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# THE LOOKOUT

FEBRUARY 2023

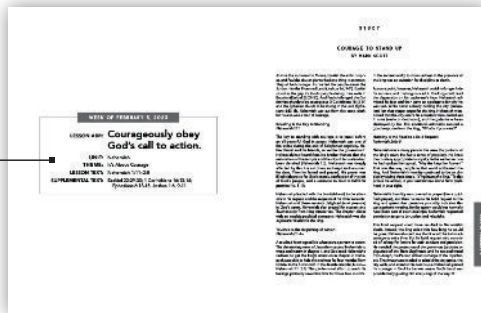
## Unit: Nehemiah

### Theme: It's About Courage

**Overview:** The root of the word *courage* comes from the Latin *cor*, which is the word for “heart.” So, courage is strength of heart. *Courage* is formally defined as “the strength to do something that frightens you; bravery; strength in the face of pain or grief.” If Nehemiah—the cupbearer of king Artaxerxes and later governor of Judea—was anything, he was courageous. During February, students will learn from the book of Nehemiah about the courage to stand up against all odds, take appropriate risks, deny one’s own amenities, and restore righteousness.

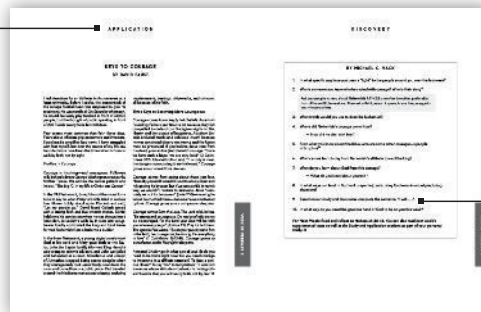
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF FEBRUARY 5, 2023**

**LESSON AIM:** **Courageously obey  
God's call to action.**

**UNIT:** Nehemiah

**THEME:** It's About Courage

**LESSON TEXT:** Nehemiah 1:11–2:8

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Ezekiel 22:29-30; 1 Corinthians 16:13-14;  
Ephesians 6:13-15; Joshua 1:6, 9-11

## STUDY

# COURAGE TO STAND UP

BY MARK SCOTT

Joshua the successor to Moses, Ezekiel the exilic prophet, and Paul the church planter had one thing in common. They all had courage. Joshua led the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land (Joshua 1:6, 9-11). Ezekiel stood in the gap for God's people during their exile in Babylon (Ezekiel 22:29-30). And Paul challenged the Corinthian church to be courageous (1 Corinthians 16:13-14) and the Ephesian church to be strong in the Lord (Ephesians 6:13-15). Nehemiah was cut from this same cloth, for he also was a man of courage.

### **Kneeling Is the Key to Standing**

*Nehemiah 1:11*

The key to standing with courage is to kneel before an all-powerful God in prayer. Nehemiah was one of the exiles during the end of Babylonian captivity. He, like Daniel and his friends, served in the government. Nehemiah had heard from his brother Hanani that the restoration of the temple and the city of Jerusalem had been derailed (Nehemiah 1:3). Nehemiah was deeply affected by this. He sat down and wept and mourned for days. Then he fasted and prayed. His prayer was filled with praise for God's mercy, confession of the sins of God's people, and a reminder to God to fulfill his promise (vv. 5-11).

Nehemiah pleaded with the *Lord* (Adonai) to *be attentive* to his request and the requests of his other *servants*. Nehemiah and these servants delighted (took pleasure) in God's *name*. Nehemiah also prayed for *success* and *favor* (mercy) from King Artaxerxes. The chapter closes with an autobiographical comment: Nehemiah was the *cupbearer* (butler) to the king.

### **Touched Is the Beginning of Action**

*Nehemiah 2:1-4a*

A touched heart typically is what spurs a person to action. The devastating news of Jerusalem caused Nehemiah to weep and mourn in chapter 1, and God used Nehemiah's sadness to get the king's attention in chapter 2. Nehemiah was able to hide this sadness for four months (from Chislev to the first month in the Jewish calendar, Nisan—Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1). This professional effort to mask his feelings probably saved his hide for those four months.

In the ancient world, to show sadness in the presence of the king was an invitation for discipline or death.

At some point, however, Nehemiah could no longer hide his sadness, and the king noticed it. The king could read the depression on his cupbearer's face. Nehemiah admitted his fear and then gave an apologetic for why he was sad. While never actually naming the city (Jerusalem) lest that trigger angst for the king, Nehemiah mentioned that the *city where his ancestors were buried lies in ruins* (waste or desolation), and the *gates have been destroyed by fire*. This emotional admission secured a good response from the king, "*What is it you want?*"

### **Humility Is the Road to a Bold Request**

*Nehemiah 2:4b-8*

Nehemiah was a classy person. He knew the protocol of the king's court. He had a sense of propriety. He knew the courtesy appropriate to royalty. In the earlier section he had spoken the typical, "*May the king live forever!*" That was the way people in that world addressed the king. And Nehemiah's humility continued to be on display by saying three times, "*If it pleases the king.*" To this phrase he added, *If your servant has found favor* (wellness) *in your sight*.

Nehemiah's humility was covered in prayer (like a quick flash prayer), and then he made his bold request to the king and queen (her presence probably indicates this was a private meeting, for the queen would not normally have been part of court dealings). Nehemiah requested permission to go to Jerusalem and *rebuild it*.

This bold request could have resulted in Nehemiah's death. Instead, the king asked him how long he would be gone. Nehemiah could see that it would be to his advantage to *set a time*. But his bold request also consisted of asking for letters for *safe-conduct* and provision. He needed the protection of the *governors* (captains or deputies) of the *Trans-Euphrates*, and he needed wood from *Asaph*, the Persian officer in charge of the royal forest. The *timber* was needed to rebuild the city gates, the city walls, and even for his own house. Nehemiah placed his courage in God for he was aware God's hand was providentially guiding him every step of the way. ■

# APPLICATION

## KEYS TO COURAGE

BY DAVID FAUST

I led devotions for an Athletes in Action event at a large university. Before I spoke, the quarterback of the college football team was supposed to give his testimony. He was terrified! On Saturday afternoon, he would fearlessly play football in front of 60,000 people, but the thought of public speaking in front of 200 friends nearly froze him with fear.

Fear seems more common than faith these days. Fears about inflation grip consumers and investors. Social media amplifies bad news. I have struggled with fear myself, but over the course of my life, my best decisions have been the times when I chose to walk by faith, not by sight.

### Profiles in Courage

Courage is inspiring—and contagious. Followers rally behind a brave George Washington or a spunky Mother Teresa. We admire the cancer patient who insists, “The big ‘C’ in my life is Christ, not Cancer.”

In the Old Testament, Joseph found the moral fortitude to say no when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him. Moses boldly stood up to Pharaoh and said, “Let my people go.” David faced Goliath armed with a strong faith and five smooth stones. Daniel held onto his convictions when he was thrown into a lion’s den. Jerusalem’s walls lay in ruins until a cup-bearer boldly confronted the king and God transformed Nehemiah from a butler to a builder.

In the New Testament, a young virgin bravely took God at his word and Mary gave birth to the Savior. John the Baptist boldly informed King Herod it was wrong to commit adultery, and John was jailed and beheaded as a result. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea stopped being secret disciples when they courageously took Jesus’ body down from the cross and buried him in a public place. Paul traveled around the Mediterranean as a missionary, enduring

imprisonment, beatings, shipwrecks, and criticism, all because of his faith.

### Three Keys to Becoming More Courageous

*Courage comes from deeply held beliefs.* America’s Founding Fathers sacrificed a lot because they felt compelled to defend our God-given rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Abraham Lincoln endured much (and achieved much) because he was convinced slavery was wrong and the Union must be preserved. If you believe Jesus rose from the dead, you can live (and die) with courage. “Since we have such a hope, we are very bold” (2 Corinthians 3:12). Elisabeth Elliot said, “If a duty is clear, the dangers surrounding it are irrelevant.” *Courage grows as our convictions deepen.*

*Courage comes from caring about those you love.* Normally you and I wouldn’t run into a busy street and risk getting hit by a car, but if we saw a child in harm’s way, we wouldn’t hesitate to intervene. Jesus “resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51)—knowing he would be crucified there—because he was motivated by love. *Courage grows as our compassion deepens.*

*Courage comes from the Lord.* The Lord told Joshua, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9). Pray for boldness. The apostle Paul wrote, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love” (1 Corinthians 16:13-14). *Courage grows as our reliance on the Holy Spirit deepens.*

**Personal Challenge:** In what part of your life do you need to be brave right now? Do you need courage to intervene in a difficult situation? To face a serious illness? To say “no” to temptation? To confront someone whose attitude or behavior is hurting others? Decide that you will live by faith, not by fear. ■

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. In what specific way have you been a “light” to the people around you over the last week?
2. Who among the people you know has acted with courage? What’s their story?

Ask two people to read aloud **Nehemiah 1:11–2:8** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to paraphrase the passage in two minutes or less.

3. What words would you use to describe Nehemiah?
4. Where did Nehemiah’s courage come from?
  - How did he deal with fear?
5. From what you know about the Bible, who are some other courageous people in Scripture?
6. What can we learn today from Nehemiah’s attitude toward the king?
7. What do you learn about God from this passage?
  - What do you learn about yourself?
8. In what ways can trust in God and prayer help us to obey God even in anxiety-inducing situations?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
10. In what way do you need the gracious hand of God to be on you this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Nehemiah 4:1-18**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖