zerubbabel, grandson of the king Babylon had dragged away. They rebuilt the altar, laid a foundation salted with the tears of everyone old enough to remember the first temple, stalled for sixteen years, and finished in 516 only after two prophets — Haggai and Zechariah — preached them back onto the site. Then sixty silent years. (Esther's whole story happens inside that gap, back in Persia.) In 458 a scholar named Ezra came up to teach the Torah. Thirteen years later a royal cupbearer named Nehemiah arrived to rebuild the walls. Three waves. Three builders. One century.

Read closely and you'll notice something odd: God never once speaks out loud in this scroll. No burning bush, no voice from heaven. He works through decrees, letters,

inventories, and lists — the most bureaucratic book in your Bible, and on purpose. This is providence at street level: a God who builds through paperwork and pagan kings. Which is very good news for people whose own lives have never included a voice from heaven.

Notice, too, how it ends. Every wave runs the same arc — commissioned, opposed, completed, and then a letdown. The famous wall is up by the book's halfway point, and the story keeps going, because walls were never the point. The final chapter finds the reforms collapsed and a tired reformer praying, "Remember me." The scroll ends waiting — leaning on a promise the prophets had already made, that God would one day rebuild deeper than stone: a new heart, a covenant kept from His side. That is why our banner stays a question until November 15. Keep asking it as you read: whose work actually lasts? Everywhere we look, it seems like the very best leaders all come up short.

Key dates that are running in the background of the story we'll study together:

- **586 B.C. Jerusalem falls**
- **539 B.C. Persia takes Babylon 538 first return**
- **516 B.C. temple finished**
- **458 B.C. Ezra**
- **445 B.C. Nehemiah and the wall**
- **about 433 B.C., the last sad chapter.**

The God Who Rebuilds

Everyone knows what it's like to live in the ruins. It might be the ruins of a relationship, the ruins of a health diagnosis or a chronic condition, the ruins of a job you've made a mess of, or a family dynamic that has been broken for a long time. American author and Nobel Prize winner Ernest Hemingway had a character named Mike Campbell who was asked how he went bankrupt. "Two ways," he said. "Gradually and then suddenly." Ruins are built the same way. A great fortress of a marriage can turn into the ruins of roommates who were once excited. The virtue of temperance can crumble when a bottle moved from the weekend into the week. Ruins are also revealed in a number you know by heart and have not dialed in three years. Or a habit you have quit so many times the quitting is part of the habit. Nobody plans these. It comes gradually, then suddenly, and then it is simply where you live.

The Bible has a word for living in a place you never chose, far from the life you were made for, partly through what was done to you and partly through what you did. The word is exile. You don't have to stay stuck in a rut of ruin. Our city offers two ways out.

The first popular way out is renovation: fix yourself. It is a booming trade — the habit apps, the five-a.m. routines, the healing era, the resolution rewritten every January in the same handwriting. It's very popular in our cultural moment to "invent yourself" and even create your own sophisticated cocktail of religion. The journalist and scholar Tara Isabella Burton has chronicled how recent generations that stopped inheriting religion began assembling their own. No altar is busier than self-repair, where you are both priest and project.

The second way out of ruins is demolition: start over. Scrape the lot. Gut the house back to the bricks and build again, no, scrape that, just bulldoze the whole thing and start again. Nashville is becoming many people's second or third city. Some are running to this city for new ventures. Others are running from a previous city and

way of life in order to find a fresh start on life. This shows up in the mentality of our own lives too. New city, new relationship, new you — it's the tall-skinny gospel applied to a life.

Our Best Attempts Come Up Short

It's important to understand that both the Renovation and Demolition routines are running on a right and holy longing of the human heart. Nobody wants to live in rubble. The ache to be made new is not the disease. This longing of the human heart is as old as time. It is a sign pointing to a homesickness for a home we've never quite seen. The North African bishop of Hippo, Augustine, prayed it sixteen centuries ago: You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You. Broadway knows this heart-longing very well; every weekend people flock to the city looking for another song, sip, or stranger to help numb the pain, even for one night, so they can feel un-ruined. Broadway understands the thirst of the human heart but it's only a broken cistern, not able to hold the good and satisfying water that can quench the thirst of our souls.

But watch what each way-out-of-ruin asks of you. Renovation makes you the builder, and there is the cruelty to it: the one buried under the collapse must also supply the labor and the will, every morning, from under the rubble. It over-demands, and it under-delivers — at its best, self-repair produces a managed ruin, the drinking controlled, the anger throttled, the marriage maintained like a listing that must never be inspected. Demolition asks less and lies more. You can scrape a lot off the surface; you cannot scrape a self. The one material every fresh start requires is you, and the rubble rides along in the moving truck. Both prescriptions to an unruined life fail at the same joint: they hand the rebuild to the ruin. We need a better way than reinventing ourselves or starting over all the time.

A Better Way

The Bible tells a different story. The first thing God ever built was not a wall or a temple. Genesis says He created a person when God created Adam and Eve in His image and likeness. God placed His people in the world and gave them orders to cultivate and create from the good world God had made (Genesis 1:26-28). God is a good Father and he wants to see what his children will get up to by stewarding his good creation. The Bible ends not with souls escaping a wrecked world but with a finished city descending like a bride. Between those brackets runs one refrain: the LORD builds up Jerusalem and gathers the outcasts, and in the same breath, "he heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." City walls and broken hearts, consecutive lines, one Builder. Scripture refuses the distinction we draw between the skyline and the soul. God holds both together.

To exiles, people far from their homeland and wondering how to start over. God speaks in the first person. He is the controlling subject of activity. He commits to work in every verb of promise. "I will raise up the ruins. I will rebuild it as in the days of old. I will give you a new heart. I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places." Notice What He never says. He never says: submit your renovation plan, and I will inspect it. He moves in first. The whole Bible is the story of God's descending addresses: a garden, a tent, a temple, a feeding trough in an occupied town with no room in the inn. The Word became flesh and took up residence in the ruin.

When Jesus walks into the Gospels, we pay attention to the real estate He climbs across. He crosses a lake for one man living among the tombs, a man whose neighbors had given up restraining what he did to himself. He sits at a well with a woman on the fifth collapse of a marriage, and at tables with men whose ledgers were their ruin. In his most famous story, a son in the far country rehearses a contractor's speech on the road home — make me a hired servant, let me work off the rebuild — and the father is running before the estimate is out of the boy's mouth. Robe. Ring. Feast. "This my son was dead, and is alive again." What the father does is not renovation but resurrection. And the Builder incurred all the necessary costs.

At the cross Jesus became the ruin — "destroy this temple" — condemned outside the wall, the demolition we deserved falling on Him. Three days later, God did what He had promised through every prophet: He raised the ruin. The empty tomb was once the house for the ruined and defeated God-man, and it becomes the first place of a rebuilt life. We can look back at the empty tomb from our own exilic experiences and realities of ruin and see that what happened there is the down-payment promise that he can overthrow the mess of the world for us today.

Some of you have read this far with your arms crossed, and that's understandable. You gave God the contract already. You prayed for the marriage and signed the papers anyway. You knelt at an altar in this room, or one like it, and were drunk again by Christmas. You are not cynical; you are experienced, and you should not be talked out of your experience. So hear what the rebuilding God actually promises. When the exiles finally rebuilt, the old men wept at the foundation — the new house was real, and it was not the old one. This means some rebuilds will not match your blueprint; God restores lives, not reruns. The timelines in this book insult our urgency: seventy years of exile, sixteen stalled years, three waves across a century, one famous fifty-two-day wall inside all that waiting. And even then the rebuilt people relapsed — the last chapter says so. The promise God made goes deeper than mere improvements: a new heart, a covenant kept from his side, a Builder who does not walk off the job. Paul reminded the Philippians, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion."

Churches are meant to be fellowships of rebuilt ruins, and too often we have dressed like a street of finished houses — Sunday as open house, everything staged, nothing structural disclosed. Two hundred and six years in Nashville and 141 years on the corner of Seventh and Broadway surely include our share of curb appeal. If you have ever sat in this room, certain you were the only ruin in the row. We don't have it all together, as good as we present ourselves and as strong as this season of renewal might feel. We are still fragile and frail and utterly dependent on the sustaining grace of God.

So here is the invitation for this season: it is not "try harder." For ten weeks this church will walk through the Bible's great rebuilding story, in worship gatherings on Sundays, in discipleship seminars on Wednesday nights, and in fellowship around tables and in homes throughout the week. You can bring your ruins — the marriage, the bottle, the number, the pattern with your name on it. You do not need a plan; in this book, the survey and the weeping are where every rebuild begins. Let's let one another in as well. Make sure one person in your life knows what's actually going on so we can build sturdy and strong together. Let's pursue greater transparency and accountability in our Bible Study Groups as well. Let's invite God to come and rebuild the ruins we still inhabit and carry a spirit of expectation for what He's going to do next. The God of this story builds cities and binds hearts in the same breath, and He is the only builder in town who bids on ruins. He is not waiting on your renovation. He is asking for your address.

A Word About Building For a City on the Rise

Nashville has never built faster. Stand on our front steps and count the cranes: the hotels are stacking floor on floor behind Broadway, the skyline looks different every Sunday. So a ten-week series about a construction project might look like the most Nashville thing this church has ever done. It is closer to the least.

And some of you are braced for a different reason. Nehemiah is the most requisitioned book in American church life. Wherever a congregation is being asked to pledge, expand, or relocate, someone is at a whiteboard with "rise and build" on it. We are nearing the end of a two-year strategic ministry plan called REVIVE, entering its final quarter, and you would be forgiven for expecting this series to arrive with a pledge card stapled to the back. If that is your suspicion, you have been paying attention. That is exactly how Ezra-Nehemiah often gets used.

It is not how this book was written. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are a single scroll, and it tells one story three times. Zerubbabel raises a temple. Ezra

teaches the Book. Nehemiah walls the city. Each builder is sent by a Persian king, each is opposed, and each story ends short of its hopes: the old men weep at the new foundation, the reforms stall, and the famous wall stands finished by chapter 6 of a thirteen-chapter book. It's a fantastic and true story about the providence of God, the agency and action of everyday people, the threat of opposition, and what happens when everyone takes responsibility. And yet, more than half of Nehemiah is about what walls cannot do. The last page is not a ribbon-cutting but a tired reformer throwing a squatter's furniture out of the temple and praying, "Remember me, O my God, for good." The end of the book is not the triumph of people or human ingenuity but a settled reminder that we need God.

Why walk into that story now? Because of how ours started. Two years ago we asked God to revive our hearts so we could sing again (Psalm 85:6) and we engaged in a season of reformation and renewal. The fruits of that are starting to report: adult baptisms, new members, new ministries – it's all very exciting. We enjoy all of this aware of the seasons of revival. Hezekiah once reopened the temple doors, and Judah kept a Passover unmatched for generations. Then Babylon's envoys came, the prophet announced the exile, and the king's answer settled for "peace and security in my days." His own son rebuilt every altar to foreign gods the revival tore down. In Ezra-Nehemiah, the families these re-builders lead home are walking out of the wreckage from a previous generation. A revival is tested by its heirs, and the oldest failure in revival's history is the failure to hand the work on. We're studying Ezra-Nehemiah to find the perspective and motivation to ensure we hand the work of this church on to another generation.

We have been building toward this all year. In August we raised a stone and declared, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." Then a month of stewardship taught us to say, "All His. All in." Isaiah 58 had already spoken the promise over both: a people poured out for their city will be called "the repairer of the breach." Vision Sunday made the promise, stewardship gathered the materials; this autumn, the promise gets its story.

Two confessions from your pastor before we open the story. First, this congregation does not have to imagine Nehemiah 13. Two hundred and six years of existing as a church include seasons when the walls stood, and the people drifted. Second, the man most tempted to misread this book is the one preaching it. Nehemiah flatters pastors. It shows us a hero's role and a ready name for anyone who questions our plans. So let it be in writing before the first sermon: I am not Nehemiah, and no member of this church is Sanballat.

What is the season for, then? J. I. Packer, whose little book on Nehemiah sits under much of this series, says it should be read as "testimony to the renewing and sanctifying of the church" — written for God's praise, not the leader's. That is our aim in miniature. Ten weeks from now the walls of the story will be up, and the only question that will matter is whether a people got built inside them. This multi-use study guide in your hands runs on four questions your group will ask of every passage:

- **What the text teaches us about God.**
- **What it teaches us about our brokenness**
- **What it teaches us about salvation in Jesus, and**
- **What it teaches us about joining His mission in the power of the Spirit.**

Week 1 – September 13

“Stirred” / Ezra 1:1–11

Summary

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, God stirs the emperor’s spirit and Cyrus proclaims freedom for the exiles, fulfilling the word the LORD spoke through Jeremiah. God’s people may return to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of the LORD, and their neighbors are called to fund the journey. The heads of the fathers’ houses rise — everyone whose spirit God stirred — and neighbors supply silver, gold, goods, and livestock. Cyrus brings out the temple vessels Nebuchadnezzar carried off, counted piece by piece, and places them in the hands of Sheshbazzar for the road home. The decree falls in 538 BC, the year after Persia took Babylon. Jeremiah had promised the exile would last seventy years (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10), and the span from the first deportation in 605 lands the promise on schedule.

Ezra-Nehemiah was one book in the Hebrew Bible; this chapter opens the whole account, and three waves of return follow: Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah. Let’s enter into this book by reading and discussing the first chapter of Ezra.

Discussion

Q: Opener: What is the longest you have waited on something God seemed silent about?

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

Q: Ezra 1:1 says the LORD stirred Cyrus to fulfill the word spoken by Jeremiah. What does it teach us about God that He keeps a seventy-year-old promise through a king who does not know Him?

Q: Where do you find it hard to believe God works through powers indifferent to him — governments, markets, employers? What would change if you believed it?

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

Q: The exile behind this chapter was the harvest of generations of covenant-breaking. What does the seventy-year wait say about how seriously God treats sin — and how patiently He redeems it?

Q: Verse 5 says those rose “whose spirit God had stirred.” Many stayed. What keeps people settled in Babylon when God opens the way home? What settles us?

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

Q: God moved a pagan king to release his people at the appointed time. How does this preview Galatians 4:4 — the Son sent “when the fullness of time had come”?

.....

Q: The vessels come home so worship can resume. What has Christ recovered in your life that sin carried off?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about living on mission in the Spirit's power?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: Where do you sense the Spirit stirring you as this series opens — and what would rising look like?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: Verses 4 and 6 show neighbors funding the goers. If you cannot go this season, whom can you supply, and with what?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Week 2 – September 20

“Three Builders, One Hand” / Ezra 1; 7:6–10; Neh 2:1–8

Summary

Three leaders carry the rebuild across a century. Zerubbabel leads the first return and raises the temple. Ezra the scribe comes up a generation later to teach the Torah — a man who “had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach” (Ezra 7:10) . Nehemiah, cupbearer to Artaxerxes, hears of the broken walls, prays, and asks the king for letters and timber. Each is sent by a Persian king. Each meets opposition. Each story ends short of its hopes. Over all three runs one refrain: the good hand of God is upon each of these servant leaders.

The leaders led three waves of God’s people and we have the dates: 538, 458, and 445 BC. Consider the diversity of talents the Lord uses to fulfill His purposes: a royal administrator of David’s line, a scholar-priest, a court official. The “good hand” of God’s refrain appears at Ezra 7:6, 7:9, 7:28 and Nehemiah 2:8, 2:18. The book’s design is deliberate — three parallel cycles, each commissioned, each opposed, each closing in anticlimax — so the reader starts asking whether any builder’s work will hold. This week we consider the reality of that question. Sunday, November 15 will deliver the answer we can truly trust in.

Discussion

Q: Opener: Who is a leader whose work outlived them — and what made it last so long?

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: The same refrain covers an administrator, a scholar, and a servant. What does “the good hand of his God” teach about how God regards ordinary vocations?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: God’s building here spans a century and three generations. How does that stretch or steady your sense of what God is doing at NFBC?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: Each wave ends short of its hopes. Why do we prefer stories of triumphant leaders to Scripture's honest ones — and what does that preference cost a church?

Q: Where are you tempted to rest your confidence on a human leader, in this church or elsewhere? What happens to a congregation when it does?

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

Q: Hebrews 3:3–6 says the builder has more honor than the house, and “we are his house.” How do the three builders point past themselves to Christ?

Q: If the question is “will any builder’s work hold?” — what in the gospel lets you answer it?

Q: What does this text teach us about living on mission in the Spirit’s power?

Q: Your work Monday through Friday: how could it become a site of God’s building rather than a break from it?

Q: Which of the three — steward-leader, teacher, behind-the-scenes servant — is nearest your gifting, and what is one step to deploy it this fall?

Week 3 – September 27

“Four Months on In Prayer” / Nehemiah 1

Summary

In Susa, Nehemiah asks visiting brothers about Jerusalem and hears the report: the survivors are in trouble and shame, the wall broken down, the gates burned. He sits down, weeps, and mourns for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. His prayer moves from adoration to confession — “even I and my father’s house have sinned” — to the promises given through Moses: scattered for unfaithfulness, gathered on return. He closes by asking mercy “today ... in the sight of this man.” The last line lands the surprise: “Now I was cupbearer to the king.”

Chislev (Nov–Dec) in chapter 1 to Nisan (Mar–Apr) in chapter 2 means roughly four months pass between the report and the request. The length of time teaches us the importance of seeking the power of God in prayer. Nehemiah exercises a season of prayer before a minute of opportunity. The prayer is stitched from Deuteronomy 30:1–5 and echoes Daniel 9’s exile confession. Corporate confession — owning the sins of “my father’s house” — is normal covenant speech, not false guilt.

Jerusalem’s walls had been down for nearly a century and a half, and a recent rebuilding attempt had been stopped by royal decree (Ezra 4:23). Nehemiah wanted to help so he called out to God in prayer.

Discussion

Q: Opener: When bad news reaches you, what do you usually do first?

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: Nehemiah prays to “the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love” (1:5). Which of those names do you need most right now, and why?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: Verse 6 asks God’s ear to be attentive. What does it mean that the God of heaven listens to one servant’s prayer about a ruined city?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: “Even I and my father’s house have sinned” (1:6). What would it look like for us to confess the church’s failures as our own rather than someone else’s?

Q: Where does grief over what is broken — in the church, the city, your family — get stuck before it becomes prayer?

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

Q: Nehemiah weeps over Jerusalem; so does Jesus (Luke 19:41), and Hebrews 7:25 says He always lives to intercede. How does Christ’s intercession change how you pray this week?

Q: Nehemiah confesses sins he did not personally commit. How does Jesus go further — bearing sin that was in no way His (2 Cor 5:21)?

Q: What does this text teach us about living on mission in the Spirit's power?

Q: What work are you attempting that you have not yet seriously prayed for? What would four months of prayer before action look like?

Q: The fall prayer rhythm launches this week. What is your concrete commitment to it, and who will know about it?

Week 4 – October 4

“Opposite Their Own House” / Nehemiah 3

Summary

The chapter is a construction roster. Eliashib the high priest and his brothers begin at the Sheep Gate — the only section the chapter says was consecrated — and the record moves around the circuit: goldsmiths, perfumers, rulers of districts, temple servants, merchants, and the daughters of Shallum, most repairing the stretch opposite their own house. One shadow falls at verse 5: the nobles of Tekoa “would not stoop to serve their Lord,” while the ordinary Tekoites finish their section and take a second (Neh. 3:27). The list ends where it began, back at the Sheep Gate.

The chapter names roughly forty sections and dozens of workers, many identified by trade rather than tribe — the wall was built by people working far outside their professions. “Opposite his own house” recurs; assigning the nearest stretch gave every builder a stake in the strength of their own section. The Sheep Gate stood near the temple’s north side; sacrificial animals entered there, which likely explains why the priests built it and consecrated it. Shallum’s daughters (Neh. 3:12) are the only women named as builders. The chapter most reading plans skip is one of Scripture’s longest honor rolls of ordinary names.

Discussion

Q: Opener: What is a job you once did that was far outside your skill set?

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

Q: God preserved a list of perfumers and daughters for two and a half millennia. What does the roster teach about what God counts and keeps?

Q: The circuit begins and ends at the consecrated Sheep Gate. What does it say about God that worship frames the whole work?

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

Q: The nobles of Tekoa would not stoop (3:5). Where does status keep us from low work? Be specific about our own church family.

Q: Consumer religion watches others build. Where have you been a spectator at NFBC, and what made that comfortable?

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

Q: The Sheep Gate brought the lambs in, and Jesus calls Himself the door of the sheep (John 10:7–9). How does the Lamb frame the labor of this chapter — and ours?

Q: The nobles would not stoop; the Lord of glory did (John 13:3–5). How does His stooping free you to take low work gladly?

Q: What does this text teach us about living on mission in the Spirit's power?

Q: What is literally opposite your own house — your street, your floor at work, your kids' school? Name it aloud in the group.

Q: The Tekoites took a second section. Is God asking your group to take one stretch of work together this fall? Which?

Week 5 - October 11

“Consider Your Ways” / Haggai

Summary

Sixteen years after the temple's foundation was laid, the work sits abandoned and the people say the time has not come. Through Haggai, God answers: is it a time for you to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins? He tells them to consider their ways — much sown, little harvested; wages dropped into a bag with holes — then to go up, bring wood, and build. The people obey, “for the LORD stirred up the spirit” of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the remnant, and work resumes twenty-three days after the sermon. God’s word over the builders: “I am with you.”

Haggai is dated to the day — the second year of Darius, 520 BC (Haggai 1:1), with work resumed on the twenty-fourth of the same month (Haggai 1:15). The stall began with opposition (Ezra 4:1–5, 24), but Haggai names what kept it stalled after the pressure eased: redirected energy. Paneled houses signal finish carpentry — comfort spending — while the LORD’s house lay open to the sky. Ezra 5:1–2 records the result: Haggai and Zechariah prophesy, and Zerubbabel rises to build. This is the sermon that restarted the wave the group studied in week 2.

Discussion

Q: Opener: What home project have you finished lately — and what shared commitment waited while you did?

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

Q: Twice God says “consider your ways” (1:5, 7). What does it teach about God that he audits priorities, not just beliefs?

Q: “I am with you, declares the LORD” (1:13) comes before a single board is carried. Why does presence precede performance in God’s economy?

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

Q: Nobody in this chapter seemingly opposes God; they defer to Him. Yet, delayed obedience is disobedience nonetheless. Where has “not yet the time” become your settled answer to something God has named?

Q: The bag with holes (1:6): where are you spending real energy for returns that never satisfy?

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

Q: Jesus says one greater than the temple is here (Matt 12:6) and tells us to seek the kingdom first (Matt 6:33). How does He both fulfill and reorder what Haggai demands?

Q: The man who found treasure in a field sold everything with joy (Matt 13:44). Why does reprioritizing feel like loss to us and like joy to Him?

Q: What does this text teach us about living on mission in the Spirit's power?

Q: The people went from sermon to work site in twenty-three days. What could you or your group get started in the next 3-4 weeks?

Q: What would it look like this month to put one piece of shared kingdom work ahead of one private project — concretely?

Week 6 – October 18

“Sword and Trowel” / Nehemiah 4–6

Summary

The attacks on God’s work come in three waves. Outside: Sanballat and Tobiah mock the “feeble Jews” and their fox-crushable wall, then conspire to fight; the builders pray and post a guard, working with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. Inside: a great outcry — the wealthy are taking fields, vineyards, and even children in pledge from hungry brothers. Nehemiah’s hottest anger in the book lands here; the nobles restore everything, and he refuses the governor’s food allowance for twelve years. Within: invitations to Ono, an open letter alleging treason, and a hired prophet urging Nehemiah to hide in the temple. He answers, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down.” The wall finishes in fifty-two days — and even the enemies perceive “this work had been accomplished with the help of our God” (Neh. 6:16).

Tobiah’s family ties reached into Jerusalem’s leading houses (Neh. 6:17-19), which explains the intelligence leaks. Nehemiah 4:9 holds prayer and prudence in one sentence: “we prayed to our God and set a guard.” Chapter 5’s crisis is internal economics — Torah forbade interest on loans to poor brothers (Ex 22:25; Lev 25:35-37). The open letter (6:5) made the treason charge public and deniable at once. Nehemiah’s short “arrow prayers” punctuate all three chapters (Neh. 4:4-5; 4:9; 5:19; 6:9; 6:14).

Discussion

Q: Opener: Which wears you down faster — loud criticism or quiet fear? Why?

.....

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: The builders “prayed to our God and set a guard” (Neh. 4:9). How does God’s sovereignty make planning faithful rather than faithless?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: In (Neh. 6:16) the enemies conclude God did the work. What would have to be true of NFBC for outsiders to reach that verdict?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: The deadliest attack had no enemy in it — God’s people exploiting God’s people. Where could economic life inside our church family need light: wages we pay, debts we hold, generosity we withhold?

Q: Whom have you quietly cast as an enemy who is actually family? What would repentance toward them look like this week?

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

Q: They told Jesus to come down from the cross (Matt 27:40–42), and He would not. How does His refusal secure everything Nehemiah’s refusal only pictures?

Q: Jesus absorbed mockery, false charges, and betrayal from insiders without retaliating (1 Peter 2:23). Where do you need his pattern this month?

Q: What does this text teach us about living on mission in the Spirit's power?

Q: What did Tobiah and Sanballat hire someone to do? How did Nehemiah know the prophet was not from God? (Neh. 6:10-13)

Q: How do you test counsel that urges self-protection over obedience?

Q: “A great work I cannot come down from”: what is yours right now —
and what invitation to Ono keeps arriving?

Week 7 - October 25

“Bring the Book” / Nehemiah 8:1–8

Summary

The wall is finished, and the people gather as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They — not the priests — tell Ezra to bring the Book of the Law. He reads from daybreak to midday, and the ears of all the people are attentive. The only construction in the chapter is a wooden platform built for the reading. Ezra opens the book; the people stand; he blesses the LORD; and they answer, “Amen,” with lifted hands and bowed faces. The Levites move through the crowd, giving the sense, “so that the people understood the reading.”

The date is the first day of the seventh month (Neh. 8:2) — Tishri 1, the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:24), the head of Israel’s holiest month. The assembly includes men, women, “and all who could understand” — children old enough to follow. Giving “the sense” (8:8) likely includes explanation and may include rendering the Hebrew for Aramaic-speaking returnees.

The Water Gate square sat outside the temple courts: public space, not priestly space. Ezra, introduced in week 2 as the man who set his heart to study, do, and teach (7:10), gets his pulpit here.

Discussion

Q: Opener: When has someone explained a passage of Scripture and it finally opened for you?

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: God's first gift within the finished wall is His word, read aloud to everyone who could understand. What does that teach about how God renews a people?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: The people stand for hours, attentive. What does the scene say about the worth God's word actually has — measured against the worth our schedules assign it?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: The exile generation lost the Book and paid for it. Where has our easy access to Scripture bred neglect of it? Be honest about your own week.

Q: We often outsource Bible intake to the pulpit. What is that habit costing you — and the people who look to you?

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

Q: Jesus stood in Nazareth, read Isaiah, and said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). How is every reading of Scripture finally about Him?

Q: The Levites gave the sense so the people understood. How has Christ opened your understanding (Luke 24:45) — and where do you still need Him to?

Q: What does this text teach us about mission in the Spirit's power?

Q: Who in your life needs someone to “give the sense” — a coworker, a child, a new believer? What would starting look like this month?

Q: In 2027, this church will be asked to read the whole Bible together. What would you need to change now to be ready then?

Week 8 – November 1

“The Joy of the LORD” / Nehemiah 8:9–18

(Lord’s Supper Sunday)

Summary

As the Law lands, the people weep. Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites stop them: this day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep. Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine, and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy — “and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” (Neh.8:9). The people feast and rejoice “because they had understood the words.” The next day they find the Feast of Booths in the text and keep it, all Israel in shelters of branches, with gladness the record measures against the days of Joshua, and the reading continues daily through the feast.

The logic of 8:10 runs holy; therefore, feast — holiness and gladness are allies here, not rivals. Sending portions extends the feast to the unprepared; joy in this text, by definition, travels. The Feast of Booths (Lev. 23:33–43) rehearsed the wilderness years in temporary shelters. “Since the days of Joshua” (Neh. 8:17) marks the celebration’s scale. Centuries later, at this same feast, Jesus stood and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37). Sunday is the Lord’s Supper: a feast set for people with nothing ready.

Discussion

Q: Opener: What is the most joyful meal you can remember, and what made it so?

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: God's leaders command feasting on a day of conviction. What does it teach about God that His holiness produces a table and not only tears?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (8:10). Whose joy is it first — ours in God, or God's own joy? What difference does the answer make?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: Some of us cannot stop crying — conviction without gospel. Others never start — comfort without conviction. Which is your drift, and what does this text say to it?

Q: Unshared joy is unfinished joy here; portions must go out. Where has your gladness stayed private when it was meant to travel?

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

Q: At this very feast Jesus offered living water to the thirsty (John 7:37–39). What is He offering that the feast only staged?

Q: Hebrews 12:2 says He endured the cross “for the joy set before him.”
Name one specific act of obedience His joy could fund in you this week.

Q: What does this text teach us about living on mission in the Spirit’s power?

Q: Who near you has “nothing ready” this holiday season — literally or spiritually? Decide as a group on one portion to send, and set the date.

Q: Does our church sound glad to the city? What would make the answer yes on your street?

Week 9 – November 8

“The Wall of Fire” / Nehemiah 10 & 13, with Zechariah 2

Summary

After confession, the people put the covenant in writing: sealed names and three commitments — no intermarriage with the peoples of the land, no Sabbath commerce, and “we will not neglect the house of our God” (Neh. 10:39). Choirs later answer across the finished wall, and the joy is heard far away. Then chapter 13. Nehemiah returns after time away at court and finds every clause broken: Tobiah furnished in a temple storeroom, merchants trading at the gates on the Sabbath, children who cannot speak the language of Judah. He throws furniture, confronts, contends — and the book ends with a tired reformer praying, “Remember me, O my God, for good.” Seventy-five years earlier, Zechariah saw a surveyor halted mid-measure: the coming Jerusalem will overflow any wall. “I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the LORD, and I will be the glory in her midst” — and many nations shall join themselves to the LORD.

Nehemiah went back to Artaxerxes in the king’s thirty-second year (Neh. 13:6, in 433 B.C.) and returned “after some time”; the breakdown window is roughly a decade — hold the number loosely. Chapter 13’s failures mirror chapter 10’s commitments clause for clause; the book is built to end in that collapse. The design pushes the reader forward: political and structural reform cannot produce heart change, which is exactly what the prophets promised God would one day do — a new covenant with the law written within (Jer 31:31–34), a new heart and Spirit (Ezek 36:26–27). Zechariah 2 (dated 520 BC) and 8:20–23 stand behind the whole rebuild as the larger promise: presence, not perimeter; nations, not walls.

Discussion

Q: Opener: What is a resolution you kept the longest — and what finally broke it?

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

Q: God’s answer to the broken covenant is “I will be to her a wall of fire ... and the glory in her midst” (Zech 2:5). What does it teach about God that He responds to failure with nearer presence?

Q: The promise predates the wall by seventy-five years. How does God’s timeline steady you when reforms and plans fade?

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: The covenant was signed, sealed, witnessed — and broken inside a generation. Why can resolve not produce what only new birth produces? Where have you been re-signing instead of being remade?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: “Children who could not speak the language of Judah” (13:24): where is the next generation around you losing the language of faith, and what part of that is ours?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20; Jer 31:31–34). How does the covenant Christ keeps answer the covenants we break — including any broken since last Sunday’s Table?

Q: Zechariah promised God dwelling in the midst; John 1:14 says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Trace the line. Where does it land in your life now?

Q: What does this text teach about living on mission in the Spirit’s power?

Q: Zechariah 8:23 pictures ten people grabbing one hem: “We have heard that God is with you.” Would your neighbors say that of this church? What would make it true on your street?

.....

.....

Q: If reform cannot renew hearts, how should that change what our group prays for versus what we merely organize?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Week 10 – November 15

“I Will Build My Church” — Matt 16:13–18

(Mission Festival Weekend)

Summary

At Caesarea Philippi, in the district of a pagan cult center far north of Jerusalem, Jesus asks who people say the Son of Man is, then makes it personal: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answers: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus blesses him — flesh and blood did not reveal this — and announces: “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Every builder this fall needed a king’s permission. This builder asks no one. And gates are defensive architecture: the church that Christ builds is not under siege. It advances. Furthermore, His church is his people. Not a building such as what Ezra and Nehemiah were rebuilding. Rather we, His people, are His temple. And we have been called to build His church here, there and everywhere. Missions. We are in the people-reaching, people-building business.

Context for leaders

Caesarea Philippi sat beneath Mount Hermon at a spring and cliff face long associated with pagan worship. “Church” (ekklesia) appears here for the first time in Matthew. The “rock” Jesus refers to is the confession Peter makes “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and not the person Peter, himself. The verb of this text carries the weight of Jesus’ message: I will build. Future certainty, singular subject. The question Ezra-Nehemiah asks — will any builder’s work hold? — is answered by the promise Jesus makes.

Discussion

Q: Opener: Looking back over ten weeks: which builder's story stayed with you, and why?

Q: What does this text teach us about God?

Q: "I will build my church" is promise, not proposal. What does the certainty of Christ's "I will" teach about God's commitment to His people?

Q: The announcement happens on pagan ground, not holy ground. What does the location say about where God intends His church to stand? How are we, His Church on mission, to engage both our neighbors and the nations with this good news?

Q: What does this text teach us about brokenness and sin?

Q: The gates of hell are real gates — death and dark power genuinely oppose the church. Where has fear convinced you the church is fragile, and what is that fear costing your obedience?

Q: Institutional survival and Christ's promise are not the same thing. Where do we protect the institution in ways that resist the mission?

Q: What does this text teach us about salvation through Jesus?

Q: “But who do you say that I am?” Answer it in your own words, aloud, in the group.

Q: He built with His body — “destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). How does the resurrection guarantee the building?

Q: What does this text teach us about living on mission in the power of the Spirit?

Q: Gates do not attack; they hold ground. What ground near us is Christ’s church meant to advance on — and what is our group’s part in this grand global mission?

Q: The double call from Sunday: come and be placed, or go and be sent.
Which is yours in 2027 — and who will you tell this week?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Christ’s church isn’t just this one congregation – we are part of a global family! Pray for the church around the world – for those that are suffering, those that are persecuted, those that are struggling and those that are flourishing.



NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

©2026 Nashville First Baptist Church