



Let's Rebuild Together



**A Call to 52 Days of
Prayer and Fasting
with Nehemiah**

*'So the wall was completed...in fifty-two days'
(Nehemiah 6:15)*

The Salvation Army United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland (UKI), together with most of God's Church, has been under intense pressure during decades of significant social, cultural and technological change. It is not too dramatic to suggest that many of our communities, traditions and structures have been deeply and detrimentally impacted, if not completely broken. Yet, as with the lion Aslan, in C. S. Lewis's Narnia series, 'God is on the move'. God is calling us to renewed hope and confidence in his mission and purpose; calling us, if you will, out of the seemingly frozen wastes of winter, into a new season of expectation of all that God is doing, in and through our small nations. This is a time for prayer and for rediscovering our voice of testimony and hope in the unconquerable, steadfast and persistent purposes of God to redeem and renew all humanity. It is a time for us to say, in response to Nehemiah's call, 'Let us start rebuilding' (Nehemiah 2:18).

God's word to Solomon at the dedication of Jerusalem's first Temple remains true for us: 'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land' (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Nehemiah is a story of God for our time. The period of Israel's history known as the Exile, when the nation was defeated and all its leaders and influencers were carried off into captivity in another land, turned out to be the most creative flowering of its spiritual life. Deep questions are asked, leading to renewed hope

and confidence in God and God's unshakeable covenant loyalty and love. People like Nehemiah answered the call and 'stood in the gap' for God's people. His response to the 'disgrace' of Jerusalem's decay remains a model of prayer and action for a time like ours, as he drew people together in prayer, fasting and rebuilding. Together, they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days.

Isaiah's prophecy during the Exile remains true for us: 'They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations' (Isaiah 61:4).



This prayer guide is divided into sections, each focusing on a particular part of the Book of Nehemiah. There is an introduction giving an overview of the theme for that section, and a series of daily prayer suggestions to help you journey through the theme.

You might like to set aside some time at the start of each section to read and reflect on the introduction and the recommended passage from Nehemiah. At the end of each section there is a prayer activity for groups to do together. If you're not already part of a prayer group or house group, why not see if you can form one for this prayer journey?

Even if you're alone in praying through this guide, remember that you join daily with people all around the United Kingdom and Ireland who are praying for The Salvation Army, and for the whole of God's Church, to be at the heart and centre of God's purposes; for God's will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven!

Whilst the larger work of God's Kingdom may not be completed in only 52 days, let us take up the challenge together of a special season of prayer and fasting, with

the inspiration of Nehemiah before us: 'So the wall was completed... in fifty-two days' (Nehemiah 6:15).

There is no particular legalistic requirement for joining your prayer with fasting. From the early well-known example of Major (later Commissioner) John Carleton, who offered to go without his pudding every day for a year, the inspiration for The Salvation Army's Self-Denial season was born. However, in this particular season of prayer, fasting is a spiritual discipline that increases in us a hunger for God and for God's will on earth as it is in Heaven. We encourage you, as is traditional in Lent, to find some simple way in which you can be sacrificial from your usual way of life, in order to focus more fully on God's purposes in and through The Salvation Army and God's Church. This may be giving up a type of food or drink, a time-consuming activity like checking social media, an unhelpful habit, a particular activity, or just the general busyness of life.

Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*.



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Section 1: Days 1-6

Penitence (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

Introduction

The theologian Karl Barth, who wrote more about prayer than almost anyone else, said that prayer is simply 'asking God', just as Jesus taught us, 'Ask and it will be given to you...' (Luke 11:9). To not ask is to not believe that we need anything, or indeed that God can give us anything! Furthermore, in asking God, we recognise our own poverty and our need for penitence.

The personal impact that the news about Jerusalem's 'disgrace' has upon Nehemiah is striking, even

though he is distant from the reality, surrounded by wealth and privilege. It is a personal tragedy that moves him to tears, to prayer and fasting. It compels him to his knees before the God of Heaven. Although many others have been disobedient, it is his sin to confess! He cannot put the blame elsewhere.

Furthermore, Nehemiah recognises the character of God as a God of loyal, covenanted love and mercy, who delights in receiving and honouring those who put their hope and confidence in him. This is a fantastic model of prayer for us all.

A question to consider

As you begin your 52-day journey of prayer and fasting, how in particular is God asking you to be penitent? What hope is God putting in your heart regarding how things could be different if you only trust God and act accordingly?

Day 1 - Broken Walls (verse 3)

 *'The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.'*

→ In Nehemiah's time, a city without walls or gates was the ultimate sign of helplessness. Father God, as we begin this journey of prayer, we confess our need of you, and our helplessness without you.



Day 2 - Grief and Desperation (verse 4)

📖 *'When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.'*

→ Nehemiah allows his prayers of grief and longing to disturb his daily routine. Is God challenging you to fast from something, or to adopt a new prayer rhythm, as you travel this prayer journey with him?

Day 3 - God's Covenant Love (verse 5)

📖 *'Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments...'*

→ In the midst of our grief and helplessness, we come to a God who is loving and faithful beyond measure. Take some time today to remember the promises God has made to you, and the prayers he has answered.

Day 4 - Lamentation (verse 6)

📖 *'I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you.'*

→ Repentance starts when we dare to share God's sadness. Ask God to show you the UKI Salvation Army through his eyes – what brings him the greatest pain? Let your prayer today be a lament for the things he shows you.

Day 5 - Confession (verse 7)

📖 *'We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.'*

→ Repentance is being specific about sin and asking forgiveness. Think back to your lament for the territory yesterday; today write it out as a prayer, naming the sins God showed you, and asking his forgiveness.

Day 6 - Petition (verse 11)

📖 *'Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name.'*

→ Repentance moves into petition, as we admit our inability to set things right without God's help. Read the prayer you wrote yesterday, and ask God to begin a new work of renewal in The Salvation Army.



Group Prayer Activity: A Group Lament

Invite each member of the group to spend 10 minutes doing the activity in Day 4 – reflecting on The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland and asking God to show them what pains him most when he looks at us. Remind everyone that we all hear God differently: some hear him best through their emotions, and some through their thoughts; some in words and some in pictures. The key is to be open to letting him speak to us.

As you bring this listening time to a close, give each person several sheets of paper and a marker pen, and ask them to write down the pains and sadnesses which God has shown them – one on each piece of paper, written large enough to be read at a distance. Spread out the papers on the floor, and invite people to walk around reading them.

In ancient Jewish tradition, grief was often expressed by sitting on the ground. Invite each person to choose a place to sit on the floor, perhaps near a word which has particular resonance for them. Play some reflective music, and invite people simply to stop and sit amidst the pain and sadness of God's heart. This isn't about praying clever prayers or fixing the problems. This is just a time to face the reality of our plight, to acknowledge our failings, and to sit with God in grief and sorrow.

After 15 minutes or so, invite people to begin turning the papers over and writing words of hope on the blank side. By the end of your prayer time, the floor should be a sea of hope and promise. Invite people to walk around again, soaking up the truth of God's unfailing love and goodness.



Section 2: Days 7-10

Asking the Right Questions (Nehemiah 2:1-10)

Introduction

When Jesus teaches us to pray to our heavenly Father, 'Your will be done', he reminds us that our authority comes from asking for God's purposes to be fulfilled. This means that there are smaller authorities in the world that must bend their wills to the will of God. Some of these authorities are actively opposed to God's purposes, and we must be assured of God's protection.

Nehemiah was a practical man of prayer, as well as a faithful and humble servant of God. He

understood ultimately whose authority he was under, and whose earthly co-operation he needed to ask for. It was important for him to have a clear grasp of what he needed, and he did that by asking the right questions about his situation.

Jesus encouraged us to ask practically for our real needs and the needs of others. He taught us to say, 'Give us today our daily bread', a request that extends beyond the simple basics of our daily food to the many practical details of our lives and our faithful service.

A question to consider

As you journey in discipleship, what are you asking for? Be practical and specific, as you think about what you need, bearing in mind whose authority and protection you are under.

Day 7 - What do we want? (verse 4)

 *'The king said to me, "What is it you want?"'*

→ The king's question moves Nehemiah from grieving to dreaming. We need to acknowledge loss, failure and brokenness, but it is just as important to have a vision of hope for the future. As you pray today, spend some time dreaming. Thinking back to the repentance of the past few days, what do you long to see change? What might a renewed Salvation Army look like?



Day 8 - Whose authority do we need? (verses 4-5)

📖 *"Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king... let him send me to the city... so that I can rebuild it."*

→ Nehemiah has a plan, but first he shoots off an 'arrow prayer' to the one who holds all power and authority. As you go about your day, practise arrow prayers. Each time you start a new task, stop and pray for a minute, offering your work to God and asking him to use it to build his Kingdom.

Day 9 - What protection do we need? (verse 7)

📖 *"If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors... so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?"*

→ Nehemiah's plan is bold and risky, and he is wise enough to seek the appropriate protection before setting out. Pray today for anyone you know who is doing something risky to build God's Kingdom. Pray for protection from discouragement, fear, resistance and opposition.

Day 10 - What provision do we need? (verse 8)

📖 *"And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel..."*

→ Nehemiah has an ambitious dream, but he also has a practical mind. He has worked out exactly what he will need, and makes sure he asks for it. What did you dream about on Day 7? Write down each dream, and make a list beside it of all the things that would need to happen for that dream to come true. Then, ask God for those things.

Group Prayer Activity: Dreaming and Asking

Spend some time talking about your dreams for what The Salvation Army could be and do in your community. Write them down, and then work out what you need to ask God for, if those dreams are to come true.



Section 3: Days 11-17

Facing the Truth (Nehemiah 2:11-20)

Introduction

At the heart of moving forward in God's purposes, both in our prayerful devotions and in our prayerful actions, is a clear and agreed recognition and understanding of what is true, right and godly. This understanding begins in our own personal encounter with the God of all truth, and from there extends into shared agreement for which we can be mutually accountable.

Nehemiah clearly demonstrates this process, both in his personal relationship with God and in his corporate life, both as a member

of the King's household and as a member of the people of Israel. It is not sufficient for his life of faith to be only a personal and private concern. It involves open, transparent and mutual accountability with others.

One of the ancient, prayerful practices is that of the Examen, which involves taking time to daily detect God's presence with us, and God's direction for us. This insight is so much stronger when, with other believers, we find agreement and we make ourselves accountable to each other. Such agreement will involve mutual encouragement, challenge and correction.

A question to consider

How are you living out a mutually accountable Christian life of prayer and action, and how can this grow deeper?

Day 11 - Truth in our Hearts (verse 12)

 *'I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.'*

→ It took thousands to rebuild Jerusalem. Nehemiah had just one part to do. God's work of renewal in The Salvation Army will involve thousands of people, but be encouraged that you have a special place on the taskforce. There are prayers in your heart that no one else has ever prayed.



Day 12 - Courageous Examination (verse 13)

📖 *'By night I went out... examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.'*

→ When you look at The Salvation Army where you are, what do you see? What is going well? What has broken down? Why not meet a friend for coffee today and talk together about what you both see.

Day 13 - Facing the Blockages (verse 14)

📖 *'Then I moved on towards the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through.'*

→ The wall of Jerusalem used to be an impressive feat of engineering. But by Nehemiah's time it's a mess of rubble, blocking the way so no one can get through. When you reflect on the life of your corps/church, what blockages do you see? What is stopping people from moving forward?

Day 14 - Vision Agreed (verses 17-18)

📖 *"Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace"... They replied, "Let us start rebuilding."*

→ Nehemiah can examine rubble and blockages on his own, but he needs friends to help him shift them. Think about the blockages you identified yesterday; is there someone you know who is aware of those blockages and would stand with you in prayer? Why not get in touch with them today and ask them to join you in praying for those blockages to be removed.

Day 15 - The Reality of God's Presence (verse 18)

📖 *'I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.'*

→ Give thanks for prayers God has answered in your corps/church over recent years. Encourage a few others by reminding them too.



Day 16 - The Reality of the Opposition (verse 19)

📖 *'But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us.'*

→ When God's Spirit begins a work of renewal and rebuilding, it is always opposed. Pray for those you know who have tried to remove blockages so that God's Kingdom may advance, but have come under spiritual attack.

Day 17 - The Promise of Victory (verse 20)

📖 *'I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success."*

→ Today, why not make contact with the person/people you prayed for yesterday, to offer them support and encouragement. Spiritual attack often feels like a heaviness, full of discouragement, intimidation or fatigue. So pray for new hope, courage and strength to fill them.

Group Prayer Activity: Assessing the Rubble

Begin with a short time of prayer, welcoming the Holy Spirit to guide you in your time together.

Then talk through the questions in Days 12 and 13 together. When you look at The Salvation Army where you are, what do you see that's going well? What has broken down? Where are the blockages? Everyone will have different perspectives, but choose one or two areas on which you broadly agree, and start to strategise:

- What could your group do to strengthen the good things which are happening?
- What could you do to help remove the blockages?
- What could you do to help rebuild something which has broken down?
- What prayers do you need to be praying?
- What action could you be taking together?

Before you finish your time together, agree on a plan of prayer and a plan of action. Be specific about exactly what you're going to pray and do together. And of course, don't forget to pray before you finish.



Section 4: Days 18-24

Building the Wall Together (Nehemiah 3:1-32)

Introduction

Christian discipleship is life lived in sacrificial and generous community and in shared action. We are the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit's life in us deepens our unity and love for each other, as we seek to mirror to the world the generous and sacrificial unity and love of God as Father, Son and Spirit.

Nehemiah understands the powerful dynamic of God's people working and praying together. As in the body of Christ, every person has their station along the wall. A range of different communities, including families, neighbours,

professional groups and faith communities, build each section of the wall.

Likewise, our journey as disciples and our service as God's people involves getting together with other believers and sharing common aims and goals. A key New Testament word for this life is *koinonia* – meaning to hold our lives together 'in common', in fellowship and partnership. There is so much strength for God's people when they 'live together in unity' (Psalm 133), supporting, serving, challenging, encouraging and building up the body of Christ, just as Nehemiah's team built up the wall.

A question to consider

Who are you praying for and serving alongside, and how is the life of discipleship that you share together deepening and bearing fruit?

Day 18 - The Priesthood of All Believers (verses 1-2)

'Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate... The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur son of Imri built next to them...'

→ Give thanks today for your co-builders: the friends God has put alongside you, to build his Kingdom with. Pray for each one by name, thanking God for them, and praying strength and protection for them.



Day 19 - Those who aren't Ready (verse 5)

📖 *'The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work...'*

→ Frustration is an exhausting distraction when you're trying to build. Have you been getting frustrated because someone else isn't building the way you want them to? Take a few moments today to forgive them, and to let go of your frustration. The wall got built, even without the Tekoan nobles.

Day 20 - In our Workplaces (verse 8)

📖 *'Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that.'*

→ Do you ever slip into thinking the only worthwhile Kingdom-building you do is at church? God longs to see his people build for justice and hope in every area of society. Where can you build Kingdom today?

Day 21 - In our Neighbourhoods (verse 10)

📖 *'Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house.'*

→ As we pray for renewal in The Salvation Army – for a fresh passion for mission and prayer – we need to be the first to become the answer, right on our own doorsteps. Could you take time to visit a neighbour today?

Day 22 - In our Families (verse 12)

📖 *'Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.'*

→ Do you ever find yourself compartmentalising: separating out your life into different boxes – one for work, one for family, one for 'ministry' etc? What would it look like to mix up those boxes? How could you do some Kingdom building with your family this week?

Day 23 - With Regional Leaders (verse 15)

📖 *'The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun son of Kol-Hezeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah.'*

→ Nehemiah's story is great inspiration for our days because it's a reminder that we're all building together, no matter what our role. Today, pray for your divisional leaders and their teams, that God will show them what he is asking them to build, and that he will strengthen them for the work.



Day 24 - With our Officers and Local Officers (verse 22)

📖 *'The repairs next to him were made by the priests from the surrounding region.'*

→ Pray today for the leaders of your corps/church – not just those who are commissioned or ordained, but all those who serve on the leadership team. Pray for wisdom to lead well, and for grace when they feel under pressure. Why not find some way of encouraging them today.

Group Prayer Activity: Bricks in the Wall

Give each person a rectangular piece of paper, and invite them to personalise it, writing their name in the middle, and then filling the rest of it with colours, words and images which say something about who they are. (Old magazines and catalogues can help make this even more creative.)

Once the papers are filled, lay them out on the floor or mount them on the wall. Set them out in several offset lines, so that they look like the overlapping pattern of bricks in a wall.

Invite the group to spend a few minutes in silence, looking at the wall they have built – noticing the diversity of the bricks as well as the similarities and shared values. Then lead them through the following three reflections:

- Start with a time of silence and invite each person to give thanks to God for where he has put them in the wall. We may sometimes wonder if we're in the right place, but God knows what he's doing.
- Still in silence, invite people to take a few minutes to pray for the people represented in the bricks on either side of theirs.
- Finally, invite people to speak out prayers for the corps/church you're a part of, welcoming God's Spirit to unite and empower you for the mission he's calling you to.



Section 5: Days 25-31

Facing Intimidation (Nehemiah 4:1-23)

Introduction

Jesus clearly warns us that life lived as his disciples will mean facing sustained and hurtful opposition, and we should not expect anything less. Thankfully, he is clear that it is also life lived in all its fulness, and therefore the most joyful life imaginable. Yet, any disciples engaged in prayerfully and actively building God's purposes will be opposed by forces of hostility and darkness.

Nehemiah learned to withstand derisive ridicule, angry hostility and serious death threats. Even those who could not normally

agree joined forces together in hateful opposition. Nehemiah recognised the vital importance of both building and properly defending the wall against his enemies. He ensured that his builders were fully equipped and protected.

It is so important that we, like Nehemiah and his builders, utilise those sure defensive strategies that God has given us. Nehemiah's story clearly reminds us of Paul's teaching on the need for us to put on the whole armour of God, 'so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes' (Ephesians 6:11).

A question to consider

How are you growing in the strength that God promises to give you, to clearly discern and withstand the enemy's opposition to what God is seeking to accomplish in and through you?

Day 25 - Facing Angry Intent (verse 1)

📖 *'When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed.'*

→ Throughout his dealings with Sanballat and his colleagues, Nehemiah strikes exactly the right balance. He never underestimates the danger which their opposition poses, but he never lets that opposition derail his building plans. As we begin to explore this theme of opposition, let's ask God for the same Spirit-breathed wisdom which Nehemiah had, that we might be ever alert to opposition but never overcome by it.



Day 26 - Facing Ridicule and Derision (verse 1)

📖 *'He ridiculed the Jews...'*

→ The trouble with ridicule is that there's usually a grain of truth in it. What Nehemiah is trying to do does indeed look ridiculous, yet he has absolute faith in the one who has called him to do it. Is your corps/ church involved in something which looks ridiculously impossible at the moment? Ask God for fresh faith, so that his all-sufficient power will be more real to you than the immensity of what you're trying to achieve.

Day 27 - Facing Stories of our Weakness (verse 2)

📖 *'He said, "What are those feeble Jews doing?"'*

→ By Nehemiah's time, the Jews were nothing more than a tiny people-group ruled by a mighty empire. Their recent history was a litany of failure. Effective opposition will always major on our failures, and The Salvation Army, like any collection of human beings, has many of those. Where is the enemy exploiting our failures at the moment? As you reflect, ask God to show you where past mistakes have blunted our effectiveness. Pray that he will help us to be honest about the past, to put things right where we can, and to have confidence in his work of redeeming grace in us.

Day 28 - Facing Stories of our Defeat (verse 3)

📖 *'Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building – even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!"'*

→ The Israelites are doing their best, but the results aren't impressive. An effective enemy exploits not only our past failures but also our present weaknesses. Continuing your reflections from yesterday: how is the enemy exploiting the things which we, The Salvation Army, aren't doing well at the moment? How is that impacting our message and our mission? Pray that God will teach us to walk in humility and truthfulness, entrusting our weakness to his incomparable strength.



Day 29 - Facing the Threat of Destruction (verse 8)

📖 *'They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.'*

→ Whatever the tactics, the enemy's aim is always to destroy the Church and disrupt its mission. Let's pray this prayer together in agreement today:

Father God, we thank you for raising up The Salvation Army as a part of your Church, and for every good work you have accomplished through us. We confess that we have failed you, and we ask your forgiveness. We admit our weaknesses, and we ask you to heal us. Our righteousness comes from Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and our confidence comes from his resurrection from the dead, and so, in his name and his authority, we resist every tactic of the enemy to undermine us. We choose trust instead of fear; we choose hope instead of despair; we offer ourselves again to your service, for the salvation of the world. Amen.

Day 30 - Facing the Sacrifice (verse 11)

📖 *'Our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."'*

→ Nehemiah can't promise his people that the work of rebuilding the wall will be easy or pain-free. Though we resist the enemy with confidence, we recognise that things of value often come at a cost. Pray today for those who are finding the battle painful and costly, that the Holy Spirit will comfort them, renew them and strengthen their resolve.

Day 31 - Facing Opposition with the Full Armour of God (verses 16, 18)

📖 *'From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armour... and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked.'*

→ When it comes to warfare, the battle is less visible for us than it was for Nehemiah and his people. We may even forget about it altogether. What practical step could you take, over the coming week, to remind yourself to wear God's armour and to carry the sword of his Spirit? You could choose a particular wallpaper for your phone or computer, or wear a special piece of jewellery, for instance, as a reminder to you to stay alert and to refuse any enemy tactics as you engage in God's work of building.



Group Prayer Activity: From Intimidation to Advance

You will need the following:

- Bible for each group member
- large paper, marker pen and flipchart stand (if possible)
- copy of the prayer from Day 29 of this booklet for each person.

1. Personal Reflection

Sitting: With gentle music playing, invite the group to sit and reflect on whether they are experiencing intimidation at the moment: is there guilt about the past, or fear about the present, or a sense of inferiority because of ridicule from others, for instance? There is no pressure to share these things out loud.

Standing: Invite everyone to stand up, choose a favourite Bible verse and read it out loud. The word of God breaks intimidation's hold.

Stepping: Invite each person to put one foot forward, as though about to take a step. As they stand in that position, invite them to pray silently, committing to step forward in the things God is calling them to, in spite of any intimidation the enemy may throw at them.

2. Church Reflection

Sitting: Ask the group to sit again, and to reflect on whether the corps/church has been under intimidation. Where do they see fear, discouragement, apathy or ridicule at work, for instance?

Standing: Invite them to stand and get into pairs, sharing their thoughts with each other and praying together that intimidation will no longer block God's mission.

Stepping: Invite the group each to put one foot forward, as though about to take a step, and to read together the words of Isaiah 61:1-4, as a declaration over themselves and the corps/church.

3. UKI Salvation Army Reflection

Sitting: Invite people to sit again, and to talk together about where they see intimidation at work in The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland. What is the enemy using in his attempts to hamstring our mission? Note the various answers on the flipchart paper.

Standing: Put the flipchart paper where everyone can see it, and invite people to read out Scriptures which come to mind as they look at that list of intimidations.

Stepping: Invite the group each to put a foot forward into the step position, and to read aloud together the prayer from Day 29 of this booklet, as a declaration over The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland.



Section 6: Days 32-38

Overcoming Discouragement (Nehemiah 4:1-23)

Introduction

We are living in an age of growing complexity, and therefore also of deep anxiety, raising many issues of emotional health and wellbeing. Dallas Willard encourages us to see that the Kingdom of God, as depicted in the wonderful words and sentiments of Psalm 23, is a perfectly safe place to be. Yet when our hearts and minds are distracted, it is very difficult to see this reality, and we easily become discouraged.

In the face of growing fear, discouragement, weariness, doubt and despair, Nehemiah has to constantly turn people's

attention back to the 'great and awesome' God of Heaven. He notices those situations which are most vulnerable, isolated, exposed and in need of protection, and develops practical strategies, such as the rallying sound of the trumpet!

As we seek the Kingdom of God together, so our attention to God's purposes involves our own careful assessment of where and how to pray and act in confident, faithful expectation of God's intervention. God is with us always. We must keep looking to God more than to our own weakness or to the enemy's tactics.

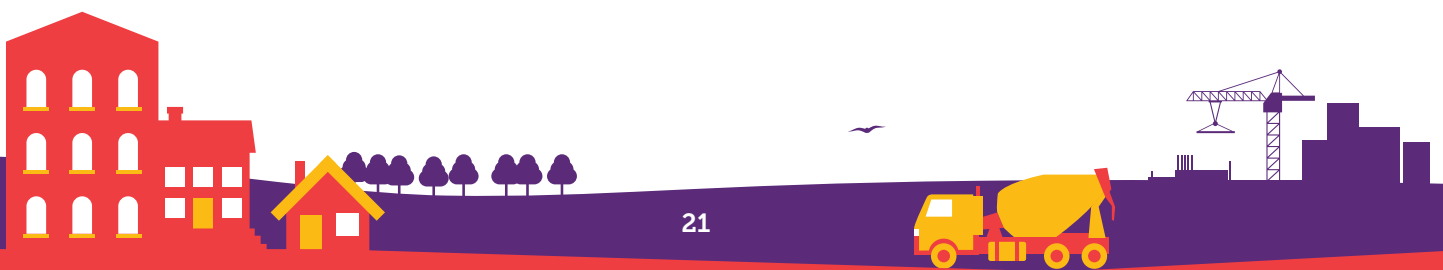
A question to consider

In what ways have the enemy's ravages discouraged you, and what difference does it make if you turn your attention fully back to God?

Day 32 - Overcoming Seeds of Doubt (verse 2)

📖 *"Will they restore their wall?... Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?"*

→ Doubting our own abilities is a human trait which clearly goes back to Nehemiah's time, and way beyond. Yet the relevant question is not 'can we?', but 'can God?' Are you asking yourself a 'can I do this?' type of question? As you pray today, ask yourself instead whether God can do it.



Day 33 - Overcoming Low Morale (verse 4)

📖 *"Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads."*

→ Given that Nehemiah's wall gets completed in 52 days, it's easy to assume it was one long labour of love and joy. But it wasn't. They hit rock bottom, but it didn't stop God from working through them. Pray for those you know who are feeling discouraged and unmotivated at the moment, that they will know God's endless, ever-new creative energy at work through them.

Day 34 - Overcoming Weariness (verse 10)

📖 *'Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the labourers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."*

→ You are two thirds of the way through this prayer journey, and perhaps you can relate all too well to this verse. The best cure for tiredness is rest; so instead of praying something bold and powerful today, have a day off. Even if you've got a day at work, find time later to do something which re-energises your mind and your body.

Day 35 - Overcoming Despair (verse 12)

📖 *'Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."*

→ Dangerous though Nehemiah's enemies may be, they are nowhere near as dangerous to the project as despair. Despair is the total absence of hope, and it can strangle God's Church and stifle his mission at an alarming rate. Could you sow a seed of hope today? Could you do something to encourage someone who's feeling hopeless? It may seem small, but it's one of the most effective battle strategies there is.

Day 36 - Overcoming Fear (verse 14)

📖 *'After I looked things over, I stood up and said... "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."*

→ Nehemiah knows that you don't beat fear by ignoring or minimising the danger. Glossing over problems doesn't make them go away. Instead, he calls the people to rise to meet the challenge head on. Whatever you're afraid of today – whatever we're afraid of, as the UKI Salvation Army – the most effective thing we can do is to remember the Lord, and fight.



Day 37 - Overcoming Vulnerability (verse 13)

📖 *'I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places... with their swords, spears and bows.'*

→ Nehemiah's response to fear isn't just a rabble-rousing speech; he has a strategy to strengthen the places where they really are at risk. Pray for your own corps/church today, asking God to show you where you are most vulnerable. Pray for strength and protection in those exposed areas.

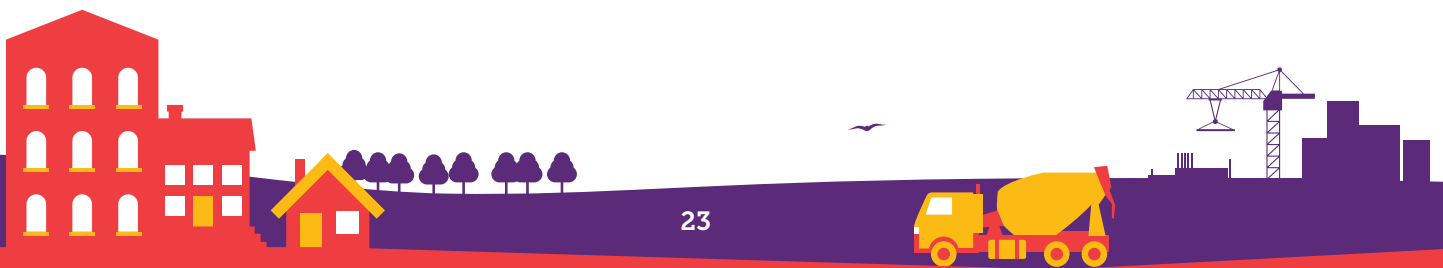
Day 38 - Overcoming Isolation (verses 19-20)

📖 *"The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"*

→ You may feel as though you're building in a lonely corner today, but there are thousands of others who are praying for The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland along with you. Give thanks today that you are part of something much bigger than yourself and your own corps/church.

Group Prayer Activity: The Hope Walk

Doubt, weariness, despair and fear are all things which can lock us away and stop us from seeing the goodness and power of God. One of the best antidotes to being locked away is to get out. One of the best ways to glimpse God again is to feast on the beauty of his creation. So, instead of gathering inside for prayer this week, go out for a walk, preferably somewhere where you can soak up the wonder of nature. Go with no agenda at all, except to revel in the beauty of your surroundings and to enjoy each other's company.



Section 7: Days 39-45

Integrity and Justice (Nehemiah 5:1-19)

Introduction

The Apostle Paul reminds us that God's Kingdom is 'righteousness, peace and joy' (Romans 14:17). It is where what God wants is done, and includes God's justice being upheld by people of integrity. Paul followed the teaching and example of Jesus, as well as the prophets of Israel, one of whom charged us 'to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8).

Nehemiah was a man of integrity, acutely aware of the injustices that hindered his great project and which he needed to tackle and resolve head on. Realities such as

food poverty, debt, human slavery and unpayable loans make us realise that human weakness and failure has a habit of recurring through the passage of time.

As we pray and act for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in Heaven, our discipleship will always involve tackling unjust, inhuman attitudes and practices rooted in our fallen humanity. Nehemiah discovered that these practices can exist as much within the life of the people of God as in the world! We need courage and determination, like Nehemiah, to speak and pray authoritatively into these divisive issues.

A question to consider

What are the issues of injustice that impact the communities that you belong to, and how can you be praying and acting to see God's Kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy take root?

Day 39 - Prayer and Justice (verse 2)

📖 *'Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain."'*

→ Nehemiah's approach to the rebuilding project is holistic and integrated. The building isn't more important than ensuring that the poor are fed. We can become dualistic, thinking we don't need to get involved in practical justice issues because we're busy doing 'spiritual' things like prayer; but God doesn't let us segment his mission like that.



Pray today for The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland, that God will renew our passion to turn our hearts to him in prayer, and our hands to those around us in service.

Day 40 - Debt (verse 4)

📖 *'Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards."*

→ What is happening in your local community to support those who have got into financial difficulty? Pray today for those agencies working to help people deal with debt, for wisdom and creative thinking to know how to help their clients find financial stability. Pray for more credit unions and community savings schemes to spring up, so that people are less at the mercy of pay-day lenders and loan sharks.

Day 41 - Slavery (verse 5)

📖 *"Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."*

→ Pray for The Salvation Army's anti-trafficking work today, that God will use us in the great battle to end slavery once and for all. Pray for Salvation Army volunteers who transport trafficking victims to safety, that they will be able to sow seeds of love and hope in the lives of those they help.

Day 42 - Exploitation (verse 7)

📖 *'I told them, "You are exacting usury (excessive interest) from your own brother (relative)" (Amplified Bible).*

→ The Church has a vital role in calling government and business to account. Pray for The Salvation Army's Public Affairs Unit, as it campaigns against the exploitation of the poorest in society. Pray that its work will influence powerful people to make radical changes in our nation.

Day 43 - Restitution (verse 11)

📖 *"Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them..."*

→ As the people learn to share life together within their new city, Nehemiah knows that greed and corruption could sour this new community before it has even started. Pray for God's Church in this nation, that we will be ruthless in refusing to serve our own desires at the expense of others, and that we will have the courage to unmask corruption wherever we find it.



Day 44 - Personal Integrity (verses 14–15)

📖 *'...neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. But the earlier governors... placed a heavy burden on the people.'*

→ Pray for the leadership of The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland – for our divisional and regional teams, for our Cabinet and for the territorial leaders. Give thanks for their faithfulness, their hard work and their passion for the mission and gospel of Christ. Pray that, as they lead others on the walk of discipleship, they themselves will fall ever more deeply in love with God, and that they will walk with him in absolute integrity.

Day 45 - Generosity and Hospitality (verse 17)

📖 *'Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.'*

→ One of the enemy's favourite tactics is to convince leaders that they can't afford to be generous and hospitable, for fear of being overloaded. Considering the task he is managing, Nehemiah and his team show remarkable big-heartedness. Pray today for leaders who feel squashed by the demands of the job and the expectations of the people around them, that God will release them from that trapped place and set them free to be the confident, compassionate leaders they long to be.

Group Prayer Activity: Be a Blessing

Why not take your group on a prayer visit this week. You could support an event being run by your corps/church leaders, or you could visit an agency which is helping vulnerable people in the community. The aim is to serve and pray, in whatever way brings blessing.



Section 8: Days 46-49

Finishing Well (Nehemiah 6:1-19)

Introduction

It is often said that the Christian life is more of a marathon than a 100-metre sprint! It is a lifelong journey with God, requiring regular, helpful spiritual disciplines and practices which can enable us to grow in faithful, resilient endurance and perseverance. Richard Foster's wonderful book *Celebration of Discipline* is just one extremely helpful account of this.

Nehemiah is a man on a mission who shows that the task of getting the job done involves keeping a clear and undistracted focus and

an undivided and devoted servant heart. He knows who he is, what he is doing and who he is serving, and he is not prepared to allow anything or anyone to steer his 'great project' off course.

It has been said that 'the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!' If we are to be disciples who maintain a faithful and constant journey with Jesus, we, like Nehemiah, must be people who put regular disciplines in our lives, so that we develop habits of faithful, constant love and service which keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).


A question to consider

Can you identify any particular spiritual disciplines or practices which could be more firmly rooted in your daily discipleship, and will deepen your faithful and constant endurance?

Check out this link for some further help:

www.renovare.org/about/ideas/spiritual-disciplines

Day 46 - Discernment (verse 2)

 *'Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me.'*

→ Nehemiah has an uncanny instinct for knowing what his enemies are up to. It's what the New Testament later calls 'the gift of discernment', and it is available to all of us when we need it. If you're facing a difficult



situation and need to know whether it's an enemy tactic or just one of life's unfortunate circumstances, why not ask God for discernment. By his Spirit, you can know whether you're in a battle, or just having a hard day.

Day 47 - Immune to Distraction (verse 3)

📖 *'So I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"'*

→ By this point in the story, the work is very nearly complete. The only hope Nehemiah's enemies have of undoing it is to cause him to get distracted and lose focus. It's worth noting that their tactics change dramatically; instead of seeking to intimidate him, they make a demand – a demand which looks perfectly reasonable on the face of it. Do we get side-tracked by things which look like perfectly reasonable demands, but which end up drawing our focus away from completing the job God has given us?

Day 48 - Obedience above Reputation (verses 6-7)

📖 *'According to these reports you are about to become their king, and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: "There is a king in Judah!"'*

→ Completing God's work often goes hand in hand with being misunderstood, and there are few things which trouble us more than people not understanding us or our reputation being under threat. It's at those moments that we get tempted to take our hands off the tiller, to go and correct the misinformation being spread about us. Let's pray for The Salvation Army today, that no matter how our reputation may be called into question, we will resist the temptation to change course, or to lose focus while we try to defend ourselves. Our hope and our help are in God alone.

Day 49 - Divine Strength (verse 9)

📖 *'They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."'*

→ Not one person in all of the Scriptures has ever been able to complete a God-given task without God-given strength. Even Jesus himself needed divine strength to face the ordeal of the cross. Pray for those you know



who need a fresh burst of divine strength today, to complete what God has asked them to do. Pray that he will strengthen their hands.

Group Prayer Activity: Passion Meditation

Select seven or eight Gospel readings telling the events of the final few days before Jesus' death on the cross. Number each reading so that they can be read in chronological order, and then give a reading to each member of the group. (If your group is small, give each person two passages to read.)

Also, select seven or eight songs which focus on themes similar to the readings you've chosen.

Invite everyone to sit comfortably, and to spend a few minutes in silent reflection. Then ask the person with reading number one to read their passage. When they've done that, play your first song, during which people can meditate on what they have just heard.

After the song, ask the person with reading number two to read their passage, and follow it with the second of your songs. Continue thus until each reading has been read and each song heard.

At the end of the meditation, you may wish to invite people to spend a few minutes sharing thoughts and insights which came to them as they followed the journey of Jesus finishing his work.



Section 9: Days 50-52

Death and Resurrection (various excerpts)

Introduction

At the heart of life as a disciple of Jesus Christ is the experience of dying and rising that mirrors the events of Jesus' own life.

The German Christian martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, killed by the Nazis at the end of World War II, had written, 'When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.' Such a death is not a conclusion, but a window opened on to the whole new resurrection life of God's Kingdom, which we seek to inhabit now.

The later chapters of Nehemiah show him involved in the renewed devotional life of the people of Israel, as they faithfully reconnect with God. It includes the re-introduction of the Festival of Tabernacles and Sabbath keeping. Sabbath keeping will be familiar. It remains a vital rhythm at the heart of God's creation, in which we

rest one day a week from all work, whether paid or unpaid, and allow ourselves time to delight in God and his presence in our lives.

The Festival of Tabernacles began as a celebration of Israel's deliverance and escape from Egypt, and God's provision for them in the desert. It was often symbolised by the building of booths or shelters made from simple materials, which helped believers to remember their ancestors' trust in God whilst in the wilderness.

As we conclude our 52 days of prayer and fasting with Nehemiah, let us remember those central Easter events that define our lives as disciples of Jesus, in which there is a willing death to our old lives, the enjoyment of God's rest and peace, and the joy of discovering new life in all its fulness.

A question to consider

As you reflect back on this prayer journey, are there things which you have had to let go of or to let die; and are there new things which have come to life in you or your corps/church as a result of this season of prayer?



Day 50 - Remembering Rescue (Nehemiah 8:14-17)

📖 *'The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them' (verse 17).*

→ The Festival of Tabernacles (or Booths) was the moment when the Israelites remembered the way God had rescued them and provided for them in the past. As you reflect on the saving work of Jesus on the cross, think back to moments of rescue and provision in your own life; and reflect on the ways in which God has rescued and provided for us, The Salvation Army, over more than 150 years in his service.

Day 51 - Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15-22)

📖 *'When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over' (verse 19).*

→ The Salvation Army is known for its activism, yet that dedication to service can leave us over-stretched and spiritually dry, running on our own strength instead of taking time to be renewed by God's power. Pray that we will rediscover the vital importance of Sabbath rest.

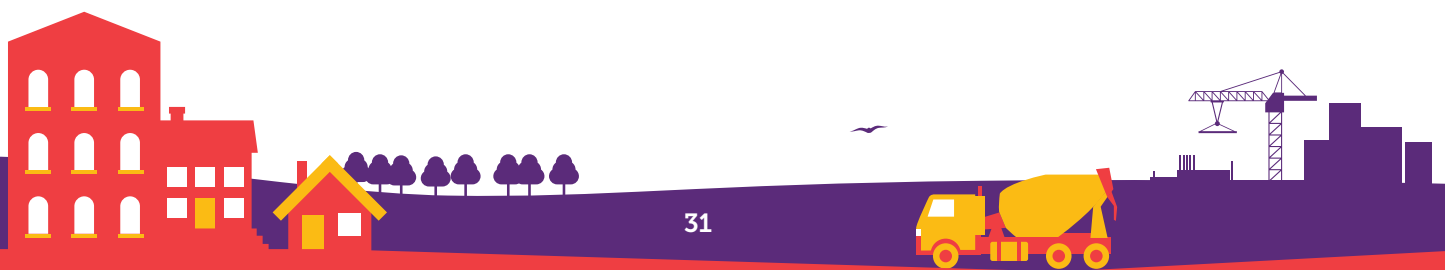
Day 52 - The Joy of the Lord (Nehemiah 8:9-10)

📖 *"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength"* (verse 10).

→ Our journey began in penitence, but it ends in joy. God has heard our prayers, and through them he has been building something new. We may not see it yet, but in due course we will. As you come to the end of this journey, spend some time in worship and praise, honouring God for who he is, and giving thanks for all that he will do in us over the coming years.

Group Prayer Activity: Debrief

Find time to gather with your prayer group, sometime in the next couple of weeks, to talk about your experiences of this prayer journey, to give thanks to God for what he's done, and to look ahead at how you might continue to build together, in prayer and action, over the coming months.





If you would like more information about the SA Prayer Network, please contact us:

Email: saprayernetwork@salvationarmy.org.uk

Phone: 020 7367 4539

Web: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/prayer-resources

The Salvation Army, SA Prayer Network
101 Newington Causeway, London SE1 6BN

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