

KINGDOM WORK

Week Ten | June 30, 2019 | Kingdom Workers Rely on the Lord's Help to do Good Works

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Nehemiah 11–13. 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 desires His people to do good works.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

We depend on the Lord to help us do good on earth, and we expect His good for us in heaven.

MEDITATE

"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for His service" (Nehemiah 13:14).

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.

The Christian life is an exciting one. We are saved from our sin, and we're saved for a purpose. We are here to bring honor and glory to our King and to make Him known throughout the nations. We haven't been saved to

be spectators during our time on earth. Our King puts 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 are kingdom workers. Our Father lovingly invites us to work alongside Him in advancing His kingdom on earth. What a privilege to serve the great and awesome God. As kingdom workers, we serve in many different capacities, building His kingdom in our homes and marketplaces, in boardrooms and classrooms, in global spheres and local meeting spots. But whatever we do, we work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing we serve the Lord and will receive the inheritance as our reward (Colossians 3:23–24).

We work for the Lord. It’s His work. But He doesn’t expect us to do it on our own. He provides what we need to accomplish His work. We do it all in His strength and all for His glory. Today, our study of Ezra and Nehemiah comes to an end. We’ve journeyed through their stories and seen God initiate their work. Their devotion to the Lord has encouraged us, as they repeatedly overcame obstacles to their work. We’ve been inspired by their passion for purity and holy ambition. We’ve testified alongside them to the greatness of God! Their pursuit of justice and mercy has ignited our own. Our hearts worshipped in spirit with theirs as they covenanted with God and rejoiced at His Word.

Today, our hearts may break a little as we check in on our spiritual ancestors. They’re not doing so well. In our last study, we saw them gathering, feasting, repenting, and covenanting with God. Today we find them desecrating that covenant.

A few years have passed since our last encounter with Nehemiah. He returned to the king of Persia, like he promised (2:6), and while he was away, the people strayed from God. He returns to Jerusalem with righteous anger, confronting the Israelites with their sin and reminding them of the consequences of sin in the past. He reforms the people’s ways and drives away the enemies they had foolishly welcomed in his absence. And as always, Nehemiah prays. Nehemiah was a man of prayer and action. He did the work God called him to and prayed God would remember His good work. Nehemiah counted on God to render to him according to his work (Psalm 62:12). God’s Word also says that “whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord” (Ephesians 6:8). When their work on earth is done and they get to go home, kingdom workers expect God to remember them.

God saves us to do good work. We can’t do it without Him. We can save ourselves much heartache by learning from the lessons of the past, how former kingdom workers failed to do good works and rightly suffered the consequences. Let’s depend on Him today as we work to build His kingdom. Let’s long for the day when He calls us home because we have faithfully completed our work, knowing we will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21).

Q: *What are the good works God desires us to do?*

Q: *How can we depend on the Lord to do His work? Give examples.*

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In today's lesson we will learn from Nehemiah the importance of remembering the Lord, relying on Him, and anticipating His remembrance of us.

1. KINGDOM WORKERS REMEMBER THE LESSONS FROM THE PAST
2. KINGDOM WORKERS RECOGNIZE THEIR NEED IN THE PRESENT
3. KINGDOM WORKERS ANTICIPATE GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF THEM IN THE FUTURE

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 REMEMBER THE LESSONS FROM THE PAST

▣ NEHEMIAH 13:15-18, 23-27

Q: *Why was Nehemiah upset that the people were selling food?*

Q: *Why was Nehemiah angry about the brides of the Israelites?*

In our study last week, we saw the Israelites obeying God by keeping the Feast of Booths. They benefitted from the designated time of remembrance appointed by God. They followed up the feast by making a covenant with Him. Scripture lists the names of those who signed the seals of the document. Nehemiah 11 and 12 contain more names, listing the leaders and workers, the people who repopulated the city of Jerusalem and its surrounding villages, the priests and Levites, and the choirs and musicians. All these people took the time to remember God's faithfulness to them, but their memory was short.

They made a vow to God not to intermarry with pagans, to keep the Sabbath and the sabbatical year, and to support the ministry of the temple. Sadly, Nehemiah 13 reveals that they had broken all three parts of their covenant with God. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to learn that Eliashib the priest has given luxurious accommodations inside the temple, in a space reserved for tithes and offerings, to his relative, Tobiah, a known enemy of God's people (v. 4-5). He had also neglected to properly distribute the offerings to the Levites and singers (v. 10).

They were not supporting the ministry of the temple. The people were breaking the Sabbath by conducting business on that day (v. 15-22). And they had intermarried with pagan nations (v. 23-29).

Nehemiah's frustration was obvious and justified. He confronted the nobles of Judah, saying, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in this way and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath" (v. 17-18). He begged them to remember the disaster God had brought down upon them in the past for breaking His laws, to remember their exile. He wanted them to remember the costly lesson of their disobedience.

To the people intermarrying with pagan nations he said, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?" (v. 26-27). Even Solomon, who was beloved by God and made king over all Israel, could not escape the consequences of marrying pagan women (1 Kings 11).

Kingdom workers aren't perfect. We fail, but when we do, we have a gracious Father to turn to for forgiveness and restoration. We enjoy this benefit because we are united with Christ. But union with Christ is incompatible with a life of unrepentant sin. Nehemiah knew the good works of obedience his people had been called to. He knew they would obey imperfectly at best. But he hoped the Israelites would learn from the past failures of their people. He hoped they would choose life and good, not death and evil (Deuteronomy 30:15). He hoped they would rely on the Lord to accomplish these good works of obedience.

It's not too late for us. Is there any area of your life where you are you living in disobedience? Are your works

far from good? Remember the past. Repent. Don't invite God's judgment into your life. Choose life and good. Choose to do good works and depend on your King for help in doing them. Remember, and live the good life.

Q: *What examples do we see in Scripture of the consequences of sin? How can we learn from these examples?*

Q: *Consider how God has disciplined you in the past. Have you learned from your past, or are you repeating the same sinful behaviors? Repent. Remember.*

KINGDOM WORKERS RECOGNIZE THEIR NEED IN THE PRESENT

NEHEMIAH 13

Q: *What happened to the Levites and the singers as a result of not being paid their allotment [v. 10]?*

Q: *What was the consequence of the people intermarrying with pagan nations [v. 24]?*

While we remember the past, and hopefully learn from it, we live in the present. It's here and now that we are to be walking in those good works God prepared for us before we were even born. Kingdom work occurs today. We need to get busy now with good works. But we can't do it alone. We were never supposed to rely on ourselves to get the job done. God gives us the great privilege of working with Him, and He graciously provides the help we need to do good.

Consider the Scriptures. "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us

his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Peter 1:3–4). “Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:22–24). “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

God calls us to kingdom work. He equips us to abound in it. He equips us with everything good that we may do His will and works in us that which pleases Him through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:21). “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Our ability to abound in good works depends on receiving God’s abounding grace. We need it. Without it, we end up like the rebellious Israelites in Nehemiah’s day. Apart from grace, we are merely people who break our promises to God. But kingdom workers are people of grace. We acknowledge our need. We go to our King for the help we need to do His work on earth.

Apart from Jesus we can do nothing. God wants us to do good works and we need Him to help us do them. God is glorified in our need. He delights to help His children. It’s our joy to go to Him for help. Our culture tells us we must have it all together. That we must be our own heroes and take pride in our determination and grit. Kingdom workers boast in our King! “Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23–24). We know the great and awesome King of the universe, and we rely on the help He freely gives to do good works. We’re not ashamed of our need, we boast in it. Doing kingdom work in God’s strength ensures He gets the glory. And Kingdom workers are all about the glory of our King!

Q: *Do you recognize your need for Christ in all your work, or are you working in your own strength? How can your faith family keep you accountable to boast in your need and therefore glorify Christ?*

Q: *What does the Bible say about God’s ability and delight to meet our needs?*

KINGDOM WORKERS ANTICIPATE GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF THEM IN THE FUTURE

▣ **NEHEMIAH 5:19; 13:14, 22, 31**

🔗: *Nehemiah asked to be spared according to what [13:22]?*

🔗: *What did Nehemiah want to be remembered for [13:31]?*

Martin Luther said, “There are two days in my calendar: This day and that Day.” This famous sixteenth-century German church leader lived in the present with his mind set on the future, when he would be fully and finally in the presence of God. He worked to build God’s kingdom in his day as we do in ours. And we long for the day when we will see Him face to face. We have nothing to fear because we’ve trusted Christ for our salvation. We don’t dread that day but wait eagerly for it because we know our King will remember us. While we spend our days on earth remembering God, our hope is set on Him remembering us when our work is done.

Nehemiah was a man of great action. He worked hard for his King. Like a good shepherd, he protected his sheep by chasing out the wolves (Nehemiah 13:28). He confronted the people in their sin and led them to turn from it. With this bunch, that was a full-time job! But His activity was never separated from His dependence on the Lord. Nehemiah was a man of constant prayer. He knew the work God put in his heart to do, and he knew God would have to help him accomplish it. So he prayed. He prayed for help and forgiveness. He praised the great and awesome God.

Earlier in his story Nehemiah prayed a unique prayer, asking God to remember him. “Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people” (Nehemiah 5:19). And in our final chapter today, as Nehemiah strives to eliminate corruption and purify the people, he seems to have a singular focus to secure God’s remembrance of him. He prays for it three times. “Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service” (13:14). “Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love” (13:22b). “Remember me, O my God, for good” (13:31).

We don’t have to overcomplicate prayer. Nehemiah was a great man by anyone’s standards, but his prayers were simple and heartfelt. He prayed for success in doing his kingdom work (1:11) and in the middle of conversations

with kings (2:4). He asked God to see his suffering (4:4) and for God to help his hands do the work (6:9). He depended on the Lord to help him do good on earth, and he expected God's good for him in heaven. Nehemiah lived each day anticipating the day he would be in the presence of his King. He expected God's remembrance of him to be good on that day.

We've been given the great privilege of working for our King. He blesses us by helping us do our work. We work best when we remember the lessons from the kingdom workers who have gone before us., When we recognize our need for Christ, we don't strive in our own strength but in the strength He provides (Colossians 1:29).

All our labors are an offering to our King. We lay our works at His feet to bless Him. One day, our good Father will welcome us home, not because of our good works, but because of the sufficient work of His Son on our behalf. We will be remembered for good because we did the good work of putting our faith in Jesus. We are believers and repenters. And out of gratitude for the great work Christ has done on our behalf, we work for Him. Our King knows us by name. His remembrance of us is certain. And that's why as kingdom workers we can pray with confidence, "Remember me, O my God, for good."

Q: *Do you spend your energy focusing on how others will remember you after you're gone? How can Scripture help you cultivate a heart that is concerned with how God remembers you?*

Q: *Read Hebrews 11. What does God remember about His people? How does this shape your hope for what God will remember about you?*

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.*

Q: *How can we do our kingdom work in response to Christ's work on our behalf, and not merely to gain favor with our King?*

Q: *Do you long for heaven? What examples in the Bible do we see of saints longing to be with Jesus forever? Ask God to make you an anticipator of His kingdom.*

PRAY

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

Father, You are great and awesome! You have done great things for us. You give us good works to do for You on earth. Help us to do them. Help us learn from the mistakes of the past. Show us our need for You, Lord. Transform us into kingdom-minded people. Cause our hearts to long for You and Your kingdom. Help us to be expectant people. Remember us, O God, for good.

COMMENTARY

NEHEMIAH 12:1—*Zerubbabel . . . and Jeshua.* Zerubbabel was the first leader of the exiles who returned to Judah following the decree of King Cyrus in 538 B.C. and Jeshua was the high priest who returned with him. This was about a century before Nehemiah.

NEHEMIAH 13:25-27—In his violent but symbolically powerful reaction, Nehemiah calls the people back to the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 7:1–5) and points to the example of Solomon, who was turned from faithfulness to the Lord by his foreign wives (1 Kings 11).

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

