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Nehemiah / Nehemiah 11–12

Introduction

- <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/11/986203268/lee-horton-reflects-on-coming-home-after-years-in-prison> - Note in particular his experience at the DMV:
 - A few days after his release, Horton, his brother, and another recently released man went to get their licenses. They stood in line for two and a half hours—at the DMV. Everybody around them apparently understood that as misery. They were laughing and smiling. Horton described the experience as wonderful because after years of incarceration, simply having the freedom to stand in that line was beautiful.
- Two people can stand in the exact same DMV line. One is miserable. The other is overflowing with joy. The circumstances are identical but the perspective is different.
- We have a tendency to think that joy comes from circumstances. When everything in life is going well, I have joy. But real joy runs far deeper than an emotional state based on your circumstances.
- Joy is a settled gladness and satisfaction that comes from knowing that God is good and He is at work even when life is hard.
- [Nehemiah 12:43](#) says: “On that they they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy.” God had given great joy to the exiles who had experienced much hardship. Their lives weren’t

easy, but at the end of [Nehemiah 12](#), their lives are filled with joy. God wants to fill your life with joy.

- Maybe life is hard for you this morning, and you are struggling to experience joy. [Nehemiah 11-12](#) is going to help you this morning understand how you can grow in joy. From this text, I want you to see three ways you can find joy.

You can find joy serving God in difficult places.

- For God's people, Jerusalem was the most significant city in the world. It was the place where God chose for His temple. The first temple constructed under King Solomon, and it was the center of Israel's worship. The temple was the place associated with God's covenant presence. Every time you came to the temple in ancient Jerusalem you were reminded that God desired to dwell with His people.
- When God created Adam and Eve, His desire was to dwell with them in the Garden of Eden. But, sin hindered Adam and Eve's fellowship with God. They were expelled from the garden. But, God still wanted to be with His people. The OT traces God's determination to dwell with a sinful people without compromising His holiness.
- The temple established in Jerusalem as a reminder of God's presence, and a place where sacrifices were made. The sacrifices reminded Israel that sinful people cannot approach a holy God apart from atonement.
- Jerusalem was a royal city. In [2 Samuel 7:14](#), God promised David an enduring Kingdom that found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. And centuries later, on a hill outside of Jerusalem, the promised King would give Himself as our atoning sacrifice.
- However, in [Nehemiah 11](#), Jerusalem was sparsely populated. Many of the returning exiles lived in the surrounding villages outside of Jerusalem. They had their land, they were working their fields. Everyone

wants a house in the country. But, Jerusalem needs to be repopulated. Lots are cast to discern God's will for who will move to Jerusalem, and one out of ten people move to the holy city. 11:1-24 are the names of people who lived in Jerusalem.

- A difficult assignment - uproot your home and move to Jerusalem, a city. A call to leave established land and livelihood to rebuild in a city that had been devastated by the Babylonians. Jerusalem was a vulnerable city. The city God was building to accomplish His purpose! Huge responsibility!
- Jerusalem mattered to God! And, the place where God has you matters to God as well. Jerusalem not the end of the story. God's Spirit now dwells in His people wherever they live. His presence is not confined to a temple in Jerusalem, His presence is in us.
- God uses His people to carry the Gospel to every place all over the world so that one day we will gather in the New Jerusalem, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.
- What a joyous thought! Even difficult places can become places where you have an opportunity to accomplish God's purpose. God can use the difficult places He allows us to occupy to display His character and advance His purposes.
- **Joy grows when you realize the difficult places are not meaningless.** For some of us, we need a change of perspective. We look at our circumstances and think, I'll be happy when I get out of this situation, or when God moves me elsewhere, instead of seeing every place as an opportunity for God to use you.
- Think of the places that are robbing you of joy: a frustrating job, a difficult marriage season, a season of loneliness, a neighborhood you don't want to live in, a parenting season that feels exhausting. Now, think of the work God may want to do through you in that difficult place.

- Are you so focused on getting out of that difficult place that you are missing what God wants to do through you?
- **Joy grows when you embrace God's purpose in the place he has given you.** In that difficult place, how can you represent Christ? At home, who needs patience from you? At work, who do you need to encourage for the sake of the Gospel? In your neighborhood, who do you need to open your home to?
- Stop waiting for the ideal place and start being faithful where God has placed you.

You can find joy by pursuing holiness.

- The end of [Nehemiah 12](#) is the dedication of the wall. However, before the wall is dedicated, the text shows that God has put His people back in place. The list includes priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and leaders. The names are people who not only live in Jerusalem but also live in the surrounding areas. The city has been repopulated, worship is organized, and the people are ready to consecrate themselves and celebrate what God has done. The names demonstrate God's covenant faithfulness. He has been faithful to bring His people out of exile and preserved His people across generations to accomplish His purposes.
- In verse 27, Levites are gathered at the wall of Jerusalem from around Judah for the dedication of the wall. This will be a time of celebration, thanksgiving, and worship.
- vs. 30 - However, before the celebration, the priests purify themselves along with the people, the city gates, and the wall. The text doesn't detail what the purification ritual consisted of, but under Mosaic Law, purification rituals often included sprinkling with water, shaving the entire body, washing clothes, or pouring oil on the heads of the leaders.

- [Exodus 19](#) - Before God came to Mt. Sinai - the people purified themselves. The purification rituals were a reminder that they were entering in a sacred space. Sin disrupts fellowship with the God we were made to worship. The purification rituals were a reminder of one's need to be clean in the presence of God.
- In [Nehemiah 12](#), the people reminded that they serve a holy God. Before they celebrated, they needed to be consecrated. It's joyous to set yourself apart from the rest of the world and identify with the Holy God of all creation.
- Tempting to think that pursuing holiness is God's way of removing fun from our lives. However, holiness is not God taking joy away from you. In His holiness and love for us, as we confess our sins and repent, God removes what keeps us from enjoying Him as we should.
- **Joy grows when you let God make you more like Jesus.** Being like Christ is what we were saved for. You can't help grow in joy when you are becoming like the One who saved you. This is the process of sanctification. This morning, God may be sanctifying you by removing your impatience, crucifying your pride, exposing your bitterness, or confronting your selfishness.
- What is God trying to change in you right now? How might God be using someone in your life to bring about change? A conversation with someone in your D Group that pressed you to think about your sin that maybe you didn't receive well? Are you willing to listen? Are you open to change or are you resisting the Spirit?
- **Joy grows when you realize sin never gives you what it promises.** Sin advertises itself as a shortcut to joy. But, sin always leads you down a path of destruction and leaves you joyless. It leaves you unsatisfied and empty. It creates bondage and chaos. It damages fellowship with God. (Nobody ever says, "I regret not sinning more. I should have been a raging alcoholic or a serial adulterer.")

- When tempted to gossip, what will the gossip actually give you? When tempted to lust, what lies is lust telling you that you are believing? When you hold on to bitterness, what do you think resentment and bitterness is accomplishing?
- You'll be far more willing to pursue holiness when you see that sin is not producing joy. Sin is stealing joy.
- Some of us need to confess our sin and ask Jesus to save us from our sins because sin hasn't just stolen our joy, it's stolen our lives.

You can find joy worshiping God for His faithfulness.

- vs. 31- Nehemiah organized two large thanksgiving processions on top of the wall. they march the top of the wall. One group goes one way, and the other group goes in the opposite direction. Both groups eventually converge at the temple.
- This is the same wall that had been mocked by their enemies. In [Nehemiah 4:3](#), Tobiah said that even a fox could break down the wall, but now choirs of people are walking on the wall. The wall that had been mocked was now a platform of praise.
- It's a celebration of worship. There's instruments, singing, thanksgiving, sacrifices, and rejoicing.
- vs. 43 - God had given them great joy. Why? God had been faithful. He had been faithful to deliver them from Babylon. He had been faithful to reestablish them in the land. He had been faithful to preserve them. He had been faithful to His promises. The natural response to the faithfulness of God is worship.
- Worship is the goal of redemption. For all of human history, God has been redeeming a people who might recognize His greatness and faithfulness and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

- Ultimately, God sent His Son to redeem us through His death and resurrection, so that some day, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation might gather around His throne in worship.
- Right now, life might be challenging. You might even feel joyless, but lift your heart in praise and worship God for what He's done in your life. Let your worship of God reignite joy in your heart.
- Worship as you place your hope in the day that you are in the New Jerusalem where no enemy can threaten, no wall will need to be rebuilt, and no temple will be needed because the Lamb is among His people. Worship as you look forward to the day that joy will never fade.
- **Joy grows when you make worship a response rather than a ritual.** Ritual says, "This is what I do." I sing because I'm supposed to. I pray because it's the right thing. I come to church because it's Sunday, etc. Rather, worship is the response to what God has done. I want to be around God's people. I want to give Him thanks. I want to sing. If you struggle to worship, you need to go back to your salvation. Think about what God has done in your life and let that fuel your worship.
- **Joy grows when you celebrate faithfulness out loud.** vs. 43 - Jerusalem's joy was heard far away. We put disappointment to words all the time. "My job is awful. Nothing is going right. I don't know what God is doing." But, do you put your thanksgiving to words? "God answered my prayers. God carried me through. God saved me. He forgave me. God provided. God has been faithful to my family." Who can you tell what God has done? Who can you share your testimony with?
- A joyful church is a church where we sing God's praises and stories of God's faithfulness are constantly being told.
- Ultimately, joy doesn't come because a wall was finished. Joy comes because God sent His Son, the One who would come to the Holy City as the Messiah who would die outside the walls as the sacrifice for our sins only to rise from the dead so all our sins could be atoned for, and we

could be given the gift of eternal life - brought into a New Jerusalem where He will wipe away every tear and death will be no more.

- Because of Jesus, there's lasting joy. Do you know Jesus? Have you turned from your sins and turned to Him by faith? Today, embrace Him as Lord. If you are a follower of Jesus, ask Him to restore your joy by reminding you of all the ways He's been good to you.