



Sermon Study - 9.13.2026

Leader's Corner

A Holy Ache

Nehemiah 1:1–4

Main Idea: God uses people whose hearts break for what breaks His.

Main Passage: Nehemiah 1:1–4

Main Practice: Pay Attention → Ask for His Heart → Take the Ache to God

Leader Summary: We often think calling begins with discovering what God wants us to do. Nehemiah's story begins somewhere different—with what God is doing in him.

Nehemiah wasn't searching for his big assignment. He was faithfully serving where he already was when he heard about the brokenness in Jerusalem. And before he developed a plan, rallied people, or rebuilt a single stone, he sat down, wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed.

This week isn't primarily about helping everyone identify their "calling." It's about becoming people whose hearts increasingly resemble the heart of Jesus. Help your group resist the urge to immediately turn compassion into action. Create space to notice, feel, and pray.

Leader Note: Different people will ache for different things. Don't allow the conversation to become a comparison of whose burden is most important. God's heart is bigger than any one person can carry.

Prayer and Praise

Prayer Prompt:

Shift the group toward this simple prayer: *"Jesus, give me Your heart. Help me see what You see and care about what You care about."*

Consider allowing 30–60 seconds of silence before anyone prays aloud.

Worship Songs:

A few songs that connect naturally to this week's theme:

* Hosanna — Hillsong UNITED — "Break my heart for what breaks Yours"

* Give Me Your Eyes — Brandon Heath

* The Cause of Christ — Kari Jobe

* Build My Life — Pat Barrett / Housefires

* Available — Elevation Worship

Group Discussion

Read Nehemiah 1:1–4 together.

START WITH CALLING

1. When you hear the phrase “God’s calling for my life,” what do you naturally think about? Career? Ministry? Location? Something significant you’re supposed to accomplish?
2. What’s the difference between asking, “What is God calling me to DO?” and “Who is God calling me to BECOME?” Read Romans 8:29.
God may give us specific assignments, but Scripture has already revealed one calling every follower of Jesus shares: We are being formed into the likeness of Jesus.
3. Where might God be asking you for ordinary faithfulness right now rather than something bigger or newer?

THEN COMES THE ACHE

Read Nehemiah 1:2–3 again.

Nehemiah is living approximately 800 miles away from Jerusalem, surrounded by the security and comfort of the Persian fortress. Yet he asks: “How are they?” That question opens his heart to something he could have easily remained distant from.

4. What do you notice about Nehemiah simply asking the question? What does that reveal about his heart?
5. What are some of the “fortresses” in our lives that can insulate us from noticing the needs or brokenness around us?

A HOLY ACHE

Read Nehemiah 1:4. “When I heard this, I sat down and wept...”

Before Nehemiah has a plan, he carries a burden. A holy ache is something that breaks God’s heart that begins to break your heart too.

Think about Jesus:

- * Matthew 9:36 — people who were harassed and helpless
- * Matthew 15:32 — hungry people
- * Matthew 20:34 — people suffering
- * Luke 7:13 — a grieving widow
- * John 11:35 — grieving friends
- * Luke 19:41 — a spiritually lost city

Again and again, Jesus sees → Jesus feels compassion → Jesus moves toward people.

6. When you look at Jesus, what kinds of people or situations consistently move His heart?
7. What brokenness have you noticed that consistently seems to grab your attention or stir something deeper in you?

DON’T RUSH THE ACHE

Nehemiah doesn’t immediately act. He weeps. Mourns. Fasts. Prays. And approximately four months pass between the events of Nehemiah 1 and Nehemiah 2.

8. Why do you think God sometimes wants us to sit with a burden before doing something about it?
9. What’s the danger of immediately turning every burden into a project to fix? Consider: Before God does something through you, God does something in you.
10. What might God want to form in us through the things that break our hearts?

Practice

GROUP EXPERIENCE | “What Do You Notice?”

Give everyone a piece of paper or open a notes app. Create a few minutes of silence and ask everyone to complete these three prompts:

PAY ATTENTION

What brokenness do I consistently notice? Write down 2–3 things without trying to determine what you’re supposed to do about them.

ASK FOR HIS HEART

Now look at what you wrote and ask: “Jesus, is there something here that breaks Your heart that You are teaching me to care about?”

Circle one that seems to carry more weight for you. Don’t worry about whether it’s your “calling.” Just notice it.

TAKE THE ACHE TO GOD

Instead of immediately making a plan, spend a few minutes praying. “Jesus, give me Your heart for _____.”

“What do You want to do in me before You do something through me?”

If appropriate, allow people to share what they circled. Remind the group: We don’t need to solve one another’s ache tonight. We can simply help carry it. Then pray for one another.

THIS WEEK’S CHALLENGE

For the next 7 days, don’t try to discover your life’s calling. Instead, practice these three things:

PAY ATTENTION.

What am I allowing myself to see?

ASK FOR HIS HEART.

“Jesus, break my heart for what breaks Yours.”

TAKE THE ACHE TO GOD.

Before asking “What should I do?” ask: “God, what are You doing in me?”

Consider choosing one day this week to fast from something that normally keeps you distracted or comfortable and use that space to pray about the ache God is stirring in you.

Further Study

Become Like Jesus

Romans 8:28–30

God’s purpose isn’t simply accomplishing something through us; He is conforming us to the image of His Son.

The Compassion of Jesus

Matthew 9:35–38

Notice the progression: Jesus sees → Jesus has compassion → Jesus calls for workers. Calling emerges from compassion.

Don’t Look Away

Luke 10:25–37

The priest and Levite both see the wounded man. The Samaritan sees him and is moved with compassion. What’s the difference between seeing brokenness and truly allowing ourselves to see it?

God’s Heart for Brokenness

Explore: Isaiah 58:6–10 | Micah 6:8 | James 1:27 | Psalm 82:3–4 | Luke 4:18–19

As you read, ask one question: “What does this passage reveal about what matters to the heart of God?”