

## Life Group Discussion Guide

### Pragmatic Faith

Nehemiah was born in captivity. He had nothing to do with the events that caused the Israelites to be exiled to a foreign land. It is highly likely that Nehemiah had never even been to Jerusalem, and yet he is filled with sorrow when he discovers that the city is in ruins. The first thing he does in response to this sorrow is fast and pray. He says this in the first few verses of chapter 1:

6: "I confess the sins **we** Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. 7 **We** have acted very wickedly toward you. **We** have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses

What does Nehemiah's use of the word "we", despite the fact that he was not even alive when the Israelites committed the sins that led to their captivity indicate about Nehemiah's mentality concerning the state of the city? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the relationship between fault and responsibility? \_\_\_\_\_

Why is it difficult to claim responsibility for fixing problems that we did not create? What characteristic of Nehemiah made him capable of claiming responsibility to rebuild a broken city even though it wasn't his choices that led to the breaking? \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Read Nehemiah 2:1-10.**

Nehemiah claimed responsibility for his sins, the sins of Israel, and the broken city of Jerusalem and then took action. What action did he take? \_\_\_\_\_

In ancient times the royal cupbearer was among the most trusted of servants. It was the cupbearer's responsibility to taste the king's drink before the king in case the drink was poisoned. Additionally, historical commentators teach us that within the Persian Monarchy (Nehemiah was cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes) the servants who surrounded the king were supposed to "reflect the sunlight of the king's majesty" (Peter Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures). In the Persian court a gloomy face was a breach of protocol that could be an executable offense for a servant who was close to the king (H.G. Williamson, Word Biblical Commentary).

**Read Nehemiah 2:1-3 again.**

What do Nehemiah's actions before the king indicate about his commitment to see the broken city rebuilt? \_\_\_\_\_

**Read Nehemiah 2:7-8.**

To what does Nehemiah attribute the favor he has with the king? \_\_\_\_\_

There were natural and supernatural components to the story of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Some of what was needed could only be supplied by a supernatural provision from God. Some of what was needed required that people partner in willingness to accomplish the task of rebuilding the walls.

Where do you see these two aspects of God's working at play within this story? \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflection:** Sometimes it is easy to think of a miracle only as God doing something for me that I could not do for myself (supernatural), but more often, God chooses to allow me to partner with Him to bring about a seemingly impossible outcome in my life or family (natural). My willingness to humble myself before God in repentance and supplication (asking Him to supply), and to commit to a Godly course of action is HUGE. With this in mind, what does it mean to have "pragmatic faith."