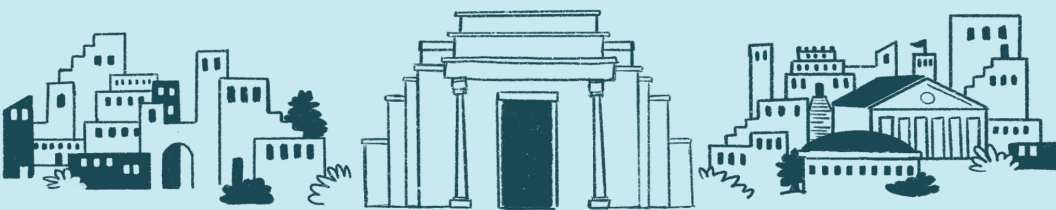


REBUILT

EZRA + NEHEMIAH

SEASON 5+6



contents

4 why this series
is important

6 series overview

8 season 5 week 1
season overview

12 season 5 week 2
who's land?
follow the money.

16 season 5 week 3
signed, unsealed,
and delivered.

18 season 5 week 4
managing relationships.

20 season 6 week 1
season overview

22 season 6 week 2
read the blueprints

26 season 6 week 3
feast of booths

30 season 6 week 4
i've got a confession
to make...

34 season 6 week 5
a boring piece
of information.

38 season 6 week 6
when the work changes:
from building to
maintaining.

42 season 6 week 7
a brief history of
dedication in scripture.

46 season 6 week 8
the drift after the rebuild.

50 resources



why this series is important

Deconstruction - a process of reexamining and questioning one's beliefs and values.

There has been a large exodus from Christianity in the West over the last 20 years. Churches, pastors, and leaders have hypothesized about why, but it hasn't changed the reality that the influence of Christ, and by extension, His church, in society has diminished.

Sometimes those leaving have done so with bitterness and anger, but more often with a quiet, aching sense that the faith they developed is no longer holding up. It seems like everywhere you turn, someone is deconstructing their faith, and that's made us in the church...anxious.

A lot of people are afraid to even talk about it, either because acknowledging it makes it more real or **because their faith** isn't holding up anymore, and they are afraid of what exploring it might lead to.

But here's something we've learned: ignoring the cracks in a person's faith doesn't make them go away. If anything, it keeps us from doing the one thing God has always invited His people to do: face what's broken and begin the work of rebuilding.

That's why the story of **Ezra and Nehemiah** is so relevant right now.

The story was written in a time when God's people were living in the aftermath of devastation. Their temple had been destroyed, their city walls torn down, and their identity stripped away.

In some ways, it mirrors the experiences of churches and Christians today. Trust in religious institutions has crumbled. Leaders have failed. Some believers have walked away, while others stand in the rubble, unsure of what to do next.

But there's hope. Ezra and Nehemiah show us what happens when God meets His people in the ruins. It's a reminder that deconstruction isn't the end of the story; it's just the beginning of a new chapter in a book with a lot of chapters.

Throughout history, whenever faith has become overly institutionalized or distorted by power, God has found ways to restore his Word to his people, forcing them to reckon with what had been built in His name and whether it still reflected His heart.

In Jesus' day, the truth was guarded by the religious authorities. In the 15th century, it was kept in Latin and controlled by the Church's hierarchy. But in both cases, God intervened so that **His voice could be heard again by everyday people**. These moments weren't just theological upgrades; they were reformations focused on rebuilding and renewal.

And now, I believe it's happening again.

People no longer seem content to let pastors and institutions do their thinking for them. With online forums, podcasts, and open-access theological resources, an increasing number of believers, skeptics and deniers are asking tough questions that require genuine answers. Conversations about God's Word have made their way out of locked rooms and into living rooms, coffee shops, group chats, discussion threads and video reels.

And yes, it's been messy.

Deconstruction is always messy. I've never seen a home renovation that didn't start with a lot of dust, a pile of broken materials, and a huge mess. But we're not supposed to walk away from the ruins; **we're supposed to start picking up the pieces.**

This series is an invitation to that.

We may face some uncomfortable truths about what is broken in us and in the church. We might need to admit that not everything we've tried has been good, even when it came from a good heart. But we're also going to see the grace of a God who rebuilds—slowly, faithfully, and completely.

You probably know someone who's deconstructing their faith—maybe that someone is you. Wherever you are in your life's journey, this series isn't about perfect answers or reestablishing an institution. It's about finding the Grace of Jesus in the rubble and rebuilding your faith, or someone else's, on a firm foundation.

So here's my challenge: don't be intimidated by the task ahead, because you were never supposed to do it alone anyways.

Let's do it the way God's people always have.

Let's rebuild, together.

series overview

september 2025 – june 2026

We know. Ten months is a long time.

In a world where most things are fast and bingeable, it might feel strange to stay in one series for almost a whole year. But this isn't just a series, it's a journey. We're slowing down on purpose so we don't miss what God is showing us.

To keep things fresh and allow us to key in on all the themes available to us in Ezra and Nehemiah, we've broken down our series into six "**Seasons.**" Think of it almost like a TV Series. One overall theme with six sub-plots, each with its own focus, flavour and heartbeat. These seasons will help us trace the shape of the story and pay close attention to the different aspects of spiritual rebuilding. They also give us space to pause, reflect and re-engage along the way.



let's break it down

Season 1: Return & Restore Worship - Sep. 2025

God calls His people back from exile—not just to reclaim land but to rebuild worship. This season helps us reflect on how spiritual renewal begins with returning to God's presence and recovering what we've lost.

Season 2: Opposition & Perseverance - Oct. 2025

Every holy mission faces resistance, but God strengthens those who keep building through the pressure. In this season, we'll learn how to persevere in faith when life pushes back hard.

Season 3: Dealing with the Past - Jan. 2026

God sends leaders steeped in Scripture to lead a generation out of broken cycles. This season invites us to bring our history to the light and walk forward with truth, grace, and healing.

Season 4: Fortifying Faith - Feb. 2026

Rebuilding isn't just about what's broken—it's about what's next. In this season, Nehemiah's courage and conviction call us to develop a faith strong enough to hold under pressure.

Season 5: The Role of the Church - Apr. 2026

God's justice starts within His people, not outside them. This season challenges us to be a church marked by equity, compassion, and courageous accountability.

Season 6: Renewal for the Journey - May 2026

Revival doesn't end with a celebration—it moves into a life of sustainable faithfulness. In this final season, we explore what it means to live as a rebuilt people with enduring joy, purpose, and hope.

1

2

3

4

5

6

season⁵ WEEK 1

season overview



Season 5 shifts the story of Nehemiah from **rebuilding walls** to **rebuilding the community**.

The physical work of construction is nearly complete, but the deeper work of restoring the people has only just begun. In these chapters, Nehemiah confronts injustice within the community, opposition from outside enemies, complicated family alliances, and the challenge of organizing a city that is still fragile and underpopulated.

Along the way, we see that rebuilding God's people involves **more** courage and determination than we might have thought. It requires integrity in leadership, fairness within the community, and strength to resist subtle pressures that could slowly undermine the work.

This season also highlights a key truth about spiritual leadership: **external threats are often easier to face than internal compromise**. Some of the greatest challenges Nehemiah encounters come not from enemies outside the walls, but from tensions, relationships and systems within the community itself.

the wall was rebuilt.

**now the people
must be restored.**

**this season is about
more than construction...**

**it is about character,
justice, leadership,**

**and learning how to live
faithfully together.**

Today, in our spiritual lives and church communities, we are not immune to these pressures:

Cultural Secularization – There is pressure to treat faith as private and irrelevant to public life.

Consumerism – A culture that prioritizes comfort, success and material wealth can slowly compete with spiritual priorities.

Busyness and Overcommitment – Modern schedules leave little room for prayer, reflection or community life.

Digital Distraction – Constant media consumption can crowd out time for Scripture and spiritual practices.

Relativism – The cultural belief that all truth claims are equally valid can make Christian convictions seem intolerant or outdated.

Syncretism – The pressure to modify Christian beliefs by absorbing parts of other belief systems, diluting faith.

Political Polarization – Pressure to tie faith identity too closely to political identity.

Individualism – The idea that personal autonomy matters more than belonging to a faith community.

Loss of Biblical Literacy – An increasing number of individuals, including those within churches, lack familiarity with Scripture

Pressure to Compromise Values for Career Success – Many workplaces or social environments expect silence or compromise around faith convictions

As you work through this season, you'll see how rebuilding a city (and a spiritual community) required more than strong walls. It required renewed character, healthy leadership, and a community committed to living differently.

reflection questions

- Look backwards and forwards on your spiritual journey:
- What obstacles have you had to overcome to rebuild or strengthen your faith?
- After a season of spiritual rebuilding or growth, what new challenges have appeared that you didn't expect?
- Have you noticed that some of the hardest challenges in your faith come from within your own habits, relationships, or assumptions rather than from outside opposition?
- How do you respond when spiritual progress brings new responsibilities or expectations?

season 5 WEEK 2

whose land?
follow the money.

To fully appreciate Nehemiah 5, here's some of the backstory on how the Israelites got themselves into this position in the first place.

Lending According to Israel

In Israel, lending was never intended for profit-making; it was an expression of **covenant faithfulness**. The Torah taught that when a fellow Israelite fell into hardship, whether through famine, crop failure, or misfortune, lending was to function as mercy. Exodus 22 and Leviticus 25 forbid charging interest to a poor Israelite. Deuteronomy 23 permitted interest on loans to foreigners but prohibited it within the covenant family. If you or your family found yourself in a position where taking out a loan was needed, the system also had built-in "reset" points to help you get out. **The**

Year of Jubilee required debts to be cancelled and land to be returned to its original family every 50 years, and a person who entered servitude to pay off a debt needed to be released in 7 years.

In short, when the system was working correctly, it didn't enslave a family; it preserved it. The underlying purpose was relational: this is your brother, your sister, your shared inheritance.

Lending According to Persia

In Persia, lending was a structured business arrangement intended for growth and wealth-building, and charging interest was standard. Silver loans commonly carried annual interest rates around twenty percent, while grain loans could be significantly higher. Collateral was normal. Land, property, children and personal freedom could all be pledged against repayment. Archaeological discoveries from the Persian Empire include formal loan contracts detailing mortgaged fields and individuals pledged into servitude when debts could not be repaid.



Land Ownership

It's also important to remember how land titles were viewed.

The Israelites believed that their land always belonged to God, that it was theirs to possess because of the covenant and that it was their job to steward it well (Leviticus 25); therefore, even when it was "their" land, they fully understood that it wasn't really theirs.

The Persians (and all other Empires) viewed land as something to be owned or conquered, and they didn't much care about who owned it. Conquering empires confiscated estates, reassigned property to loyalists, and restructured territories to secure control and taxation. Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem resulted in the disruption of long-standing inheritance patterns, and even when Persia allowed Jews to go home and restore worship, it didn't reset decades of disrupted ownership. Fields had been abandoned, absorbed, and transferred, and by the time Nehemiah arrived, the land that had been Israel's inheritance had become contested ground, saturated by Israel's grief.

Persian Taxes

Under Persian rule, taxes were mandatory, and even during famine, tribute still had to be paid. If families could not meet their obligations, officials could seize property, imprison delinquents, impose fines, or absorb land into the holdings of those able to cover the deficit. Unfortunately, while the average Israelite was struggling to make ends meet in the middle of a famine, the wealthy among them were taking advantage of the situation for their own gain.

two ways of seeing wealth and land

ISRAEL'S VISION

- Lending as mercy
- No interest among covenant family
- Land belongs to God
- Debt had limits
- Goal: preserve families and inheritance

PERSIA'S VISION

- Lending as business
- Interest for profit
- Land as property and power
- Debt could cost freedom
- Goal: increase control and wealth

Nehemiah 5 exposes what happens when God's people begin treating one another more like an empire would than like a covenant family.

reflection questions

- Where do you feel the tension between the values of God's kingdom and the economic or cultural values of Canada most strongly in your daily life?
- Have you ever justified a decision by saying, "That's just how the system works"? What might faithfulness look like in that space?
- When does financial wisdom quietly become financial self-protection at the expense of generosity?
- In what areas of life does obedience to God feel impractical, unrealistic, or financially risky?

season5 WEEK3

signed, unsealed, and delivered.

The Unsealed Letter

In the Persian Empire, official correspondence was sealed to authenticate and protect the contents. Letters were rolled or folded, tied with a cord, and sealed with clay impressed by a signet ring or a cylinder seal, serving as a personal signature. Official correspondence often contained sensitive information and was sealed to demonstrate its legitimacy and prevent tampering. But Sanballat, a regional governor of the Persian empire, sent an unsealed letter. And he likely did it on purpose!

An unsealed letter could be (and often was) read by **anyone** who handled it. It would have sparked as much speculation and rumour as posting a private message or document on social media today. We can reasonably assume that Sanballat's purpose here was to allow his accusation to spread, thereby creating public pressure for the empire to intervene. Under Persian rule, even the whisper of rebellion could trigger an investigation and lead to a full-blown military response.



The Temple

The Temple was many things to the Jews, but it was not intended as a **general refuge or sanctuary for political leaders** seeking safety; it was holy ground governed by covenant boundaries, and access to sacred areas was restricted. A reminder of King Uzziah unlawfully entering the priestly space to burn incense and being struck with leprosy should be enough of an example. If Nehemiah had entered, he would have violated sacred space, undermined his moral authority, and given enemies grounds to accuse him of religious transgression.

The Hired Prophet

Throughout history, Israel had its fair share of false prophets, but to **hire** a prophet was to attempt to purchase divine legitimacy. In a community where prophetic words shaped public trust and moral direction, and, in this case, the migration of over 50,000 people, a paid prophet could manufacture urgency or amplify fear under the appearance of spiritual authority. This made false prophecy uniquely dangerous. It did not attack from outside the covenant community; it spoke from within it. The voice sounded familiar. The language sounded faithful. But the source was corrupt.

reflection questions

Have you ever noticed that just as you begin taking steps of obedience, rebuilding something broken, committing to prayer, or getting into a rhythm of devotions, things sometimes seem to get harder out of nowhere? Reflect on that experience by answering these questions.

- When criticism or rumours circulate, how do they affect your confidence in what God has asked you to do?
- Have you ever received advice that sounded spiritual but, deep down, was rooted in fear rather than faith?
- How do you discern the difference between wise caution and fear-based compromise?

season 5 WEEK 4

managing relationships.

Tobiah's Next Move

In Nehemiah 6, we learn something new about Tobiah, one of the main men opposing the rebuilding of Jerusalem and here we also see an example of the kind of influence that Ezra tried to prevent in Ezra 9-10.

Tobiah wasn't just an **outsider** sending threats from far away. He had married into one of the important Jewish families and couldn't easily be ignored! Tobiah became the son-in-law of **Shekaniah**, whose family had returned from exile and was part of the restored community. Then Tobiah's **son** married the daughter of **Meshullam**, one of the men who actually helped rebuild the wall. This means Tobiah was connected by marriage to people inside Jerusalem who were respected and involved in the work.

Prominent Jewish Families

In Nehemiah's time, prominent Jewish families carried a mix of **social**, **economic**, and **political** influence. They often owned land, controlled resources, and shaped community decisions. Prominent families helped stabilize the city, but their alliances could also quietly steer its direction.

Nehemiah Navigates

Just as the wall was finished and the external threats seemed to quiet down, Nehemiah faced a new challenge: the opposition wasn't just outside the city anymore; it was woven into respected families within the community. In many ways, this feels familiar. Sometimes the hardest spiritual pressures often come from people we love, respect or depend on.



reflection questions

- Do you ever feel tension between loyalty to family and obedience to God? How do you respond?
- Are there close relationships that subtly pressure you to soften or silence certain convictions?
- When spiritual compromise feels relationally costly, what tends to win?
- If someone looked at your closest relationships, would they say those connections are reinforcing your walk with God or slowly redirecting it?

season6

WEEK1

season overview

Season 6 marks the transition from rebuilding **Jerusalem's walls** to rebuilding **the people's spiritual life**. With the physical work finished, attention turns to Scripture, worship, confession, covenant, and the rhythms that sustain a faithful community. The people rediscover Scripture, respond with repentance and celebration, and recommit themselves to living according to the covenant. Yet these chapters also remind us that renewal requires ongoing attention. Even after powerful moments of unity and reform, the people must continually return to Scripture and His purposes to prevent the slow drift that can follow seasons of rebuilding.

A Week 2 Head Start: The Turning Point

When Ezra stands and reads the Book of the Law in Nehemiah 8, the moment feels natural to modern readers. Someone **reads** the Scripture and then **explains** it to the people. But for the crowd gathered that day, this was actually a big shift in how they encountered scripture.

For one thing, many people could no longer easily understand the language of the Law. While the Torah was written in Hebrew, decades of exile in Babylon had shifted the common language among Jewish people to Aramaic. For us in southern Ontario, the equivalent might be hearing the scripture read to us in French. Most of us know **some** French, but unless we recognize key words along the way, it would be hard for us to follow. That's why the passage says the Levites were **"making it clear and giving the meaning"**. They were essentially

translating and interpreting so the people could grasp what God's Word actually said.

As mentioned previously, the exiles also changed how worship functioned. Before Jerusalem fell, the center of religious life had been the **Temple and its sacrifices**. During the exile, the Temple no longer existed, so Jewish communities had to find new ways to maintain their identity and worship God without sacrifices or a central sanctuary. Many scholars believe that during this period, the practice of **gathering to read and teach the Scriptures** became far more important, eventually giving rise to what later became synagogue-style worship.

By the time Ezra reads the Law in Nehemiah 8, these two realities had come together to form a people who had lost appreciation for the Temple system and a generation that no longer fully understood the language of their Scriptures.

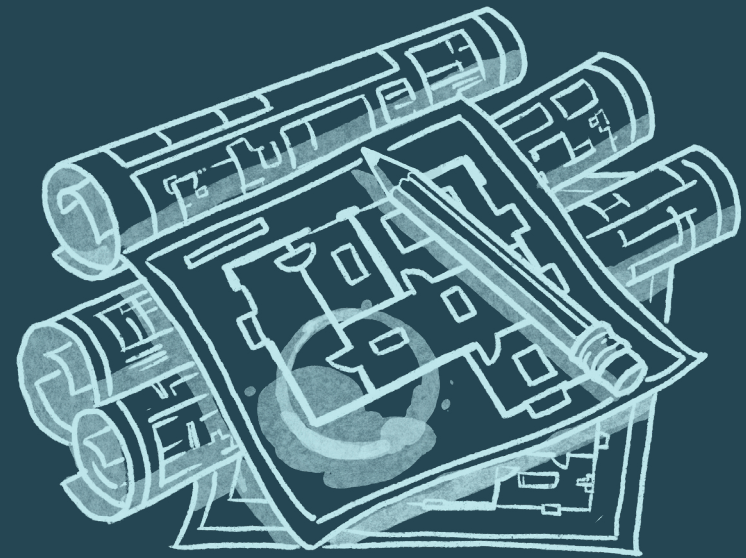
It's easy to think that this change was only for the Jews, but this moment also marks a turning point in our history of understanding Scripture.

The life of God's people no longer revolved solely around sacred spaces like the Temple, but around each person's understanding of the holy texts.

reflection questions

- When you think about how you understood Scripture as a child, how is that understanding different from how you read and interpret it as an adult?
- Are there passages or ideas in the Bible that once felt simple or confusing, but now carry deeper meaning because of life experience?
- What steps could you take to continue growing in your understanding of Scripture so that your faith keeps maturing?

season 6 WEEK 2



read the blueprints.

Whenever God's people have rebuilt successfully, it's always been based on the blueprints provided by the original architect—God. Spiritual rebuilding always has and always will come from **understanding what God has already designed**. This should be a no-brainer by now, but reality has taught us that we can't rebuild without understanding the blueprints.

A Tale as old as Time

In Nehemiah 8, when Ezra opens the Word of God and reads it to the people, he's not bringing them anything new. He reads the same words, written by the same people, and shaped by the same God. But in this moment, **the people were committed to understanding what it said**, which moved their hearts and minds.

This pattern has repeated throughout history. When young King Josiah heard the rediscovered Book of the Law read aloud (2 Kings 22), he tore his robes in repentance. The reform of a nation began with understanding words that had been sitting, forgotten, in the Temple.

In Acts 2, Peter did not evoke revival through emotion; he explained the Scriptures, showing how they pointed to Christ. The Spirit moved, but it was the word of God that pierced hearts.

Centuries later, when Martin Luther nailed his theses to a church door in Wittenberg, he wasn't trying to fracture the church. Having wrestled with Paul's letter to the Romans, he realized that "the righteous shall live by faith," and the gospel came alive with clarity. That understanding ignited a movement that reshaped Europe and included people like William Tyndale, who gave his life to translate the Bible into English. Tyndale believed that if ordinary people could read it, they might also come alive because of it.

What we Should Do vs What we Actually Do

Sometimes we drift into a kind of intentional spiritual ignorance. Not outright rejection of God's voice, but just enough distance to keep clarity from costing us anything. If we never fully understand what Scripture is actually saying, it never truly shapes, challenges or confronts us. Most Christians would agree that understanding the Bible matters. We assume it's a given. And yet all of us have a tendency to stop short on purpose, especially when a deeper understanding might require us to change something we already feel settled about.

The truth is, it **feels** easier to live with a vague sense of God's words than a clear one. Clarity demands a response. Clarity exposes assumptions. Clarity presses on habits and loyalties. That's why rebuilding so often stalls at the same place it begins, with understanding.

Renewal moves forward when we are willing to grasp not just the words of Scripture, but through them God's expectations, His intentions, and His heart. When we resist that understanding, we don't just avoid discomfort, we prevent the very thing that could reshape us.



vague faith vs clear faith

VAGUE FAITH

- Hears Scripture secondhand
- Stays comfortable
- Avoids challenge
- Resists change

CLEAR FAITH

- Seeks understanding
- Welcomes conviction
- Responds in obedience
- Makes renewal possible

Clarity costs us comfort,
but it opens the way for change.

reflection questions

- Do you think it's possible that you assume you understand Scripture simply because you've heard other people talk about it?
- Are there areas of Scripture you avoid because you suspect they might challenge something you've already made up your mind about?
- Do you pursue things because they seem like good ideas, or because you've taken the time to seek God's will in a particular thing??
- Have you ever stopped digging into a passage because you sensed it becoming personally uncomfortable?
- If rebuilding always rises or falls on understanding God's heart, how can you get into Scripture for that rebuilding to continue?

season6 WEEK3

the feast of booths.

The Feast of Booths (Tabernacles / Sukkot) combined remembrance of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, gratitude for the harvest, and renewal of the covenant through public reading of the Law.

Primary texts:

- **Leviticus 23:33–44**
- **Deuteronomy 16:13–15**
- **Numbers 29:12–38**
- **Deuteronomy 31:10–13**

Timing:

- **15th–21st day of the seventh month (Tishri)**

Core Commands:

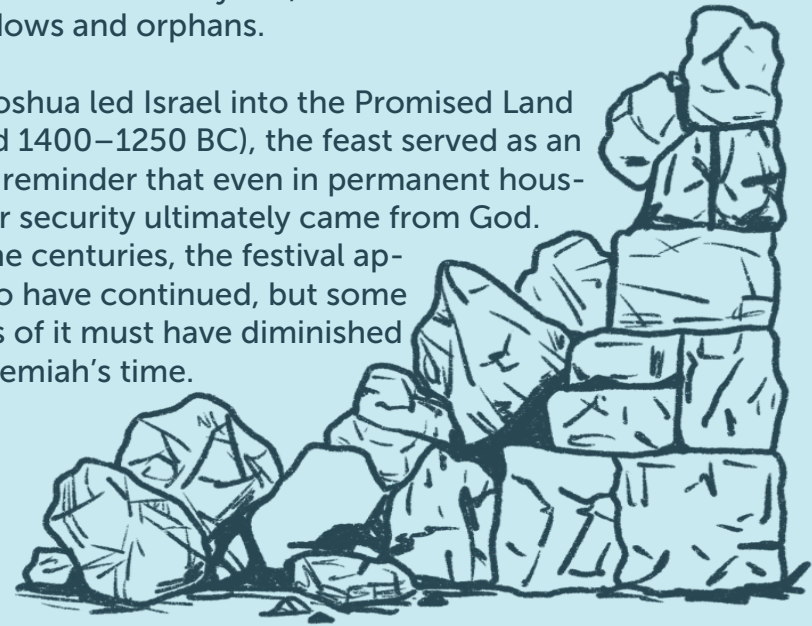
- **Live in temporary shelters (booths) made from branches**
- **Rejoice before the Lord for seven days**
- **Offer prescribed sacrifices**
- **Include everyone: families, Levites, foreigners, widows, orphans**

Purpose:

- **Remember wilderness dependence**
- **Celebrate harvest provision**
- **Reinforce covenant identity through public reading**

The Feast of Booths was a seven-day celebration in the seventh month, followed by a sacred assembly on the eighth day. During the week, Israel was instructed to live in temporary shelters made of branches, to rejoice before the Lord, and to offer sacrifices. It was also important that this feast include everyone, from the noble families to the widows and orphans.

After Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land (around 1400–1250 BC), the feast served as an annual reminder that even in permanent houses, their security ultimately came from God. Over the centuries, the festival appears to have continued, but some aspects of it must have diminished by Nehemiah's time.



When the Law was publicly read by Ezra, the leaders (re) discovered the command to live in booths and responded immediately. The entire community returned to tradition, building shelters on rooftops, in courtyards, and in public spaces. Scripture was read daily throughout the week. The text notes that it had not been celebrated “like this” since the days of Joshua, which would have been between 800 and 1000 years earlier.

When we talk about rediscovering or returning to the Law, we often assume it will mean more rules, more restraint, and more responsibility. And in one sense, that’s true; deeper understanding can make the path to obedience clearer. But Nehemiah 8 reminds us that a deeper understanding also brings moments of joy we might otherwise have forgotten. When we understand God’s heart more clearly, we don’t simply inherit more obligations; we step into richer opportunities for celebration, generosity, and community.

Legalism comes from thinking that following rules is an end in itself. As if God just wants us to follow rules because he likes making rules. Life comes from seeing that rules and discipline are ways for us to grow in our relationship with God.



**“The joy
of the Lord
is your strength.”**

Nehemiah 8:10

reflection questions

- Do you associate obedience more with restriction or with freedom? What has shaped that perception?
- Have you ever experienced obedience leading to unexpected celebration or community? What happened?
- How might rediscovering God’s intentions reshape not just your habits, but your relationships?
- If renewal always includes both obedience and celebration, which of those two do you need to lean into more right now?

season6 WEEK4

i've got a confession to make...

In the church, we often talk about confessing our sins. We know this is important, but how have God's people confessed their sins throughout history?

Here's a brief overview of how God's people have navigated confession over the last few thousand years.

what confession really is...

CONFESSION IS NOT

- spiritual self-hatred
- earning forgiveness
- pretending to be worse than you are
- getting stuck in shame

CONFESSION IS

- telling the truth about sin
- agreeing with God
- making room for mercy
- clearing the way for renewal

When confession is honest,
grace becomes deeper than reassurance.
It becomes restoration.

Biblical Confession

In Scripture, we see that confession is often communal and reflects God's faithfulness.

In **Leviticus 16**, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest confessed the sins of the nation over the scapegoat before sending it into the wilderness. This act symbolized both the seriousness of sin and God's provision for forgiveness.

In **Psalms 106**, confession included the retelling of Israel's history. The psalmist recounts the nation's repeated rebellion and puts their current sin in the context of past sin. This is something we will see a few more times, to varying degrees, throughout scripture.

In **Daniel 9**, Daniel prays on behalf of the entire nation while Israel is in exile in Babylon. Even though Daniel himself is portrayed as faithful, he repeatedly says "**we have sinned**," identifying with the failures of Israel's kings, leaders, and people. His prayer acknowledges that God was righteous in allowing exile, while also appealing to God's mercy and covenant faithfulness to restore His people.

In **Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9**, confession follows the rediscovery of God's Law and the conviction that God has already spoken to His people.

In each case, confession is not just admitting personal wrongdoing; it is telling the truth about the community's story and acknowledging that God has remained faithful even when His people have not.

The Catholic Church

As the early church developed, confession remained part of Christian practice. But in some circles, it became more structured. Although public confessions were more the norm in the first centuries, over time the practice shifted toward **private confession** to a **priest**. This was influenced by monastic traditions, in which monks or nuns dedicated themselves to prayer, discipline, and spiritual devotion and lived apart from ordinary society to pursue a life focused on God. The church developed a system where believers confessed their sins to a priest, who then pronounced absolution and sometimes assigned acts of penance. By the late Middle Ages, this practice had become formalized as the **Sacrament of Penance**, and regular confession to a priest was expected of believers. The goal was restoration with God and the church. This was meaningful for some, but for others it became associated with fear, obligation, or a form of works-righteousness. It wasn't surprising, then, that people started asking, "Why are we doing this?"

The Protestant Church

During the **Protestant Reformation** in the 1500's, Martin Luther challenged parts of this system. Luther did not reject confession itself (in fact, he valued it deeply), but he rejected the idea that forgiveness was **mediated** through a priest or earned through acts of penance. From studying **Romans and 1 John 1:9**, Luther emphasized that forgiveness comes through **God's grace received by faith**, not through the performance of religious duties. The Reformers retained the idea of **confession** but returned its focus to two main practices: **confessing directly to God** and **corporate confession within the gathered church**. Many Protestant traditions still include prayers of confession in worship services, reminding believers that repentance and grace remain central to Christian life.

Confession clears the ground for Grace.

In much of modern Christian life today, **affirmation** seems more important than **confession**. While encouragement through grace and reassurance of forgiveness surely matter, when affirmation overshadows honest acknowledgment of sin, something essential is lost. Throughout Scripture, **renewal begins** when God's people get honest with God about where they have fallen short. Without confession, affirmation can become shallow encouragement. But when confession is present, affirmation becomes something deeper: the assurance that God's mercy is real and that renewal is still possible

reflection questions

- What role should confession play in a healthy church community?
- How might avoiding confession limit our ability to experience God's grace?
- In what ways could an honest confession lead to deeper spiritual renewal in your life?
- Is it possible to focus so much on confession that you don't delight in grace? Or focus so much on grace that you are blind to your sins?
- Are there areas of your life that need to be brought to the Lord in confession?
- Take a moment to confess these things to Him and receive His grace in return. Thank Him for his continued forgiveness, and ask the Holy Spirit to renew your heart.

**"Create in me a new heart,
O God, and renew a
right spirit within me."**

- Psalm 51:10

a boring piece of information.

Here's something I found interesting. Buried among all the big promises and spiritual commitment in this section of Nehemiah is an ordinary, even boring piece of information.

Families cast lots to decide who would bring wood for the altar.

It's literally about who will keep a fire going. It's not dramatic like the rediscovery of the Law or the setting of a final gate. It's a passage about fuel logistics. But the truth is, without families organizing who would bring wood, the fire would go out, the altar would stop functioning, meaning that sacrifices would stop.

Now, I know I'm biased towards being mission-oriented, but I really enjoyed that, in the middle of a moment of spiritual renewal, the people quietly organized how the work would actually continue.

Can you 'plan' for spiritual growth?

Today, there's tension around the terms "strategy" and "planning" when discussing spiritual growth or renewal.

Some people say that if the Spirit truly leads something, it shouldn't require planning, systems, or intentional structure. These are things created by humans, and they get in the way of God speaking to us.

Others would say that having a plan is essential for spiritual growth. They say that without a set plan, it's impossible to know how your growth is going or what you should be doing next. It's not about replacing the Spirit; it's about organization and accountability.

In my reading, I found Nehemiah 10 to be a healthy **middle ground**, because as the large project nears its completion, the Israelites recognize that to stay on track, some organization will be required.



The Musings of a Pastor

In my time in ministry, I've known quite a few people who open their Bibles to random pages and expect a regular spiritual "ah-ha" moment, or only pray when they feel led, because "genuine spirituality" should always flow naturally rather than through a disciplined rhythm. In their view, systems only get in the way of the work God is doing in us.

And while I can agree that the spirit often works in ways we don't expect or plan, I would point out that a faith built on the hopes of "random revelation" is in its own way, a strategy.

The truth is that consistent spiritual growth **rarely** happens by accident. People who choose rhythms that make time for God to speak to them often show greater spiritual growth and discernment. (If I'm being **really** honest, when planning is dismissed as "unspiritual," it's often masking the truth that it's easier to be critical of those who create a structure than to take responsibility for growing in one's own faith.)

My favourite example of this is Mother Teresa, the Nobel prize-winning Roman Catholic nun and missionary who dedicated her life to serving the poor in Kolkata, India. She wrote in her private letters that, for nearly 50 years, she did not **feel** God's presence in prayer, describing a deep spiritual "darkness" even as she continued her work and devotion faithfully. What sustained her was not a constant spiritual "feeling", but a clear understanding of who God was and how God felt about His people.

Long-term Growth

Can spiritual growth or renewal come about in those "ah-ha!" moments? Absolutely, they can, and they do all the time. But if it's going to be sustained, or even grow across a whole community, we eventually have to decide that parts of that growth are our responsibility. You might not like it, but setting aside time for prayer, devotions or a small group - that's a strategy. And it's important, because in the end, if you're going to keep the fire going, someone needs to feed it.

If spiritual growth didn't take planning, organization, and intentional effort, then you probably wouldn't be reading this workbook right now. :)

reflection questions

- How do you approach your spiritual life?
- Are you more "hopeful and spontaneous" or "planned and disciplined"?
- What are the pros and cons of both in your life?
- How can you make a change to help deepen your faith today?



season6 WEEK6

when the work changes: from building to maintaining.

The rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall had been dramatic to say the least.

During the project, there was urgency, opposition, visible progress, and a clear mission. But once the wall was finished, the challenge changed. The whole community needed to transition from rallying around a large-scale community project to "normal life." Nehemiah 11 shows the beginning of that transition, as some people moved into the city, others returned to their towns and fields, and life began to settle into rhythms that would sustain the community over time.

In many ways, **maintenance can be harder than construction.** Building something often comes with momentum and emotional energy. There is excitement, purpose, and the satisfaction of seeing visible change. Maintenance, however, is quieter. It requires consistency instead of adrenaline. The work continues even when there is no immediate crisis and no visible milestone to celebrate. Faithfulness becomes less about dramatic moments and more about showing up day after day.

when the work changes...

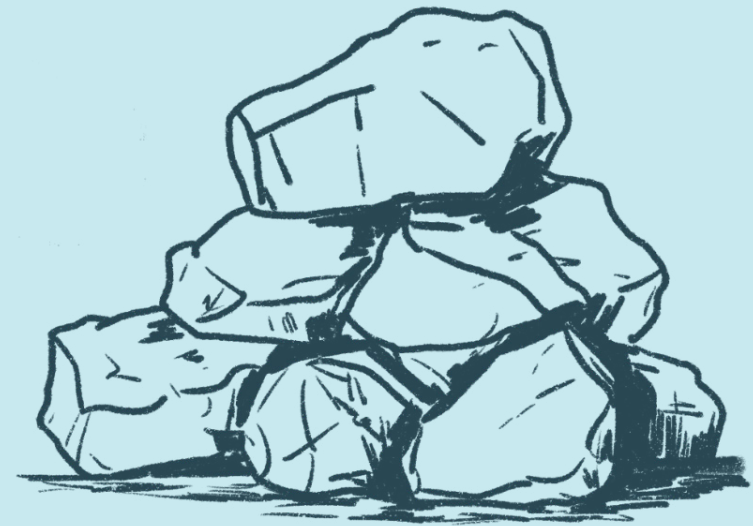
BUILDING

- Urgency
- Momentum
- Visible progress
- Clear opposition
- High energy

MAINTAINING

- Consistency
- Patience
- Quiet faithfulness
- Ordinary rhythms
- Long obedience

Rebuilding gets attention.
Maintenance reveals character.



War-time Leaders vs. Peace-time Leaders

This idea has become personal to me (Pastor Mike) over the last couple of years. As our church navigated through a season of significant change and transition, I found myself **more energized**. There was movement, urgency, and a clear sense of mission. Sometimes people would ask me if I was getting tired, and although I had my moments, honestly, I woke up every morning excited for that day's challenge.

During that time, someone with a personality very similar to mine asked me a few questions that stuck with me for a long time:

- **What happens when the season changes?**
- **When the transition settles and things become stable again, would I still feel fulfilled and energized?**
- **Was it the mission that gave me energy, or was it the crisis?**

Through our conversation, he taught me about the difference between "wartime" and "peacetime" leadership, and I began to realize that if I wasn't careful, I could unconsciously pull the church into another "war" to feel useful again.

The people in Nehemiah's day had to learn something similar. They had proven they could rebuild a wall amid opposition and urgency. Now they had to prove they could live faithfully in the city they had restored.

Some would live in the centre of Jerusalem, others would return to their towns, but all would have to adjust to a different kind of work. The long-term strength of God's people would not come from dramatic moments alone; it would come from steady faithfulness in the seasons that followed.

CRISIS asks,
"Will you rise up?"

PEACE asks,
"Will you remain faithful?"

reflection questions

Have you ever noticed that just as you begin taking steps of obedience, rebuilding something broken, committing to prayer, or getting into a rhythm of devotions, things sometimes seem to get harder out of nowhere? Reflect on that experience by answering these questions.

- **When criticism or rumours circulate, how do they affect your confidence in what God has asked you to do?**
- **Have you ever received advice that sounded spiritual but, deep down, was rooted in fear rather than faith?**
- **How do you discern the difference between wise caution and fear-based compromise?**

season6

WEEK7

a brief history of dedication in scripture

Throughout Israel's history, important moments were often marked by **dedications**.

Dedicating something to God was a way of publicly acknowledging that something belonged to the Lord and should be used for His purposes. Whether it was an altar, a building, a group of leaders, or even an entire city wall, dedication reminded the people that their achievements and resources ultimately came from God and were meant to serve Him. Here's a short list of some examples of Biblical dedications.

dedications in the old testament

Altars & Sacred Places

- Noah dedicates an altar after the flood (Genesis 8:20)
- Abraham builds and dedicates several altars to the Lord (Genesis 12:7–8; 13:18; 22:9)
- Isaac builds an altar at Beersheba (Genesis 26:25)
- Jacob dedicates an altar and pillar at Bethel (Genesis 28:18–22; 35:7)
- Jacob dedicates a pillar at Bethel (Genesis 28)
- Twelve memorial stones were dedicated at the Jordan River (Joshua 4)

The Tabernacle and Its Furnishings

- The Tabernacle was dedicated and filled with God's glory (Exodus 40)
- The altar and sacred objects were consecrated (Leviticus 8–9)
- Tribal leaders dedicated the altar with offerings (Numbers 7)

People Dedicated to Service

- Aaron and his sons were dedicated as priests (Leviticus 8)
- The Levites were dedicated to Tabernacle service (Numbers 8)
- The firstborn of Israel was dedicated to the Lord (Exodus 13)

The Temple - Building and Renewal

- Solomon dedicates the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 5–7)
- The Temple was rededicated under King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29)
- Covenant renewal and Temple reforms under King Josiah (2 Kings 23)
- The wall of Jerusalem was dedicated after rebuilding (Nehemiah 12)

dedications in the new testament

The Temple

- The Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah, (John 10:22) commemorates the Temple's rededication in 164 BC after the pagan King Antiochus IV outlawed Jewish sacrifices and defiled the altar.

The Leaders

- Jesus was presented at the temple as a child (Luke 2:22–24)
- Church leaders were appointed through prayer and laying on of hands (Acts 6:6)
- Paul and Barnabas were set apart for missionary work (Acts 13:2–3)

The Community

- Christians are called to present themselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1)
- Spiritual gifts are dedicated to building up the church (1 Corinthians 12)
- The body is described as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- Early churches met in homes dedicated for gatherings (Acts 2:46; Romans 16:5)

When you step back and look at the whole story of Scripture, something interesting begins to emerge. In the Old Testament, dedication **often focused on objects, buildings, and sacred spaces** such as altars, the Temple, and the tools of worship.

As the story moves into the New Testament, this trend changes, as dedication becomes less about objects and more about **people**. Followers of Jesus themselves

become the place where God's work happens. The movement of dedication in Scripture slowly turns from **what belongs to God to who belongs to God**.

Living in the Balance

That shift in Scripture doesn't mean the dedication of places or objects no longer matters. Today, it is still meaningful for believers to dedicate buildings, ministries, resources, or seasons of work to God. These acts remind us that what we build and use should ultimately serve Him.

But when we read the story through the lens of the New Testament, it becomes clear that the centre of dedication has moved toward **people themselves**. God's primary work is carried out through lives surrendered to Him through the faithfulness, service, and everyday obedience of His people. Buildings, tools, and ministries still matter, but they exist to support the greater reality that **the people of God and their work for the kingdom are what carry His mission forward**.

reflection questions

- What does the word dedication mean to you when you think about your life with God?
- How might dedicating something change the way you treat or use it?
- Do you tend to think of dedication more in terms of places and objects, or in terms of people and their lives?
- How can churches balance caring for buildings and programs while remembering that people are the real focus of God's mission?
- How might understanding yourself as someone dedicated to God influence your decisions or priorities?

season6 WEEK8



the drift after the rebuild.

Nehemiah 13 feels like a jarring conclusion to the story, given how united and focused the book has been up until this point. But while Nehemiah is away serving the king, the systems he helped establish start to unravel.

- A Temple storeroom meant for offerings is given to Tobiah (**seriously!?**)
- The Levites are no longer supported and return to their fields.
- The Sabbath begins to look like any other business day.

During the rebuilding of the wall, the urgency was obvious. Everyone knew what the mission was and why it mattered. But once the wall was finished, the crisis ended, and the community moved into a quieter season where faithfulness required maintenance, discipline, and steady leadership rather than emergency response. That kind of leadership is harder because it requires people to stay focused even when the urgency fades.

By way of an analogy, consider “mission drift” or “spiritual drift” using the image of a **kayak on a lake**.

When you want to get somewhere, you point your kayak toward your destination and start paddling, and as long as you keep paddling, you keep moving in that direction. But after a while, you might get tired and need a short rest, so you set the paddle across your lap and enjoy the quiet of the water.

Resting is ok, but it’s really important to remember something:

Even though you’ve stopped paddling, you haven’t stopped moving.

The wind and current will slowly start to carry you somewhere else, even if you’ve only relaxed for a moment. The movement can be so gentle that you might not even notice it until you pick up the paddle again and realize you’re no longer where you stopped paddling in the first place.

Churches can experience the same thing after a big **“come together”** moment. A crisis passes, a capital campaign finishes, or a season of renewal settles into routine. The urgency that once united everyone begins to fade, and without intentional focus, the mission can slowly drift. Activity continues, programs run, and life feels normal, but the deeper question of **why we’re doing what we’re doing** can quietly slip out of view.

how drift happens.

You stop paddling

You pause.
The urgency is gone.



You still keep moving

Stillness does not mean
you are standing still.



The drift feels small at first

The change is subtle
and easy to miss.



The destination quietly changes

Without noticing, your
direction begins to shift.



You look up and realize you're off course.

What once felt aligned is no
longer where you meant to go.

Drift rarely feels dramatic.
That's what makes it dangerous.

Faithfulness after the rebuild
requires attention, alignment,
and intentional movement.

Nehemiah's return reminds us that renewal doesn't permanently eliminate drift.

God's people must keep returning to the **mission**. In both rebuilding seasons and peaceful ones, we need to keep asking where God is leading us next and how our lives and communities can stay aligned with His purposes. The work of following God doesn't end when the crisis passes; it continues in the steady, attentive faithfulness that keeps us moving in the direction He first called us to go.



reflection questions

- When you think about the direction of your life right now, are you still intentionally moving toward the calling God placed on your heart, or have you simply been floating for a while?
- What practices or habits once helped keep your faith focused that may have slowly faded over time?
- In your church or ministry, do conversations tend to focus more on how things are done, or why they exist in the first place?
- What signs might indicate that a church has begun drifting from its mission, even if everything still looks healthy on the surface?

explore more. grow deeper. stay connected.

Our journey through **Rebuild** doesn't end here.

We've created a growing collection of resources just for you, including podcasts, articles, and practical tools to help you dive deeper into God's Word and apply it in everyday life.

Visit:

hopeinnerkip.ca/rebuild

New content will be added regularly throughout the series, so check back often to:



- Listen to bonus podcasts and teaching
- Find reflection questions and activities
- Discover stories from our church family
- Get tools to help your group or family grow in faith

Make this page part of your weekly rhythm and see how God continues to rebuild hope, faith, and vision in your life.

Thank you for joining us on this journey through our final seasons of "Rebuild: Nehemiah + Ezra".

We're grateful for the way you're leaning in towards reflecting, praying, and growing with us as we walk through the story of God rebuilding His people.

With gratitude,

Your Hope Church Family

thank you.



HOPE
CHURCH

hopeinnerkip.ca

Printed by Millcreek Printing