

Women's Bible Study – Spring 2019
Nehemiah 7:5-8
Svea Merry – 02/27/19



I hope you've been enjoying this book of Nehemiah. As I've said before, it's one of my favorites. I admire Nehemiah as a person and feel like I have so much to learn from his example. I enjoy the storytelling in this book, and even though I will never experience firsthand the challenges of restoring a city in the 5th century BC to its former glory, I have found that the applications that flow from this story to be greatly inspiring and highly practical.

Over the last two weeks as Juli and Angie described all of the challenges and threats that kept coming Nehemiah's way, I've felt overwhelmed for him. And yet, Nehemiah stayed so grounded, so unflappable, even in the face of substantial threats. Juli challenged us last week to ask what made him like that, and she showed us that it was because he remained focused on our great and awesome God which kept him focused on what God had called him to do, and kept him trusting in God's justice to deal with everything else. That is powerful stuff.

I'm working on memorizing Colossians 3 with some friends, and last week we got up to verse 15 which says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." I couldn't help but think of that verse as we studied Nehemiah together last week. Nehemiah had every reason to have fear ruling in his heart, or discouragement ruling in his heart, or even anger and resentment, but he didn't. He had the peace of God ruling in his heart.

I want that for myself, don't you? The exciting thing is that the material we're going to study today will show us a tool for getting that kind of sure, confident peace. It's a tool that has been essential in my life, and I know many of you will say the same.

After my first husband died, and I was a single mom to two very little kids, one of the things I struggled with the most was feeling very fearful and vulnerable that someone might break into the house in the middle of the night. I would often lay awake unable to sleep, ears pricked hearing every strange noise, my heart racing as I tried to figure out what the sound was. My wise mother-in-law, Rosella, gave me something that truly helped me to get over that fear. She gave me these cards. On each one is a verse either about fear, or about God watching over us, or that He is in control. She advised me to take out these cards and read them over and over and not to stop until I believed them. It worked. The truths of these Scriptures melted the fear I felt and renewed my perspective that God was in control. I read through these cards on a nightly basis for a long time, and without fail, they calmed me. They reassured me. They restored my confidence in God's protection. These cards taught me that Scripture can transform us when we have it in our heart.

These verses banished the fear that was trying to rule heart and gave me peace. And from what we've seen of Nehemiah, I'm confident he'd say the same. We know that he was not only a man of deep and continual prayer, he based many of his prayers on

Scripture. Maybe you recall from chapter 1 that his prayer was basically a paraphrase of sections of Deuteronomy. He knew Scripture and therefore he knew God and that gave him the peace to withstand the many blows from the enemy.

I know many of you would agree with this too. That Scripture transforms us when we have it in our heart. Today in chapter 8, we're going to see a fabulous example of exactly this when we see the Israelites rediscover the amazement of God's Word for themselves.

But if you've read chapter 7 in preparation for today, you might be wondering if we have arrived at the first "clunker" chapter of this great book. If you haven't read it yet, chapter 7 is basically a long list of hard-to-pronounce names with some tacked-on items about what these people gave to the treasury of Jerusalem. It doesn't seem at first glance like there is much heart-transforming potential in this chapter. But I hope you know my style enough to know that I wouldn't ever start off a lecture saying that any chapter of the Bible is a "clunker." I am a whole-hearted believer of what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16 that "ALL Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Even lists like this one.

And there is heart-transforming potential in this list, but in order to see it, give me just a minute to recap this story so far in case you've missed a week or things have gone by too quickly. In chapter 1, we met Nehemiah who was a Jew living in exile in the Persian city of Susa. He was serving in a very prestigious position as the chief servant to the Persian king. He became aware that the Jews who had gone back to rebuild Jerusalem were struggling to get the community up and running because the city was stuck in a state of disrepair largely because the wall that was its main form of protection was still lying in ruins. In chapter 2, Nehemiah approached the king very astutely with his request to take a leave of absence to oversee the project of getting the wall rebuilt and the city functioning again. The king not only granted him time off to do this, he threw in a massive amount of supplies and resources to make the project successful. Nehemiah was quick to attribute this to God's good hand on him that a pagan king would be so generous to the Jews. Nehemiah traveled the 1000 miles from Susa to Jerusalem and after inspecting the work that needed to be done, implemented a very smart and strategic plan for rebuilding the wall by having the entire community work together, each family group only focusing on a small, manageable chunk, usually the section belonging to their family or by the place most significant to them, for example, the priests took care of the section by the temple. In chapters 4–6, we saw that there was tremendous opposition to this rebuilding process. The so-called "Troublesome Trio" of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem tried virtually every trick in the villain playbook, hurling insults, plotting violence, planting confusion and stirring up people who would cause negativity and discouragement, and eventually, even the threat of physical attack. Nehemiah and the people prayed their way through this all the while continuing to work diligently on the wall. But we also saw that there were problems within the Israelite community as well. Poverty was a significant issue for many families and some of the officials were taking advantage of the situation to make a few bucks on the side. Nehemiah was incensed and not only dealt with this, he modeled his servant-leadership style by not even taking his full salary and by providing for more than 150 people at his own table. In last week's chapter, chapter 6, the Troublesome Trio were back again, this time trying to intimidate, publicly slander, and even trap Governor Nehemiah in a bad decision to get him removed from office so-to-

speak. But his resolve and integrity stood, and the chapter ended with the victorious and extraordinary announcement that the work on the wall was finished, the community having completed the whole project in only 52 days!

Much work was yet to be done, though, as verse 4 of chapter 7 says that houses hadn't yet been rebuilt. Our first verse for today, Nehemiah chapter 7, verse 5 reveals Nehemiah thinking about where to go from here to get the city going. Nehemiah 7:5. *"⁵ So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. This is what I found written there:"* And we're going to stop reading there because what follows is 67 verses worth of names of the family groups who had returned from exile to Jerusalem, with accounting for their animals, and a list of the gifts they had given to the treasury of Jerusalem for the rebuilding process. I could read it for you, but then your mind might wander enthralled with hearing so many exotic-sounding, interesting names you've never heard before.

Or, let's just call it like it is. It can be hard to get very excited about places in Scripture that are just lists of names we can't pronounce. But, lists can have tremendous value to them. I mean, who here has ever gone to the grocery store and realized you forgot your shopping list at home? On the day before Thanksgiving? That's a very important list.

You see, lists, even lists of names, are extremely meaningful to us when we have a connection to them. I'm really looking forward to hearing a particular list read this May when the graduating class of Schaeffer Academy's high school is read off because two of my children, Lord willing, will be on that list. A list of names can be significant even when we don't personally know the people on it though too. Have you been to Washington DC and been moved by the list of names at the War Memorials? Or how many of you remember hearing the names of people killed on 9/11 read aloud, a bell tolling after each was spoken? On a much lighter note, have you ever listened with excitement at a fundraiser while a list of raffle winners was being read, hoping to hear your own or a friend's name called? My point is that lists become very meaningful to us, transformative even, when we're connected to them or understand their significance.

This list was significant to Nehemiah and it's here in our Bibles for a reason. And it's a fun work of Bible study to figure out what that reason might be. Verse 5 says God put it on Nehemiah's heart to assemble the nobles and officials and people to be enrolled in this restored community, and as he did that, he turned to this list. Now, he's not pulling this out to use as a checklist to affirm who is supposed to live here and who isn't. This is an old list. This was first recorded, with a few minor variations, in Ezra chapter 2. It's a list of the families who were the very first brave souls to return to the ruins of Jerusalem back in 537 BC, about 90 years before Nehemiah was looking at it.

So, why has God put it on Nehemiah's heart to go back and review these names from a generation or two ago? I believe it is because it was important for Nehemiah, as well as for us, to remember the real people who stepped out in faith during a time of difficult transition. This was a generation who represented a new chapter in God's story as they returned to the city where God's temple had once stood, where God's presence had been.

Warren Weirsbe writes in his commentary, *"The list of people were God's "bridge" from the defeats of the past to the hopes of the future....The important thing is not to count the people but to realize that these people counted. In leaving Babylon, they did much more than put their names on a list. They laid their lives on the altar and risked everything to obey the Lord and restore the Jewish nation. They were "pioneers of faith" who trusted God to enable them to do the impossible."*¹

The names on this list may not be familiar or even normal-sounding to us, but they were people who held a significant place in Nehemiah's history, and even included the line to whom Jesus would one day be born. Therefore, we have a connection to them too. Someday in the new heavens and earth, I'd love to have a cup of coffee with Zerubbabel, Azariah, and Bilshan and ask them what feelings they had as they set out for Jerusalem. I'd like to ask the sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono about what it was like to make that journey and if they ever had second thoughts about going, and it would be amazing to hear from the priestly families of Immer, Pashhur, and Harim about what it was like when they caught the first glimpse of God's temple on the horizon.

You see, even here, represented in this list, there is Scripture that can fuel our lives for godliness if we let it sink in. We can be inspired to acknowledge the thousands of people that stepped out in faith to be a part of God's story of redemption, who gave sacrificially of themselves and their resources. I dare you to ask yourself if you would have been counted among the names on this list if you had lived when they did.

But what significance did this list have for Nehemiah at this point in our story? He was fresh off the amazing accomplishment of completing the rebuilding work so quickly despite the challenges, and now as he was preparing for the next challenge, God put this on his heart. This list was important to him as he needed structure for getting the renewed community of Jerusalem established.

You see, verse 4 tells us that the city was big but the people living in it were few, and the houses hadn't been rebuilt. Now, if you read chapter 3 carefully, you saw that several of the families rebuilt the section of the wall that was in front of their own house, so many scholars say it's likely that Nehemiah wasn't simply talking about literal houses here, but rather using the meaning of houses like family dynasties as in the "Royal House of Windsor." That meaning of house fits with why he turns to this genealogical list of the families who originally returned to Jerusalem as he summons the other officials to meet with him to begin the city planning process.

But there is one phrase in this chapter that strikes me as more powerfully perhaps than anything else. And it is ultimately, the reason why Nehemiah went to this list. We already read it in verse 5 but you may have read right past it, so let's see it again because it's so great. Nehemiah said, *"So my God put it into my heart."*

I love that Nehemiah uses this phrase. Over and over we have seen Nehemiah talking to God whether in his deep prayers as in chapter 1, or his quick "arrow prayers" - you know,

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. [*Be Determined*](#) (p. 87).

the ones you shoot up to God quickly - like he did in chapter 2 when he asked God to help him answer the king, or in later chapters as he asked God for strength, protection, and justice in dealing with the guys who were up to no good.

But this is a really incredible phrase here because it shows us that Nehemiah's theology of prayer was not just a one-way street of him always talking to God, he expected to hear from him too. Now I don't mean he heard God talking in an audible voice, but simply what Nehemiah says here in verse 5. That God put something on his heart. Have you ever had that experience? A sense that the urge you felt to do something was from the Holy Spirit and not simply of yourself?

A couple of weeks ago, while working on this very lecture, a sweet thing happened to me. I was sitting in my living room, bundled up in a blanket on one of those ridiculously frigid days, studying today's chapters and feeling rather discouraged. I tried writing down some of my thoughts but nothing much was coming. It was a cold, grey day and I just couldn't seem to break through and make any headway. Then an email appeared. It was a really sweet message, out of the blue, from a gal telling me how one of my lectures had been meaningful to her. I was so touched as I read and re-read her email, not just because of her kind words, but because it directly dissolved the discouragement I was fighting at that moment and reignited my enthusiasm to dig into God's Word and prepare to share it with you. I emailed her back right away, thanking her, and told her it would probably give her chills if she knew how much I believed God had used her to be His voice of encouragement to me.

Now, that was a nice kindness, and of course it could have just been a coincidence. But one more thing happened that led me to believe it was not coincidental. The next day, a different friend called me out of the blue just to chat. And we don't chat on the phone hardly ever so that was unique in itself. But she mentioned that I had kept coming to her mind during the previous afternoon and she kept feeling like she should give me a call, but she just didn't get around to it.

Friends, how sweet and good and loving is God if He had been urging this friend to give me a call while I was feeling so discouraged, and when she didn't act on His promptings at the time, He motivated another gal to write me an encouraging email? The combination of those two things makes me believe that not only does our God know our hearts, He lays things on the hearts of other believers to be His hands and feet here on earth.

Now, a word of caution here. How do we know if what's on our heart is from God or not? Well, without a doubt, we have one sure way, and that is to know what God has already said to us through His Word. He will never contradict Himself or lead us to do something that conflicts with what He's already said. And this is yet another reason why it is so important for us to know what's in here. To let it be the voice of *Scripture* and not other misleading voices that motivates and transforms our hearts.

Nehemiah believed God put things on his heart, and now, as we turn to chapter 8, we're going to meet a new character who had something important on his heart too, and that man is Ezra. You may recognize Ezra as having the same name as the book that comes

right before Nehemiah. And yes, it's named after him. As you may recall from our introduction to this study, originally the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were one long book, like a part 1 and part 2 of a longer story. The beginning of Ezra tells us about the people in that list we just talked about in chapter 7, the ones who were the first to leave exile and return to the ruins of Jerusalem. That group was led by Zerubbabel, there's a name for you. Their focus was on rebuilding the temple. Then the second half of Ezra jumps forward about a generation later and tells Ezra's story. He returned to Jerusalem with a second group of Jews. And, in keeping with our theme of Scripture in our hearts today, just like we saw that Nehemiah reacted to what God had put on his heart, Ezra was a man with a very godly motivation on his heart too.

Ezra 7:10 says that "*Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach its statutes and rules in Israel.*" Ezra was a man who not only wanted to know God's Word, he had his heart set on living it out, and then to share that applied knowledge with others. That was his motivation behind all that he did.

Ezra was a priest, a direct descendant of the first high priest, Aaron, brother of Moses. His dream and mission when he set out for Jerusalem was to lead the spiritual revival that the Jews so needed as this new phase of their history was unfolding. And at first it seemed that it was going well, but then a problem surfaced within the community. Many of the Jews were intermarrying people from the surrounding nations. Now, this wasn't a racial issue. God loves people of every race. In fact, Scripture promises us that the end of this age won't happen until people from every tongue, tribe, and nation are gathered in to worship God together with us (Rev 7:9). God loves all people regardless of their race or nationality. The issue was a spiritual one. The Jews were marrying people who worshipped other gods and who were leading them astray. Imagine if the next senior pastor we hired had a wife who was a practicing Buddhist. How could we trust his spiritual purity and leadership if the person he loves most on this earth rejects God and worships something else entirely. That was the issue at the end of Ezra's story. Some of these Jews were living this scenario like a pastor being married to a Buddhist, and Ezra was devastated over this, knowing it represented a significant threat to the spiritual health of the Israelite community.

That's where his story left off at the end of his book until he appears again here in Nehemiah chapter 8. I can only imagine what an encouragement Nehemiah and Ezra would have been to each other. I expect they were probably good friends and great supporters of each other. That would explain why at this point in the story, Nehemiah shifts his focus to tell us about a really great event that Ezra led. Later in the book they'll have a wonderful dedication ceremony for the wall, but it should be inspiring to all of us that even before they did that, before that celebrated and dedicated their great accomplishment, the first thing they did was to gather together and ask Ezra to read and teach the Scriptures to them.

After all, what good is life if we are living in dark ignorance, not knowing who God is, what the purpose of our life here on earth is all about, or how to go about living as one pleasing to God. All of the answers to those questions are here in this book. Yet another great reason to know Scripture. And I expect that what these people had just been through, the great work they had been part of with God clearly on their side, the protection He

had given them from their enemies, and their witness of Nehemiah's extraordinary example of trust and faith in our great and awesome God, had made them hungry to know God for themselves. And, again, the best way to know God is through how He has chosen to reveal Himself. Through His Word.

So chapter 8 begins by saying that all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate, this big open area near the temple. And they told Ezra to bring out of the book of the Law of Moses. The books of Moses are the first 5 books of the Bible, called that because he is recognized as their author. In other words, they asked Ezra to bring out Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Ezra, is described in the NIV translation here as a teacher of the Law, and in other verses and translations as a scribe. A scribe was one who copied scrolls, often spending a lifetime studying, recording and carefully writing out each word of the Scriptural text. Both of these titles confirm that Ezra's priestly focus was on knowing, living out, and teaching people all of the details of God's Law, and this was exactly what the people wanted to know, this Law that was God's description of what it looks like to live as a peaceful community of people who love and serve God and live in harmony with one another. Their ancestors had been conquered because they didn't follow these instructions and so it's a beautiful thing now that they want to recommit themselves to learning and following God's Word. They were hungry for Ezra to read and teach God's Word to them.

Let's read verses 1–8, and as we do, try to imagine yourself as one of the people standing inside the newly rebuilt fortress, finally feeling secure, the temple behind you, your future with this community of God's people ahead.

"When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

² So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand.

³ He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

⁴ Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

⁵ Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. ⁶ Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

⁷ The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. ⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read."

Isn't that a great scene? Ezra is reading Scripture to these Scripture hungry people, and it was important that they not just hear, but that they understood what they're hearing. So Ezra had this team of Levites, Levites were the Israelite tribe tasked with all the worship-related responsibilities, circulating around the crowd explaining things and answering their questions. This passage affirms why you should never feel ashamed or inhibited from asking questions about the Bible. Ezra and his team recognized that some of this stuff is hard to understand, and we often need some help with the explanation.

But what happened next is really interesting. The people were going deep with their understanding. They were really discovering the big idea about Scripture that I began this message with - that knowing Scripture transforms us as we take it into our hearts. Apparently they were coming to recognize in a profound way that they had failed to live up to all that God wanted for them, that they had missed out on many blessings because they didn't know the beauty that was in God's Word. Maybe they felt regret for the ways they'd grieved God, maybe they were wishing they could turn back time and do things differently. Let's read how Ezra and Nehemiah handled this sudden outburst of emotion in verses 9-12.

⁹Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

¹⁰Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

¹¹The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve."

¹²Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them."

It was a time to celebrate with great joy. Great joy because of what they Lord had accomplished. Great joy not just for how the community had come together to rebuild the wall in only 52 days, but great joy for all that God had done for His people. Again, verse 10 said, do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your *strength*. This was happening during a holiday season for them, literally a season of holy-days. Verse 2 says it was the first day of the seventh month, which probably doesn't mean much to us, but on the Jewish calendar, the seventh month contains some of the holiest days of the year, including the Day of Atonement, and then the Festival of Booths.

Repentance and remorse for how we've missed the mark with God is good and appropriate and has it's time and place, but this wasn't it. This was the time to celebrate God and what He had done. Their regret-filled grief would be like parents making a scene during their child's wedding reception because of regrets they had over how they had parented. Wishing one had parented differently might be worth processing, but at a wedding reception is not the right forum for that and doing so would selfishly take the focus off of where it belongs. Nehemiah and Ezra did well to get the people to snap out of their mood and to celebrate God.

Have you celebrated God recently? Or ever? The intent behind most all religious holidays is to remember and celebrate God, obviously Christmas celebrates Christ's birth, Easter, his resurrection, but it's so easy for us to get busy with the traditions of those days and to miss or at least minimize the purpose. Have you ever set aside a day to celebrate God's faithfulness to your family? A day of worship, and gratitude, and praise?

God knew this kind of thing would be meaningful and worthwhile, not for His own sake, but for ours. When we recall the goodness of God, isn't it really we who benefit from that? We who are blessed to regain that focus and perspective? He doesn't need our recognition, He is sufficient in Himself. But when when we look back and remember how God has been our helper, our faithful provider and protector, our faith is blessed. And that brings God great glory too.

Way back when God told Moses how He wanted His people to live, He built in periods of rest, remembrance, and celebration like this into their year. In my opinion, one of the ones that sounds like the most fun was a week-long harvest festival that would take place each fall to celebrate God's faithfulness specifically by remembering how He provided for all of the Israelites when He brought them out of slavery in Egypt. When they were released from captivity to Pharaoh, they camped in tents, or some translations call them "booths," in the wilderness, and God provided everything they needed, even their daily bread in the form of manna. This fun festival was a time when the whole community was supposed to take a week to camp out together and celebrate God. Every family was supposed to construct a little shelter and sleep in it each night. The first and last days were refreshing days off when no one had to do any ordinary work, and every day in between they would celebrate God's faithfulness by bringing offerings from their harvest. Can't you imagine what a fun time this could have been for the community? It kind of reminds me a bit of going to Family Camp with our church each August.

But lest you think I'm going off on a tangent, let's go back to chapter 8. As Ezra had been reading the Law Scriptures written by Moses to the people, he would have read through Leviticus 23 which is where the description of this very festival is recorded. Nehemiah 8:13 says that the next day, a smaller group of people got together for some more in-depth Bible study, and they realized that this very festival was due to be celebrated in two weeks and they jumped on the opportunity to begin living out the Scriptures. Can you think of a more fun way to begin practicing the joy of learning and applying what you see in the Bible than getting to start with a festival?

Verse 15 says that they published and proclaimed the announcement of this festival in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas where people had been living and gave them the details of how to prepare to celebrate this Feast of Booths. The people jumped on board and they made these little booths, setting them up on their roofs, courtyards, and in the public squares. They celebrated with such enthusiasm and joy that verse 17 says the festival hadn't been observed so well since the days of Joshua. They observed the weeklong festival and, showing their happy hunger for God's Word, Ezra continued to read Scripture to them every day of the festival.

The implication of why they felt such great joy was that they were rediscovering God's Word and all that was in it. They were experiencing this tremendous heart-transforming power of Scripture. And even more importantly, they were committing themselves to not just learning it on an awareness level, but really putting it into practice. As they lived out this first tangible example of practicing something that God wanted for them, for their good, from His Word, they experienced great joy.

This is beautiful, isn't it? The Bible is certainly the most incredible book ever written. In these pages we see God revealed to us, we learn about who He is, what He is like, what He wants for us. We gain the ability to discern if the tug we feel at our heart is from Him or not. And as we recommit ourselves to not only learning what is in these pages, but actually practicing the principles we learn, great joy is likely to be the first of many blessings that we will experience.

So, as we wrap this up, do you, too, want to experience Scripture in this heart-transforming kind of way? I would love for your small groups to share ideas with each other about how to do that, but let me give you one right now that you can take home and practice this week. This is a tool from the Navigators, a campus-oriented ministry known for its emphasis on learning and applying Scripture. They suggest a 5-step procedure to easily help you learn to live out the Bible. And if you haven't already noticed, it's written out for you at the bottom of your notes page so you don't have to copy this down.

- 1) This first step is to select a verse or passage and to write it out. Put it somewhere where you'll see it often, maybe on your mirror or fridge. Or I have one friend who writes verses on her shower wall. Wherever works for you.
- 2) The second step is to identify the truth that you want to focus on. Use your own words to state the truth of the verse.
- 3) Third, honestly assess your own life in relation to this truth of Scripture. What area of need does this part of God's Word expose in your life?
- 4) Fourth, state a specific change you want to implement in your area of need. Keep the action simple.
- 5) Fifth, and probably the most important one for being effective with this process: State how you will accomplish the goal you have set. You may want to put a reminder on your calendar or share your application with a trusted friend who will hold you accountable.

I have practiced this process and found it to be really exciting. If it is for you too, great! If you have found a different way that works better for you, I hope you'll share it and encourage others. But the point is that knowing and living out Scripture is essential for how we can have that kind of peace-filled confidence that we've seen here in Nehemiah. Affirming this, later in the New Testament, James wrote *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do."*