

KINGDOM WORK

Week Seven | June 9, 2019 | Kingdom Workers Believe God Is Great and Awesome

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's texts, Nehemiah 1:5–7; 4:14; 20; Psalm 145; and Proverbs 3:25–26. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God's Word displays His greatness.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

We respond to God's greatness by obeying His Word and glorifying Him.

MEDITATE

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable" (Psalm 145:3).

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.*

Renowned former boxing heavyweight champion of the world, Muhammad Ali, is widely recognized as one of the greatest boxers of all time. Ali believed he was *the* greatest boxer. He famously said, "I am the greatest. I

said that even before I knew I was. I figured that if I said it enough, I would convince the world that I really was the greatest.” Ali spent a lot of his time trying to convince people he was great. Similarly, our culture attempts to shape our ideas about greatness. Companies spend millions of dollars each year on developing advertising campaigns to influence consumers’ thoughts on the superiority of their product over their competitors’. The rise of reality television promises greatness through instant fame. At one time or another, we’ve all been guilty of seeking and celebrating our own glory. We’ve also likely assigned a value of greatness to something or someone unworthy of it.

As kingdom citizens, we must live counter-culturally. Our beliefs must not be influenced by our culture. God’s Word informs our beliefs. The Bible teaches that true greatness is found in our King. “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:3). “For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods” (Psalm 95:3). We are not a people who listen to what the world whispers in our ear about what is great. We listen to the voice of our great Shepherd.

God defines greatness as Himself. His awesomeness is on display throughout the Bible. He created the world out of nothing and made us in His own image. When we rebelled against Him, He showed mercy by sending His beloved Son to secure our salvation, offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He adopts us as sons and daughters, breathing new life into us and giving us the Holy Spirit, who enables us to live for Him. The great and awesome God, the Alpha and the Omega, is our Father. He is restoring all things to Himself and He will come back for us, for we are His inheritance. “Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods” (Psalm 96:2–4).

Nehemiah believed God was great and awesome. His actions testified to his beliefs. His high view was evidenced by his petition to God, inspiring repentance in the people of God. His confidence in God gave him courage to persevere in adversity. Kingdom work was impacted by Nehemiah’s belief, and our belief will change how we work for the Lord too.

Greatness demands a reaction. The Lord’s greatness is undeniable to His people. We must respond to the awesomeness of our God by obeying His commands. Our beliefs are demonstrated by our actions. Our kingdom work shows the world the greatness and awesomeness of our God. This is our mission. Our belief that God is glorious will produce kingdom workers devoted to our King through obedient living. Every step of obedience boldly proclaims to the world, “Behold, our great God! He is worthy of our allegiance!” Let us purpose to live lives of bold obedience for God’s glory.

Q: *What examples of God's greatness does Scripture provide?*

Q: *How does our obedience to God's Word bring Him glory?*

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In today's lesson we will explore how our view of God's greatness motivates us to bring Him glory through obedience to His commands.

1. GOD'S GREATNESS INSPIRES REPENTANCE IN HIS PEOPLE
2. GOD'S AWESOMENESS INSPIRES COURAGE IN HIS PEOPLE
3. GOD'S GREATNESS INSPIRES HIS PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE IN HIM

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.*

GOD'S GREATNESS INSPIRES REPENTANCE IN HIS PEOPLE

▣ NEHEMIAH 1:5-7

Q: *Whose sins does Nehemiah confess?*

Q: *How often did Nehemiah pray to the Lord?*

God had given His people the law to guide them in obedience. But the formerly exiled Israelites have a rich history of rejecting God's law in favor of their own. Instead of loving God with all their heart, soul, and might, they loved themselves above all else. The fact that they were exiled in the first place was God's response to their continued wickedness and rebellion. The Israelites were great sinners, but God is rich in mercy. He sent Nehemiah to lead His people away from their idolatry and back to Himself. We can take great comfort from how the Lord dealt with His people in Nehemiah's day. God relentlessly pursues His people, calling them to repentance and right fellowship with Himself.

From the very beginning, man has sought to be great like God. In the garden, the crafty serpent convinced Eve that God was holding out on them (Genesis 3:1–5). He tempted them to believe that God was not good because He was withholding something that would make them like Him. Even though God told them to avoid the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17), they rebelliously sank their teeth into its fruit. They expected to become great like God, but with the taste of the forbidden fruit still lingering in their mouths, they were awakened to the reality that they'd been deceived. They were not great like God. They were rebels, disobedient children. The bite that promised to make them like God instead separated them from Him.

We are all born into this same sinfulness. Our actions prove we are rebels against God's authority. But with great grace, God offers us forgiveness for our sins. Our great and holy God extends mercy to us. All we must do is repent. See Nehemiah's repentance. He prayed, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned" (Nehemiah 1:5–7).

Notice Nehemiah's prayer begins with the acknowledgment that God is great and awesome. That He keeps covenant and steadfast love with the people who love and obey Him. It's this vision of God's greatness that reveals the divergence between Him and His people. He is holy. He kept His end of the covenant. Nehemiah and the people of Israel did not. They did not love and obey God.

When we believe we are great, we serve ourselves. But that belief does not belong to new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have been remade, reborn, and renewed with a nature that has eyes on our great King. We serve Him in building His kingdom on earth. He is the only great and awesome One, not us. His Word reveals this.

Our belief in His greatness illuminates our sinfulness and inspires us to repentance. We no longer believe in our own awesomeness. He opens our eyes so that we may see our sin. Nehemiah saw it and led the Israelites to see it for themselves. We have sinned greatly before a great God. But His greatness extends to His mercy

towards us. He offers redemption and removes our sins far from us (Psalm 103:12). We benefit from His greatness, and we joyfully turn from our sin. We turn toward Him to bring Him glory through our obedience. Kingdom workers obey our great King for His glory in all the earth.

- 🕒 *Spend some time considering how great God is. Read Psalm 145. Does the knowledge of His greatness inspire your repentance? Confess your sins to the God of mercy.*
- 🕒 *Consider what you think of as great. Have your ideas about greatness been shaped by Scripture or by the world? What changes can you make to ensure your ideas are shaped by God's Word?*

GOD'S AWESOMENESS INSPIRES COURAGE IN HIS PEOPLE

🗺️ **NEHEMIAH 4:10-14**

- 🕒 *What did Nehemiah tell the Israelites to do to combat their fear of their enemies?*

Kingdom work is always met with opposition. It's hard. It can be scary. Its challenges often leave us feeling hopeless and unmotivated. It's in these times that our beliefs about who we're working for and the importance of our work drive us (Colossians 3:23). We have an enemy who hates us because he hates our King. He actively seeks to destroy our kingdom work. He is formidable, and we can easily succumb to our fears if we're not focused on our great and awesome God. Fear comes for us in the form of uncertainty over our safety and success. We are assaulted by thoughts that make us doubt our mission and our God. With our eyes on the doubts and distractions presented by the enemy, we stumble through our tasks, weak-kneed and wobbly. Our fear tempts us to disobey God by not doing the work He's called us to do.

The Israelites were mocked and threatened by their enemies. They were terrified. The whole town knew their strength was failing (Nehemiah 4:10). God’s people lacked the courage to obey, so Nehemiah reminded them that their God was great and awesome. “And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, ‘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). Satan tried to thwart the work, using their enemies as a constant threat, hoping they would be paralyzed by fear and walk away from their task. But he underestimated the great and awesome God. Once Nehemiah reminded the frightened people of God’s greatness, they courageously picked up their tools and weapons and obeyed Him by completing the wall.

When God’s people are afraid, they need to be reminded anew of who God is. God is faithful to ignite His people’s faith in Him. After Moses died, God charged Joshua with leading His people across the Jordan River into the promised land (Joshua 1:2). The people were afraid. The land was filled with peoples who were stronger than the Israelites (Numbers 13:31). They were afraid to take what God had promised them. But God told Joshua and the people to have courage because He would be with them (Joshua 1:9). When the great and awesome God promises to be with you, you can surely and courageously obey Him.

Our King is awesome, and we work for His glory on earth. He has invited us into His kingdom and entrusted us with the mission to make disciples of all nations. Our view of God—how great and awesome He is—gives us the courage to work when it’s hard. We courageously labor for the expansion of His kingdom. We toil, our strength provided by His energy that He powerfully works within us (Colossians 1:29). Do you lack courage? Remember that you are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that He prepared for you (Ephesians 2:10). Remember that His grace is sufficient for you and His power is made perfect in your weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Remember how great and awesome the Lord is, and do the kingdom work He has called you to.

Q: *In what areas do you lack courage to obey? What encouragement in the Scriptures can you find to help?*

Q: *Read Exodus 14. When the people saw the Egyptian army closing in on them, what did Moses ask them to see instead? How can your faith family encourage one another to keep your eyes fixed on your great and awesome God when you’re afraid?*

GOD'S GREATNESS INSPIRES HIS PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE IN HIM

NEHEMIAH 4:20 AND PROVERBS 3:25-26

Q: *Who did Nehemiah believe would fight for them?*

Q: *Why should we not be afraid?*

If you needed someone to pick up your child from a friend's house across town because you were suddenly detained, you wouldn't ask one of your child's friends to go get him. You certainly wouldn't ask a stranger. You would not place your confidence in just anyone for this task, but in an adult you knew and trusted who had a license and transportation. When we need something, we don't ask for help from someone who is incapable of providing it. Why would we ask something of someone we didn't think could help?

As believers, we never have the problem of being without help. We are children of the great and awesome God. He alone is powerful and capable. Who else would we go to but Him? Who else should we put our confidence in? One of the many covenantal benefits of being the adopted sons and daughters of the great High King is that He is our helper. He is for us. He is great and awesome, and He is ours. We are a most privileged people, part of a long lineage of people, who have great confidence in our King.

Nehemiah inspired courage in the Israelites by imploring them to remember their great and awesome God. They went back to work, but this time they carried weapons to defend themselves because of the great threat to them. Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, and the Ammonites continued to seek their destruction. But the Israelites were freshly encouraged with the reminder of who they worked for and refused to stop working. They courageously persevered because of their confidence in their great and awesome God. Nehemiah summed up their confidence in Him with six words. "Our God will fight for us" (Nehemiah 4:20). No hesitations. No doubts. No contingency plans. Just the unshakable confidence that God would be there for them. They trusted God to get His work done through them.

God's Word teaches that terror and ruin will come our way in this life. But God doesn't intend for us to live in fear. He emboldens us with the comfort that when terror comes for us, He will be our confidence. "Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught" (Proverbs 3:25-26). This great confidence is yours. Own it! The great and awesome God Himself is

your confidence. Are you confident in Him? Do you believe your Father is great and awesome and therefore deserves your unwavering trust and obedience? Do you live this transformational truth, or do you succumb to fear when terror and ruin come for you? We are not people who give up on the kingdom work we've been called to. We are the children of the great and awesome God. We are His kingdom workers. We obey His call to join Him in building His kingdom on earth. And we do so with confidence in our great God. We keep moving forward. There is work to do.

🕒: *What are you tempted to put confidence in? What changes can you make to rightly place your confidence in your great God?*

🕒: *What Scriptures stir our hearts to be confident in our King?*

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 serve God like He is great and awesome? How can you cultivate a heart that views God rightly?*

🕒: *Are there areas in your life where you lack obedience? Pray for repentance and for the courage to confidently obey God's Word.*

PRAY

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

You are a great and awesome God! And You are ours. We love you, Father. Forgive us for our sins. Give us the grace to obey You. You are worthy of our devotion. Make us a people of courage. Let our strength in You bear witness to our confidence in You, Father. May those who see us marvel at Your greatness and profess Your awesome deeds. May others' eyes be opened to Your splendor through our witness of Your greatness. Glorify Yourself, O great and awesome God!

COMMENTARY

NEHEMIAH 1:8 – *Remember*. Moses also called on God to remember His promises when Israel was suffering His judgment because of sin (Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:27–29). Nehemiah now recalls God’s words about the essential choice placed before Israel in the covenant, in which disobedience would lead to scattering, or exile, among the peoples (Leviticus 26:27–33; Deuteronomy 4:25–27; 28:64), while obedience would bring blessing (Leviticus 26:3–13; Deuteronomy 28:1–14).

NEHEMIAH 4:14 – *Do not be afraid* is both a command and an exhortation, rooted in the call to believe that God can overcome His enemies (see also Deuteronomy 1:21, 29; Joshua 1:9) as He has in the past (in the exodus from Egypt and the capture of Canaan).

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

