

# KINGDOM WORK

Week Six | June 2, 2019 | Kingdom Workers Pray and Act

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's texts, Nehemiah 2–4; Psalm 28; Ephesians 2:10; and 2 Corinthians 12:9–10. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of the text and how it applies to your life.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God invites us to join Him in His work to advance His kingdom on earth.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

We depend on Him to supply our strength as we labor for His kingdom.

### MEDITATE

*"In Judah it was said, 'The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall'" (Nehemiah 4:10).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

In the early 2000s, NBC's *The West Wing* was a popular television show. This political drama offered fans a behind-the-scenes, albeit fictional, look at the inner workings of the White House. The characters on the show were portrayed as people who worked eighteen-hour days for embarrassingly low wages. But without exception, each character believed it was a privilege to perform their jobs. Why would endless days and little pay be considered a privilege? Because of who they worked for. Their boss was the president of the United States. Their work was important because of who they worked for. Far from feeling overworked and underpaid, they were grateful for the privilege of working for the most powerful man in the world.

While the world of *The West Wing* is the product of a screenwriter's imagination, we can still identify with people who have the privilege of working for someone great. Our heavenly Father is the great and awesome God. There is no one greater than Him. And He has invited us, His beloved and adopted children, to work for Him. Our great High King issues the invitation for us to join Him in the work of advancing His kingdom on earth. What a privilege!

Our Father doesn't save us and leave us alone until He calls us home to Him. He doesn't welcome us into His family only to pamper us in royal living quarters. He calls us to work. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). We weren't given new life in Christ to gain a front-row seat to the mission of God. We aren't spectators, we're active participants. We're contributors. We were made alive to join our Father in the family business. Like Jesus, our Father's business is our business. It's what we are about (Luke 2:49).

Nehemiah heard God's invitation to join Him in His kingdom work and responded. He was a man of action and prayer. Kingdom workers do both. We pray and we act. Both are crucial to the mission. We must act to get the work done. We must pray for God to provide what is needed to get the work done. Prayer and action cannot be divorced in kingdom work. The Lord is our strength (Psalm 28:7), and we rely on His strength to do His work.

We'll see in our lesson today how Nehemiah relied on the Lord in His kingdom work. We'll see how he led God's people to work together. We'll learn from the example of his co-laborers how we can glorify God in our weaknesses. When God invited Nehemiah and the church in that day to join Him in advancing His Kingdom on earth, they responded with prayer and action. God invites you into His kingdom work today. How will you respond to your King?

Q: *What kingdom work is your King inviting you to join Him in?*

Q: *What is the source of your strength in your labors? Is it your own abilities or is it the Lord?*

## ❏ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In today's lesson we will discuss how God's people both act and pray to accomplish His Kingdom work.

1. KINGDOM WORKERS RELY ON THE LORD AS THEY DO HIS WORK
2. KINGDOM WORKERS LABOR TOGETHER
3. KINGDOM WORKERS GLORIFY GOD IN THEIR WEAKNESSES

### GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

## KINGDOM WORKERS RELY ON THE LORD AS THEY DO HIS WORK

### ❏ NEHEMIAH 2:4, 8, 12, AND 20

Q: *What did Nehemiah do when the king asked what he was requesting?*

Q: *Why did the king grant him everything he asked?*

Our culture teaches us that self-reliance is the goal. Admitting our inability to perform some task is embarrassing. Weak. We learn early to depend on ourselves and no one else. We don't want to be seen as incapable or less than. We desperately avoid giving any hint of the appearance that we can't keep up. But Christ came to turn the logic of this world upside down. He came to rescue us from our love of and belief in ourselves. God knows the error in this logic. He knows we are a needy people, and that His Son is our only hope (Ephesians 2:12). He sent Christ to meet our greatest need, the need for a Savior. Jesus came to live the life we could not live and die the death we should have died so we might be rescued from the wrath of God and adopted into His family. We rely on Christ for our eternal salvation through faith and repentance. And we rely on His strength each day as we join Him in His work of building His kingdom on earth.

The gospel alone has the power to penetrate our hearts and minds and direct us towards truth. The truth is that we were created to rely on our Creator. We were never meant to labor in our own strength, but in the strength of our Savior. Kingdom workers rely on the Lord as they do His work. He is our strength, and He is magnified when we rely on Him.

Nehemiah provides us with a great example of what it looks like to rely on the Lord as we work. He intended to approach Artaxerxes for help to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem and prayed for God to grant him success (Nehemiah 1:11). But before he answered the king's question of what he wanted, he prayed to the God of heaven (Nehemiah 2:4). Both before and during Nehemiah's interaction with the Persian king, his reliance on the Lord is obvious by his praying. After his conversation with Artaxerxes, he said, "And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me" (Nehemiah 2:8). He relied on God and gave God the full credit for his success.

When Nehemiah went under the cover of darkness to inspect Jerusalem's walls, he told no one what God had put into his heart to do for Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:12). He relied on God as the initiator of His Kingdom work. When Sanballat and Tobiah, the local governors, mocked and despised him and his work, he replied, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:20). Nehemiah boldly declared to his enemies that his success would come from God alone.

Nehemiah teaches us that kingdom workers rely on God as they work for Him. We work in His strength, and we ask Him for success. We interact with Him in the middle of all our efforts for His kingdom work. We acknowledge that He initiates our work for Him and proclaim that He is the one who makes us prosper in our work. Nehemiah shows us that, despite what the world teaches, reliance on God is good. He models it for us. May we rejoice in our identity as kingdom workers who rely on the Lord as we do His work on earth for His glory!

**Q:** *In what ways do we work in our own strength? What changes can we make to press into the Lord's strength for our work?*

**Q:** *Do you talk to the Lord in the middle of your kingdom work? What effect do you think it would have on your labors if you regularly interacted with God as you work?*

# KINGDOM WORKERS LABOR TOGETHER

## ❑ NEHEMIAH 3

**Q:** *In what kind of proximity did the Israelites work together to build the wall?*

Have you ever been a part of a project so big it was intimidating? Have you participated in a job you struggled to believe would ever be completed because of its scope? We often find ourselves in situations where we feel completely unequal to the task. Instead of our insufficiency breeding unbelief and despair, it should send us to the feet of the object of our faith. God never intends for us to work on our own. Our faith is not individualistic, it's communal. Your identity in Christ means you are not only a person, you are a part of a people. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). As citizens of the kingdom of Christ, we are freed from the burden of being solely responsible for getting His work accomplished. Kingdom workers labor together for the glory of our King!

Nehemiah 3 paints a beautiful picture of God's people laboring together. The mission to build the wall around Jerusalem was a massive task, far too big for any one person. It required a people. "Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built" (Nehemiah 3:1–2). This entire chapter repeats the phrase, "and next to them," over and over. The people of God worked alongside each other to accomplish the work God called them to do.

They built, repaired, and restored. And this was not just man's work. The women worked together with the men (Nehemiah 3:12). The wall was huge. There was no way one man or a small group of people could repair it. "Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah, the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired" (Nehemiah 3:28–29). The bigger picture of repairing the whole wall was intimidating, but when each household took responsibility for the section of the wall outside their home, the job became manageable. Each person did their part, and they worked together to build the wall.

God invites His people to join Him in the work of advancing His kingdom on earth. He intends for our work to be a group effort. What a privilege to get to join Him! What grace to be given our brothers and sisters to work

alongside! As kingdom workers labor across the world for the glory of our King, may we be found working “next to them.”

♀: *What benefits can we enjoy when we work together as the family of God in kingdom work?*

♀: *What examples do we see in Scripture of God’s people working together? How can we imitate their group efforts?*

## KINGDOM WORKERS GLORIFY GOD IN THEIR WEAKNESSES

■ ■ **NEHEMIAH 4 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9–10**

♀: *How does Nehemiah encourage the frightened Israelites (v. 14)?*

♀: *What is God’s power made perfect in?*

The idea of gladly boasting in our weaknesses makes no sense to us. It conflicts with every natural inclination of our flesh. We delight to hide our weaknesses. We feel shamed by them. Our culture celebrates individual achievement and encourages us to find our worth in our own impressiveness. Paul’s words about weakness to the Corinthian church are just as radical in our day as they were when he spoke them. Paul was harassed by an unknown (to us) affliction. He pleaded with the Lord to remove it from him.

His next words about God’s response to his request, and his response to God, boldly contradict our natural tendencies. “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9–10). We loathe our weaknesses. God glorifies Himself in them. Kingdom workers live in this tension but submit it to the Lord. We join God in the spread of His glory through the glad boasting in our weaknesses so that the power of Christ is revealed through us.

Nehemiah’s enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah, were causing trouble for him again. They publicly mocked the kingdom workers by saying, “What are these feeble Jews doing?” (Nehemiah 4:2). They mocked their craftsmanship. “What they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!” (Nehemiah 4:3). Sanballat and Tobiah were dangerous and underhanded.

Nehemiah begged the Lord to take notice of their situation (v.4). The Jews were ridiculed as feeble. Their work was criticized. They appeared insufficient for the task. Wouldn’t it have been easier to give up? Wouldn’t it have been safer to stop working? Surely the logic of the world leads us to the conclusion that they should have stopped the work. They were too weak. But in God’s economy, our weakness is a springboard for His strength to be magnified through us!

After Nehemiah prayed to the Lord, they got back to work. “So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work” (Nehemiah 4:6). This made the enemies of the Lord very angry (v.7). Why? Because the enemy hates when God is glorified. And the glory of the Lord was shining brightly through these kingdom workers! They worked despite being tormented. They glorified God simply by pressing on. Their actions proclaimed to their enemies, “Our King is worth it! We work for Him, and we won’t cower to you!” As their enemies plotted their destruction, they prayed to God and set a guard as protection against them day and night (Nehemiah 4:9). They prayed and they acted.

“In Judah it was said, ‘The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall’” (Nehemiah 4:10). Jews who lived nearby came and begged them to stop the work and leave with them (v.12). Discouragement was widespread. Nehemiah reinforced the holes in the protection and encouraged the people, saying, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes” (Nehemiah 4:14). This weak people united in the strength of the Lord. They worked with one hand while their other hand held a weapon for protection (v.17–18).

Nehemiah led the people to pray and work together. Verse 21 says, “So we labored at the work.” They knew they were weak. Their enemies knew they were weak. God knows we are weak, but He invites us to be encouraged in our weakness, because it is when we are weak that we are strong. The kingdom workers glorified God in their weaknesses. Dear saint, what about you? Will you embrace the freeing truth of God’s Word, rejecting the world’s

wisdom that says we must hide our weaknesses? For the sake of Christ, will you be content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities? God invites us into His kingdom work. Our insufficiency in it is a spotlight for His all-sufficiency displayed in us. We joyfully depend on Him to be our strength. Let us be a people who pray and act together to join God in advancing His kingdom on earth!

♀: *The Israelites did exactly what God called them to do, and they suffered for it. Can you identify with their plight? What encouragement can we find in Scripture when we suffer for doing the will of God?*

♀: *Consider your own weaknesses. How can you glorify God in them?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

♀: *Do you find yourself praying for work to be accomplished without acting to that end? Do you find yourself working constantly for the advancement of the kingdom without really praying for the work? How can these two parts of kingdom work be merged in your own life?*

♀: *What changes can you make to trust God to transform the way you view your weaknesses?*

♀: *How do you see God being glorified through the weaknesses of others in your faith family?*



## PRAY

+ Use this prayer point to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

*You are a great and awesome God! You are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. You are the covenant-keeping God. Be pleased to glorify Yourself in my weaknesses. Open my eyes to opportunities to work together with Your people for the good of Your church. Give me the grace to rely on You to be my strength in kingdom work. Forgive me for trusting in my own strength. Thank you for the great privilege of working with You. May Your name be blessed in all the earth!*

## COMMENTARY

**NEHEMIAH 3:4** – *repaired*. The work is sometimes “building” and sometimes “repairing,” suggesting that the parts of the walls were in various states of dilapidation.

**NEHEMIAH 4:4–5** – Nehemiah interjects in his own voice a prayer similar to certain prayers for deliverance from enemies in the Psalms (Psalm 74; 79). He prays that what his enemies wish for him would return on their own heads; indeed, he prays that they would suffer captivity such as the Jews had recently experienced. The motive is not mere revenge but rather the honor of God, who is the real object of the enemies' insults and whose purposes they do not understand.

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes.*

