It’s the account of one man’s determination, in spite of opposition, to see the wall of Jerusalem rebuilt. It happened nearly twenty-five hundred years ago in a land across the world from where you and I live today. Nehemiah’s story is filled with intrigue and sinister plots. Against all odds, he faces down his enemies and rallies dispirited men to rise and rebuild. It makes for great reading, but why should we study the book of Nehemiah?

Nehemiah is a model of leadership. But his life and ministry is more than that. His experiences touch us all, for he encountered problems we face in everyday life. His example teaches us how to pray, how to wait on God, and how to work through the challenges of life. Look closely and see that Nehemiah models for us:

- How to handle discouragement.
- How to stay focused under pressure.
- How to motivate others.
- How to respond to criticism and false accusations.
- How to deal with setbacks and disappointment.
- How to act responsibly with power and privilege.
- How to finish what you start.

Nehemiah was a man called to serve. He didn’t get to choose the circumstances of his life nor the conditions under which he labored. There was rubble to be cleared and obstacles to overcome. For that reason, Nehemiah prayed and he persisted. So must we as we endeavor to build a life that is pleasing and useful to God. What lessons for your own life will you draw out from Nehemiah’s story?

**Background**  
When God commissioned Moses to lead His people out of slavery, He promised to be with them and make them a mighty nation. He spoke of a place where He would choose “to establish His name there for His dwelling” (Deuteronomy 12:5). In time, all surrounding nations were eclipsed by the power of Israel and Jerusalem was recognized as the city of God.

When the temple was built during King Solomon’s reign, Jerusalem was at the height of glory. Her fame spread the glory of God’s name to every nation. To Solomon, God renewed His promise that if Israel would obey Him, He would bless them—if they did not, He would scatter them to the ends of the earth and their temple would lie in a heap of ruins (1 Kings 9:7-8). Eventually, this is what happened. The kingdom was divided, and then fell. The northern kingdom fell first, and was absorbed into the surrounding cultures. Some years later, the southern kingdom was defeated and carried into captivity in Babylon.
Seventy years passed and the power of Babylon was broken by Persia. Cyrus, the Persian king, decreed that the Jews could return to their homeland and rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

In 536 B.C., the first group returned to Judah under the leadership of a man named Zerubbabel. They set about rebuilding the temple but soon became discouraged by the immensity of the task and opposition from their neighbors. With only the foundation of the temple laid, the work was abandoned. For sixteen years, the people worked their land and raised their families, indifferent to their own spiritual decline. God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to challenge the people and reconstruction of the temple began again. Finally, some twenty years after the work first began, the temple was completed.

About sixty years later, a second group returned under the leadership of a priest and scribe named Ezra. They arrived in Jerusalem only to find the children of Israel had relapsed into spiritual and moral compromise. Intermarriage with people from the surrounding nations had weakened their own spiritual convictions. Through Ezra’s faithful ministry, many of the people turned from their sin and once again committed to follow God’s will for their lives.

However, Jerusalem remained a byword. The surrounding nations seized every opportunity to annoy and bully their Jewish neighbors. Life was difficult—most folks were barely able to eke out a living for themselves and their families. The ruined and decaying walls of Jerusalem were a visible sign that God’s people remained vulnerable, living in affliction and shame.

This was the sad state of affairs that Hanani reported to his brother, Nehemiah, after a visit to Jerusalem in the year 445 B.C. Nehemiah was living in Shushan (or Susa) the winter residence of Artaxerxes, king of Persia. As cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah enjoyed the comforts of royal life and a position of influence with the king. His own place in life was secure. A lesser man might be saddened by Hanani’s news but choose not to get involved. In Nehemiah’s response, we see the depth of his character and get a first glimpse of the man God chose for a special work. While Nehemiah’s work was to rebuild walls, God’s work is rebuilding lives.

Getting started. Find a quiet place to study. Take your Bible, your lesson and any other study tools you want to use. Plan to spend about an hour each day on your lesson. Pray. Take time to settle your heart, focus your thoughts and ask the Lord to help you see with clear eyes.

“Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in Your law.” – Psalm 119:18 NLT

Nehemiah Ch. 1 Read the passage two or three times without interruption. If possible, read from more than one Bible translation. Briefly describe in your own words what is happening.
Working Text for Nehemiah Ch. 1
New International Version (NIV)

1:1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah:

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

3 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."

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

5 Then I said:

"O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you.

7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

8 "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'"
"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.

O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."

I was cupbearer to the king.
OBSERVATION – What do I see?
Read the section and record what you see. Use the first column to keep track of what you find in the Bible passage. (Who? What? When? Where?) Follow along with Nehemiah as he tells his story. Look for clues that tell you when and where the story is taking place. Who else is mentioned and what part do they play? What events have taken place? What is happening now? How does Nehemiah respond?

Use the second column to record information you gather from other sources. You may want to look up names and places in a Bible dictionary, map or encyclopedia. What else can you discover about the people and places mentioned in this chapter?

You can also use this section to jot down your own thoughts and impressions about people and events. What do you observe about Nehemiah’s character? What challenges or problems does he face? What do you observe in the character and behavior of others in the story?

**Nehemiah 1:1-3**  
Bible Facts and Information:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Research and Observations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Nehemiah 1:4-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bible Facts and Information:</th>
<th>My Research and Observations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What four things did Nehemiah do when he received the news from Hanani?

- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________

What specific concerns and requests does Nehemiah mention in his prayer?

- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________

The month Chislev (Nehemiah 1:1) corresponds with our mid-November to mid-December. The month Nisan (Nehemiah 2:1) corresponds with our mid-March to mid-April. How long did Nehemiah pray before he received an answer? What does this say about Nehemiah?

- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
INTERPRETATION – What does it mean?
Look for a spiritual lesson. Be careful not to read into the Bible an idea that is not there. Examine each verse in light of the verses around it. To help you find a spiritual lesson, ask questions such as, “Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? A condition to that promise? Is there a warning to heed? An example to follow or avoid?” State the lesson in one simple sentence.

APPLICATION – How does it apply to me?
We don’t study the Bible just to gather information—we want to spiritually grow. Our heart needs to be open to change. The only way to move truth off the pages of your Bible and into your life is to put it into action.

To apply a spiritual lesson, we must examine ourselves and take deliberate steps to do something with what we have learned. Ask yourself: Is this a new lesson, or does it reinforce what I already know? What does it challenge me to do? Does it point out error in my attitude or actions? What changes does it require? Think of how the lesson relates to you and what specific course of action you will take. Write your application in the form of a question to make it personal.

Nehemiah 1:1-3
Lesson: ____________________________________________________

Application: ____________________________________________________

Nehemiah 1:4-11
Lesson: ____________________________________________________

Application: ____________________________________________________

Summary
Write a simple sentence that summarizes what the chapter is about.________________

Give a title to the chapter that will help you personally to remember it.

________________
“O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant…”
Nehemiah 1:11a

Ask Nehemiah the secret of successful Christian living and his answer might simply be three words: prayer, persistence and obedience. Nehemiah practiced all three, especially when he found himself up against a difficult situation. Throughout the study of this book, we will see—time and again—that Nehemiah’s first response to problems is to pray. Nehemiah was a man who knew how to pray consistently and with results! He demonstrated his belief that the “effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). Let’s take a closer look at Nehemiah’s prayer with an eye to discover how to be consistent and effective in our own prayer life.

The word ACTS helps us remember four elements of consistent prayer. Do you see these incorporated into Nehemiah’s prayer? Look over his prayer (vs. 5-11) and list what you find.

A   doration: __________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

C   onfession: __________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

T   hanksgiving: _________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

S  upplication: __________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Do you consistently include each of these elements in your own prayer life? Do your best to explain why each one is necessary for you and important to God.

A   doration: __________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

C   onfession: __________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

T   hanksgiving: _________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

S   upplication: __________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
According to God’s Word, what will make our prayers effective? Read the following verses and record what you find.

2 Chronicles 7:14 ________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

Jeremiah 29:13 ________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

John 15:7 ________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

1 John 5:14-15 ________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

Nehemiah took time to pray before he took action. What effect did this have on the way he responded to the problem he was praying about? List all the ways you can think of.
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

Can you think of a specific time when you prayed about a problem before taking action? How did taking time to pray change your attitude or direct the action you took? Briefly share your experience.
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

What task or situation in life are you facing right now, for which you need to ask God’s guidance and help? Take a few moments to bring your need to the Lord in prayer. You may or may not wish to share this prayer within your group.
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
God’s Word Bearing Fruit

For you personally, what has been the most important lesson from this chapter? How will you put what you have learned into practice?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Something to Think About . . .

Why is prayer so important? Here are the four shortest reasons I know.

Prayer makes me wait.
Secondly, prayer clears my vision.
Thirdly, prayer quiets my heart.
Fourthly, prayer activates my faith.

The Lord is the specialist we need for these uncrossable and impossible experiences. He delights in accomplishing what we cannot pull off. But He awaits our cry. He listens for our request. Nehemiah was quick to call for help. His favorite position when faced with problems was the kneeling position. How about you?

- Chuck Swindoll -
Hand Me Another Brick