

A LENTEN GUIDE OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS FROM NEHEMIAH AND HEBREWS

New World UMC observes Lent as a deliberate way to join with the Church around the world in preparing for Easter. This Lenten Study Guide is meant to be a simple and intentional way to connect with God each day during the Lenten season, and to guide us through self-reflection and intentional discipleship.

WHY NEHEMIAH AND HEBREWS?

For Lent 2022, we picked Nehemiah as it focuses on personal and corporate confession that seeks reform and renewal. Nehemiah's themes of pursuing God through His Word and setting aside the sins which get in the way help connect with major motifs of the Lenten season.

The book of Hebrews is a great follow-up to Nehemiah. It focuses our eyes on Jesus, our Prophet, Priest, and King, the one who fully cleanses us and renews us from the inside-out. While Hebrews reminds us life for the Church in a season of wilderness—another major theme during Lent—it also leads us to Good Friday and Easter with its clear focus on Christ's redemptive work on our behalf.

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INTRODUCTION TO LENT

HISTORY OF LENT

The early church created a purposeful time to prepare for Easter and called it Lent from a word meaning, "spring." This preparation included intentional disciplines, such as fasting, almsgiving and prayer, and lasted 40 days to symbolize other significant Scripture stories.

The 40 days were to take spiritual inventory to clean out the things that hindered their relationship with Jesus, to remember why they were baptized, and to renew their commitment to the way of Jesus.

FASTING PURPOSE

Fasting is a spiritual practice found throughout the Bible where people give up or abstain from something (typically food). The purpose of fasting is to:

- Center our thoughts on God (Luke 2:36-38)
- Reveal the things that control us (Psalm 69:10)
- Create greater dependence (Matthew 4:4)
- Be "heard on high" (Isaiah 58:4)

Fasting is a primary practice during Lent because it helps strip away any spiritual veneer. In other words, abstaining from things of comfort often reveals the deeper layers of our lives (parts we often ignore or cover-up) – the things that take us away from trusting God and embracing our true identity as disciples of Jesus.

FASTING GUIDE

When people think of fasting, they typically picture giving up food for a certain amount of time. And while that is one way to do it, you can fast from all types of things for example:

- *Certain Food, Snacks, or Beverages*
- *Social media*
- *TV or Radio*
- *Video games*

The most important step in beginning a fast journey is to be mindful of the purpose: to keep your eyes on the Lord. Therefore, as you fast, plan places for prayer, worship, solitude, scripture reading or journaling during normally scheduled mealtimes.

WEEK 1

DAY 1 (3.2): NEHEMIAH 1

- What are 1-3 things in your life that feel like they've been broken down that you want God to rebuild? After reflection, talk to God about these things.
- When Nehemiah heard about Jerusalem's broken walls, what did he immediately do?
- When should we fast and pray?

DAY 2 (3.3): NEHEMIAH 2

- Despite having many blessings in life, why was Nehemiah saddened by the condition of Jerusalem?
- How does this reveal his priorities?
- What did Nehemiah ask of King Artaxerxes?
- In whom did Nehemiah trust? Where do you put your trust when life is hard?

DAY 3 (3.4): NEHEMIAH 3

- How did rebuilding the wall require investment and ownership from the whole community?
- What might we learn from that?
- Who took part in rebuilding the wall?

DAY 4 (3.5): NEHEMIAH 4

- Read Nehemiah 4:14 again. What do you need to remember when facing trials, opposition, temptation, or frustration?
- Who was plotting against them?
- What had God commanded in Deuteronomy 20:17? Sometimes, hard times come because of our sin, the sins of others, or God's way to grow us. How can we look at hard times as a blessing from God?

DAY 5 (3.6): CHURCH DAY

DAY 6 (3.7): NEHEMIAH 5:1-13

- Why do you think the poor, the outcasts, and the overlooked are so near to God's heart throughout the Bible?
- Do you reflect God's heart and actions in this area?
- Does God "play favorites"? Do we? How can we show love to all of God's people?

DAY 7 (3.8): NEHEMIAH 5:14-19

- What can you learn from the way Nehemiah's sacrifices personal gain for the sake of loving and serving his fellow Israelites?
- Where do all our blessings come from? How do we treat our things? Do we hold them tightly, not willing to share or loosely sharing with others? What are some ways that we could see "our things" as gifts from God?

WEEK 2

DAY 8 (3.9): NEHEMIAH 6

- Despite regular opposition, how does the wall's completion testify to God's faithfulness and power?
- What in your life testifies to the faithfulness, mercy, and power of God?
- What should we say 'yes' and 'no' to, remembering to seek God's best for us and for others around us?

DAY 9 (3.10): NEHEMIAH 7

- What might you learn from your walk with Christ through Nehemiah's example of not letting the guards leave their post, especially when there is still much work to do and opposition to experience?
- How does God continue to show God's faithfulness to God's people?
- How does God value each person? Each family? Each gift?

DAY 10 (3.11): NEHEMIAH 8:1-12

- How can you cultivate a love for reading and hearing God's Word like we see in this section?

DAY 11 (3.12): NEHEMIAH 8:13-18

- Do you have any ways to mark, remember, and celebrate God's faithfulness in your life?
- What might be ways you can do this throughout the year?

DAY 12 (3.13): CHUCH DAY

DAY 13 (3.14): NEHEMIAH 9:1-21

- Why is confession of sin such an essential part of how we rightly relate to God?
- Why is it important that we understand our sin is against a holy God?
- In what ways does knowing our sin and God's perfect Law lead us to tell God about our sin and help us to turn back to him?

DAY 14 (3.115): NEHEMIAH 9:22-38

- How does chapter 9 help us see the blessings of obedience and some consequences of disobedience?

WEEK 3

DAY 15 (3.16): NEHEMIAH 10

- What are ways Christians are to be "separated" to (or set apart to) our God and distinct from the world?
- How has God set you and your family apart for him?
- God uses God's people to fulfill God's promises. Remembering all things are from God, how are you serving the church?

DAY 16 (3.17): NEHEMIAH 11

- Throughout chapter 11, different individuals or groups are described with markers like people of valor, leaders of praise, those who give thanks, or valiant ones. How do you want people to remember you most?
- What changes might you need to make to leave this kind of legacy?
- How did each person help to rebuild Jerusalem? If someone described you and your family, what words would they use? Do others see Christ in you?

DAY 17 (3.18): NEHEMIAH 12

- Why was the dedication of the temple such a significant moment for Israel?
- How does that help you with what you prioritize and value as well?

DAY 18 (3.19): NEHEMIAH 13

- How does this chapter and their relationships to the Sabbath teach us about the competing values of the world and God?
- How can you prioritize rest and worship over accumulation, accomplishment, and busyness?
- What is the Sabbath Day? Why did God command God's people to it?
- How does your family set apart time to worship God?
- Do you prioritize that time within your schedules?

DAY 19 (3.20): CHURCH DAY

DAY 20 (3.21): HEBREWS 1

- Why is Jesus the perfect revelation of God and superior to angels or anything else in creation?
- How is Jesus, the Word, used by God to speak to us? See *Hebrews 1:3-4*

DAY 21 (3.22): HEBREWS 2:1-13

- Jesus endured suffering as one of us. Why should that stir up a trust and a desire to turn to him in trials?
- Why did Jesus need to be 100% God and 100% man to become our perfect substitute for our sins? See *Philippians 2:5-11*

WEEK 4

DAY 22 (3.23): HEBREWS 2:14-18

- Why and how can Jesus help you when you're tempted?
- As followers of Christ, we are drawn (tempted) to sin. How can turning to Jesus, through the Bible and prayer, help us to follow Him, even when we are tempted to sin? Spend time in prayer confessing and talking to him about your sin.

DAY 23 (3.24): HEBREWS 3:1-11

- How can you better "consider Jesus" throughout the course of each day?
- What are some ways that you thought about Jesus today?
- How can you trust him today and in your future? Memorize Hebrews 3:6.

DAY 24 (3.25): HEBREWS 3:12-19

- If we're to be on guard against rising unbelief or idolatry in our heart, what is one temptation to ask God to help you fight?
- How are you encouraging one another to live for Jesus?
- What are some temptations that draw you away from God?

DAY 25 (3.26): HEBREWS 4:1-13

- Why and how can you better rest in Jesus?
- How are you resting in Jesus with your schedules?
- Pray as you prepare for time to worship God at church tomorrow.

DAY 26 (3.27): CHURCH DAY

DAY 27 (3.28): HEBREWS 4:14-16

- What might it look like for you to draw near to God with more confidence, not in you, but in him?
- Have you put your trust in Jesus? If you have, how are you "holding fast" (clinging and trusting) to your belief in Jesus?
- Why should we cling to his promises over our good deeds?

DAY 28 (3.29): HEBREWS 5:1-10

- How is Jesus different from any other priest, and why does that matter?
- How is Jesus better than anyone else in the Bible?

WEEK 5

DAY 29 (3.30): HEBREWS 5:11-6:12

- In light of the deceptiveness and danger of sin, why should we take these warnings seriously in Hebrews and cling to Jesus?
- How are you growing closer to God?

DAY 30 (3.31): HEBREWS 6:13-20

- What are a couple reasons we have "strong encouragement" to hold fast to the hope set before us?
- Remember some of God's promises that he kept in the Bible. Remember some promises that he has kept to you and your family.

DAY 31 (4.1): HEBREWS 7:1-10

- If the Old Testament repeatedly points to Jesus, what does that tell us about him?
- How does that affect how we read the Old Testament?
- How is Jesus better than anyone else in the Bible?

DAY 32 (4.2): HEBREWS 7:11-28

- Why is it good news that Jesus is right now interceding for his own?
- Jesus is always keeping us before the Father. How can we be comforted that we are never forgotten, even when we go through hard times?

DAY 33 (4.3): CHURCH DAY

DAY 34(4.4): HEBREWS 8:1-7

- Why was the old covenant incomplete and why is the new covenant complete?
- Why did Jesus have to come?
- Why is the sacrifice of Jesus better than the Old Testament sacrifices?

DAY 35 (4.5): HEBREWS 8:8-13

- What are some of the blessings we receive through Christ in his new covenant?
- If you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, what blessings are for you in the new covenant (God's Promises) that Jesus kept?

WEEK 6

DAY 36 (4.6): HEBREWS 9:1-10

- Why did sin keep people out of the Most Holy Place?
- How does sin affect our relationship with God?
- Why couldn't the people of Israel enter the Most Holy Place?
- What did our sin do to our relationship with God?

DAY 37 (4.7): HEBREWS 9:11-28

- What do we receive because of the blood of Jesus?
- When do you need to remember this the most?
- Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper? What do the bread and wine stand for?
- What does God want us to do to remember him in celebrating the Lord's Supper?

DAY 38 (4.8): HEBREWS 10:1-18

- If Jesus' one sacrifice fully forgives and fully cleanses, how might you live in freedom today?
- How are we cleansed from our sin in Christ?
- How did Jesus' death on the cross make us free?

DAY 39 (4.9): HEBREWS 10:19-39

- How does the work of Christ give us boldness? How do we encourage one another with this good news?
- As a family, find someone to share your faith with so that they may know or grow deeper in love with Jesus. Keep Christ in your heart and on your tongue, and be assured that you are always doing the work of God's Kingdom.

DAY 40 (4.10): CHURCH DAY

DAY 41 (4.11): HEBREWS 11:1-16

- What is difficult about "faith" in God or his promises?
- What is faith? What do we learn about having faith in God? Memorize *Hebrews 11:1-3*.

DAY 42 (4.12): HEBREWS 11:17-40

- What did you learn or were encouraged by in seeing God's faithfulness through the faith of these people?
- How does the faith of others, whether in the Bible, in the church, or in your family, encourage you to live for God each day?
- How can you be used to encourage others to keep the faith?

WEEK 7

DAY 43 (4.13): HEBREWS 12:1-17

- What weights do you need to lay aside or sins forsake to cling to Jesus?
- What burdens do you carry (guilt of sin) that Christ has already paid?
- How can you help each other to trust in Christ alone to save?

DAY 44 (4.14): HEBREWS 12:18-29

- What are little ways we "refuse the one who is speaking" or ignore God's Word?
- What are some ways that you get distracted from reading God's Word or spending time in prayer?
- How can you encourage time in the Word and in prayer?

DAY 45 (4.15): HEBREWS 13:1-16

- Which of the commands, exhortations, or ways of living in this section do you most need to apply right now?
- What things do you need to "put off" in order to "put on" living for God more each day?
- How can you help each other to put "on" God?

DAY 46 (4.16): HEBREWS 13:17-25

- What are two things you most want to take away and keep from Hebrews?

DAY 47 (4.17): CHURCH DAY

LENT CHALLENGE: PUTTING OFF & PUTTING ON

WEEK 1: PRAYER

Put-off: PRIDE. Pride in your own success and your own way.

Put-on: HUMILITY. Humble dependence on God through prayer.

WEEK 2: TIME

Put-off: the WORLD. Centering your schedule and time on things of this world.

Put-on: CHRIST. Centering your schedule and time on things of God.

WEEK 3: TALENTS / GIFTS

Put-off: YOUR glory. Seeking your glory and fame with your gifts and talents.

Put-on: GOD'S glory. Seeking God's glory as gifts and talents to be used for His kingdom.

WEEK 4: MONEY

Put-off: SPENDING. Spending all money earned on self.

Put-on: GIVING. Learning to "give, save, and spend", making giving your first priority.

WEEK 5: GRATITUDE

Put-off: SELF. Seeking your own needs.

Put-on: OTHERS. Seeking the needs of others with a grateful heart.

WEEK 6: EVANGELISM

Put-off: PRIDE & FEAR. When sharing Christ with others, seek to put off pride and fear.

Put-on: CONFIDENCE. Show love to others to know and grow in Jesus.

WEEK 7: WORSHIP

Put-off: SELF-WORSHIP. The desire to worship anything or anyone else other than God alone.

Put-on: GODLY-WORSHIP. The need to worship God for WHO God is.