

# Distractions

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[ 0 : 00 ] I've been able to give a message in the sanctuary, and I hear it's been nine years since you've been here. I remember leading a service once in the old sanctuary, so it's been a few years, so it's good to be back and to worship with you.

It kind of gives you a sense of how long I've been in ministry. I know it was mentioned that my wife and I planted a church in Horicon in 1998.

Before that, I served for five years as a pastor of outreach and discipleship in Beaverdam. Before that, five years, I was a dairy farmer, and before that, six years, I was in heavy construction, commercial, industrial, and some home construction.

So if you add up all those numbers, you must think I'm about 90 years old, and I look pretty good for 90, but I'm not quite as old as what it might seem. But I am getting up there in age.

But I know that one thing, seminary did not teach you construction techniques. And I was so glad that I was in construction for a number of years because as a church planter, we rented a number of buildings, and I finally bought this 1890s building.

[ 1 : 23 ] And so we've been always having to remodel to do something. And all of those construction skills, all of those farming skills, all came in handy to do the work that God has called us to do in Horicon.

And I continue to use those skills today, construction skills, and I'll just share a little bit. My wife has got me working on a project.

I inadvertently made a suggestion, which she jumped on. And I have this pole shed on my, we live out in the country, we've got about three acres of property there.

And I have a pole shed. My wife is an artist. And I offhandedly mentioned I should just put a little she shed inside this pole shed so that she could do her art and maybe teach some classes and maybe have a gallery.

And she jumped on that one. And much to my demise, this has become much more of a project than what I ever anticipated. And, but it's coming along.

[ 2 : 30 ] But my wife being an artist, of course, as I'm doing the construction, she's adding things to this, right? And so it's an ongoing morphing process along the way that I can never quite keep ahead of her as we're doing this construction work.

And her being an artist, and she's frugal, she's always looking on Facebook Marketplace for supplies for this art gallery. And, you know, about Marketplace is that when you see something, you have to get it right away.

Otherwise, it's going to be gone. So, and when I say we have to get it, it means me. And I have to go get it. And so there's one dilemma that keeps coming up is that I have to put this stuff she gets into the she shed that as I'm constructing, it's being filled up with things for her art gallery.

And if you've ever done construction, you know you like a wide open space, you know you like to be able to work, you like to be able to not have any obstructions along the way, nothing to move out of the way, you just like to hammer it out.

That's not the case. In my case, I have always have to pick up stuff, move stuff over here, move stuff out of the shed, move stuff back in the shed, move things around in order to accomplish the task that is before me.

[ 3 : 54 ] And it's really distracting. It is also taking time and energy. And it's just making the process slower, which I gave, she gave me a deadline of September 1st.

And I still have to hang all the drywall yet. And so this has been an ongoing process, and it is many ways of distraction as I'm trying to still do ministry and work for classes and work for the denomination.

So that's my life recently. And I thought about the topic of distractions and things in the way when you're trying to accomplish a task.

And how things that might seem to be a minor distraction, if it's there long enough, if it is always in the way, if it always kind of rears its head up at you, that distraction can become really frustrating. It can become annoying. And it can really just get discouraging sometimes along the way. And not all distractions are equal, right? We all get distractions. It's inevitable in our life.

[ 5 : 10 ] We're going to catch distractions. We're going to get phone calls at inopportune times. We're going to have somebody tell us we need to do something when we have plans to do something else.

And not all distractions are equal, right? Some are minor inconveniences, but some can really kind of change the course of the direction of not only our day, but maybe a season of our life, maybe the rest of our life.

And like I said, most distractions may not be very consequential, but distractions that get us off the path spiritually and have devastating impact.

And not just personally, and I know that we all get those distractions in our spiritual life, temptations that come along, things that kind of come into our life that maybe be discouraging, maybe even be depressing.

And kind of draws us away from where God is calling us in our life. We may have experienced those personally. We may also experience those as a church, as a ministry as well.

[ 6 : 23 ] Distractions that come along the way that kind of pull us off of focus of what God wants us to accomplish for his purposes in our lives as a ministry.

And so this morning, I'm going to be looking at Nehemiah chapter 5 and 6, and I'm not going to read two chapters of the Bible. I'm going to summarize 5 a little bit and kind of give you some insight there, and I'm going to take selected verses off of chapter 6.

But as we get into this, I'd like to give us just a 30,000-foot view of what is going on in the book of Nehemiah. So I'm going to back up a little bit.

In 722 B.C., the Assyrian nation was the world power at the time, and they waged war against the upper tribes of Israel and capitulated them in 722 under Sargon II.

Now, at this time, world powers were kind of rising up and falling, and in 586 B.C., a few years later, Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire comes in, and they lay siege to Jerusalem, and they capitulate the lower tribes of Judah.

[ 7 : 43 ] A few years later, the Medes and the Persians, they become the world power, and they take over the Babylonian Empire, and under Cyrus then, king of the Medes and the Persian Empire, Cyrus gives permission for the Jewish people to leave Babylon and to go back to Jerusalem, to be able to reestablish Jerusalem as a city, as a culture, and as a worship center.

And so these are all happening. And then we're kind of familiar a little bit, maybe, with the returning exiles that go back into Jerusalem to rebuild the city.

The first wave of immigrants come back to, the exiles come back into the city, and the city was destroyed.

It was level. There was so much destruction. There were so few people that returned, and there was so much work to do. And as they began to reestablish the foundation of the temple and to rebuild the temple, they became discouraged.

They looked at it, and it says, even though we have some resources, we are just lacking the people to really do this. And over time, they became very discouraged, and they kind of gave up the work.

[ 9 : 12 ] And along the way, prophets had come in and encouraged the people to do the work. And Zerubbabel was the leader of Jerusalem at the time, and he encouraged the people to work.

But it laid waste, and they weren't continuing the work. And so a few years later, back in Babylon, Nehemiah, he was the cupbearer to the king.

So he had a position of authority. He had a position of privilege. He had a position that had some influence over the king. And God lays on Nehemiah's heart to go back to Jerusalem and to reestablish the city, the wall of Jerusalem.

Now, I want to highlight something here, because when we talk about Nehemiah going to Jerusalem to reestablish the wall around Jerusalem, the wall is symbolic in many ways.

It was an actual wall, but there was more than just a wall that was laid on Nehemiah's heart, because the wall symbolized, in a sense, God's protection for his people.

[10:28] It symbolized God's blessing for his people. And so as Nehemiah was going back, he had this idea that the wall was more important than just a wall being established.

It was significant because God's people were there. God's blessing was there. God was rebuilding his people up again. And that was really on the heart of Nehemiah.

And so I always think of Nehemiah going in, and he's reestablishing, in a sense, a wall, a city. He's reestablishing a society and a sense of worship and devotion to God that was going to be a testimony to the world around them of God's presence and his blessing.

And I think about that in the context of the church today. What is the heart of a church's ministry? As Nehemiah goes in to reestablish a wall, a city, a society, and a temple, a system of worship, what is the heart of the ministry of a church today?

And I want to just whittle it down to three things this morning. I think we need to have a society that is a worshiping community, right, a discipling community, and a witnessing community.

[11:50] And with that in mind, I think those are the three things that really form the support, the backbone of what a church is about. And I think that's what Nehemiah was trying to do as well, to establish those things.

And in these two chapters, there are some things that are going on that Nehemiah faced as a leader that had the capability of breaking the backbone of the work that Nehemiah was trying to accomplish.

And I think we can translate those same principles this morning into what would be the conflict, what would be the distractions in our society, in our churches today, that can kind of break the backbone of a calling that God has on for his church.

And so the first one is this one. And the first one is this, that there's divisions within the community. That's what was happening. Now, in Chapter 5, there was an internal conflict that was happening within the Jewish community.

And let me just give you kind of a background here. There was, you know, as it came back into Jerusalem, there was a vast amount of people with different socioeconomic statuses, right?

[13:17] There was those who had financial resources and those who were really struggling. And as they came into the city to rebuild it, there was a problem that those who did not have a lot of financial resources ended up, in a sense, selling or mortgaging their property to those who had, so that those who had could give money to them and they could continue on to live.

And so they were selling or mortgaging out their properties. It got so bad that sometimes they had to, I don't want to say sell their children, but give their children into servitude, into slavery, in a sense, to those who had so that they could continue to live.

And this Nehemiah, he finds this out, he hears what's going on, this destruction, this division that was going on, people who had their properties confiscated or had to sell their properties, who had to hire out their children, came to Nehemiah and complained about what was going on, and Nehemiah had to address this.

But this was a conflict that was happening within the context of the Jewish community, divisions within. And I think about this in terms of all the way back to the Law of Moses.

The Law of Moses specifically said that this was an immoral act, this was an unethical act for the people to engage in. In Exodus 22, verse 25, it says this.

[14:53] Moses says, If you lend people, if you lend money to any of my people who are in need, do not charge interest as a money lender would.

They were disobeying that. In Deuteronomy 23, 19 through 20, it says, Do not charge interest on the loans you make to fellow Israelites, whether you loan money or food or anything else.

You may charge interest to foreigners, but you may not charge interest to Israelites so that the Lord your God may bless you in everything that you do in the land that you are about to occupy.

And so Nehemiah, he knows these verses from Exodus. He knows these verses from Deuteronomy. He sees what is happening. He sees the division of what's happening.

And he, I think, is reminded of these words in Deuteronomy. He says, Don't do this so that your Lord God may bless you in everything that you do.

[15:52] And so he's seeing this as a way of looking back and going, You know, people, we were engaged in this kind of stuff, and that's what led to our captivity. That is what led to the exile.

That is what led to us falling apart as a society. So why are we doing this again? Why are we falling into the same pattern? Why aren't we not seeking God's blessing?

And so what happens is that there is a repentance that takes place, and things begin to change. But Nehemiah understands a principle. He understands that the way they treat each other, and I love how you focused on love, right?

How they treated each other demonstrated not just in their community a godliness, but to the nations around them. How do they treat their own people?

See, that was a witness to the nations around them, what they were doing to their own people. It would disgrace God's name, and it would withhold God's blessings from them.

[16:59] And Nehemiah understood this. He confronts that, and they make an adjustment. Now, I think sometimes we kind of minimize, or we don't know the significance, or don't realize the significance on how internal turmoil can distract the church from what God's plans are, what God's desire is for a church to be able to do.

And I think one of the things that so often I've seen in churches is that internal turmoil, the struggle that people have within each other, how they bear down on one another, impacts the legacy of the church.

It impacts the witness of the church, because we come embroiled on ourselves, rather than carrying out being a worshiping community, a community, a discipling community, and a witnessing community.

And so Nehemiah addresses that. With godly leadership, they were able to make that change. So now we get into chapter 6, and there's another major distraction that takes place, and that comes from with outside of the community.

And in the opening verses of chapter 6, we read about three gentlemen, Sembalat, Tobiah, and Geshem. They are kind of the governors or the leaders of the tribes or the nations around Jerusalem.

[18:30] Now remember, they're all under the Medes and the Persian government, right? But they still have these local leaders, these local, what we would say, kings, governors.

And they see Jerusalem under Nehemiah being rebuilt again. Now these leaders, they know the history of Israel.

They know that at one time, about 500 years earlier, 400 to 500 years earlier, this was a formidable nation, these Israelites. Under King David, under King Solomon, they were at the peak of their power.

They were the world power. And they know the significance of Jerusalem. They knew the significance of the wall around Jerusalem. And there was fear that if this accomplished and God blessed their people, they didn't know what was going to happen.

And so they wanted to stop Nehemiah's work. And so what did they do? They sent a number of messages to Nehemiah.

[19:35] In the terminology of today, Nehemiah ghosted them. He wasn't going to respond to them whatsoever. And eventually, they send a messenger, and they give Nehemiah this personal message.

And that's in verses 6 and 7. And this is what the message reads. There is a rumor among the surrounding nations. And Geshem tells me it is true, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel. And that is why you are rebuilding the wall. According to his reports, you plan to be their king. He also reports that you have appointed prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim about you, look, there is a king in Judah.

And you can be very sure that this report will get back to the king. So I suggest that you come over and talk with me. So that's the message that Nehemiah gets.

And here's that first distraction. They want to get Nehemiah distracted away from the work that he's trying to accomplish. And the attack comes by way of questioning his integrity and his intentions.

[20:50] If you look at that, it says very much, because none of these things are true, right? But he says, you're planning to build the wall so that you can become a king, and you've got prophets who are going to proclaim you as king.

So what is happening here? There was an attack on his integrity, his intentions. None of this is true. And I know that at times that we can really experience as we're following Jesus, if we're intending to do his will, if we have great motivation to accomplish something for God, whether individually as a church, there can be that resistance that comes.

There can be those innuendos, those questioning our intentions, questioning our motivation, questioning our integrity. And if we're allowing Satan to distract us that way, we're going to try to defend our integrity.

We're going to try to defend ourselves. We're going to try to ward off those kind of accusations. And Symbolic, Geshem, and Tobiah, they know that if they can distract Nehemiah from the work that God has for him, the work of rebuilding that wall will stop.

And I wonder how many times we intend to do something good for God and we hear a voice, whether it's in our own head, that we're not good enough, that we can't do this, that our motives are wrong, or we don't have the character, the integrity to do this.

[ 22 : 36 ] And those voices of doubt can come in our mind or they can be attacks from the outside when people tell us these things. And it can be a distraction for following God's will for us as individuals and as a church.

And so a godly conviction, and I think that's what Nehemiah does, is that he has a godly conviction which leads to an undivided determination. And in verse 9 it says this, they were trying, and Nehemiah is saying this, they are trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work, so I continued the work with even greater determination.

Now, Nehemiah understands where all this is coming from. Because this is a spiritual attack as well as anything else.

And I don't think we can dismiss the power that Satan has to try to distract us from the work that God has called us to. I think we can underestimate the power that Satan has to try to derail us from our spiritual walk and our spiritual journey of him.

Now, I think about the way that Satan worked in the life of Jesus. Jesus had a mission, right? To seek and to save the lost. Jesus came into this world for a purpose and for a mission and for a thing that he needed to do to be obedient to the Father.

[ 24 : 09 ] And in Matthew chapter 4, right, we read about the temptations of Jesus. He's just been baptized into his ministry. Satan takes him into the desert where he tempts him for 40 days.

Right? And so in Matthew 4, verses 1 and 2, it says this, Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For 40 days and 40 nights he fasted and became very hungry.

Isn't that what Satan likes to do? He likes to isolate us, first of all. He likes to prey on our weaknesses or the things that physically that can hold us back.

And then he tempts us. You know, and I was thinking about this. What was the first temptation that Jesus faced? We often think of it as Jesus was hungry, Satan presents him stones, and he says, Turn these stones into bread, right?

That's not really the first temptation. The first temptation says, If you are truly the Son of God. If you are truly, He's casting doubt into the identity.

[ 25 : 24 ] He's casting doubt into the integrity of who Jesus says, who claims to be, and who he really is. And that's what Satan tries to do. To undermine. Now there are intentions for our identity as well.

And so, sometimes when Satan gets to us, it's when we are weak, when we are isolated, and when he brings doubts. In James 1, verse 6, and I know the setting is a little bit different what James is relating here, but he says, Do not waver.

For a person, divided loyalty, is as unsettled as a wave of the sea, and is blown and tossed by the wind. So, if you've ever been out on a boat, and if you've been in a storm, and you're being tossed back and forth in the wind, you are not making any headway.

You're adrift. And that's what Satan wants to do for us personally. That's what he wants to do, I think, as a church as well. If he can embroil us in distractions, we are just adrift.

We lose our sense of purpose. We lose our sense of direction. We lose our sense of calling. And that is what Satan desires. But we can resist against that.

[ 26 : 39 ] Jesus, if you think about how many times Jesus was tempted or was confronted, and he says, you know, the Pharisees said to Jesus, you know what?

You're in league with the devil. Again, what is that? That is an attack on his integrity, on his identity, and his intentions. And how did Jesus respond to that?

In 1 Peter 2, verse 23, Peter gives a little insight into Jesus' response. He says, he did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered.

He left his case in God's hand who always judges fairly. And in Matthew 5, verse 11, it says, God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers.

What is that list of things that is all distractions from the calling that God can place in our life as individuals, as in a church? And I always find sometimes what's interesting is what not said in Scripture is what is said.

[ 27 : 53 ] And in that Matthew 5, 11, where it says, God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of things against you because you are my followers, what does he not say?

He says, you know what? Don't retaliate. Take out the nature of Christ who did not retaliate when he suffered injustices. So in our desire and our motives to follow God in the life of our church when we face accusations when people try to or attempt to dissuade us, distract us, or derail us from our walk with Jesus or our calling as a church, don't retaliate.

Trust God. So discernment, I think, discernment really strengthens our commitment and our courage. In verse 11 through 13, it says this. Now there was a prophet, a couple of prophets actually, that was trying to work with symbolic Tobiah and Geshem to distract Nehemiah.

And they said to Nehemiah, it says, you know, they're going to come and get you. They're going to try to kill you. So why don't you leave your position and go into the temple and find protection there because they're not going to come into the temple to get you.

Right? Another distraction. And the verses 11 through 13, we see Nehemiah's reaction there. He says, but I, speaking of Nehemiah, replied, should someone in my position run from danger?

[ 29 : 27 ] Should someone in my position enter the temple to save his life? No, I won't do it. I realize that God had not spoken to him, that prophet, but that he had uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Zambalad had hired him and they were hoping to intimidate me and catch this and make me sin.

The sin of omission in a sense, right? Of not carrying on the work that God has for them and then they would be able to accuse and discredit me. So discernment in a sense, what was the motives going on?

What was God calling him to do? What did God lay on his heart? What was the plan and the process that Nehemiah had to do to reestablish the people of Israel as a society, as a worshipping community?

And then they were trying to distract him. Now maybe you don't face this kind of reality. I know some people in my congregation, we have kind of an eclectic group of people.

A lot of people had come out of, we do a lot of recovery ministry at our church, so a lot of people had come out of drug and alcohol abuse. And when they make that change, when they leave the addiction behind and they come to Jesus and they make some progress forward, it is amazing how many people from their past life want to draw them back into that addiction and that compulsive behaviors, the destruction.

[ 31 : 04 ] And in a sense, we say, misery loves company, right? And so when they leave the merry-go-round, people want to drive them back into that merry-go-round, that circle that keeps going around, and they get discouraged.

They get discouraged. Now, I'm not saying that these are bad people that are discouraging these new believers and these people coming out of addictions, but I'm saying Satan can use people to distract them from their journey of faith.

And they can distract the church from the work that God has called them to. And so Nehemiah gives us another step here that I think is really important.

And it was in a kind of a prayer that Nehemiah gave. And it was a prayer to remember instead of revenge. In verse 14, Nehemiah says this, Remember, O God, all of the evil things that Tobiah and Zimbalat have done.

And remember, no, Haida, no, Adiah, excuse me, and the prophet and all the prophets like her who have tried to intimidate me. He says, Lord, you remember them.

[ 32 : 21 ] Now, why does he say that? And I might be reading into this, but I think that there is something here. We ever hear the phrase let go and let God?

Yeah, we probably have all heard that. We probably maybe have said that at times. I think Nehemiah is embodying that. He says, Lord, you remember all of the evil that Tobiah and Zimbalat

and Geshem are doing.

Lord, you remember the prophets that have spoken against me because I'm going to let that go. I'm going to forget that. I'm going to let you take care of that so it don't distract me from the work that you've called me to do.

That it no longer just spins in my head and takes up space and distracts me from the work that you do or that you want me to do or the faith that you want me to have that you will accomplish through me what you called me to do.

Nehemiah says, God, you remember that so I can forget it. You know, and in some ways I've had to practice this principle in our own ministry.

[ 33 : 32 ] As I said before, you know, we do a lot of recovery ministry and the very first building that we ever rented, it was a tavern downtown that had closed down and we had started doing worship services.

Now, it had been remodeled, but the rumor around our small community of 3,000 people was that right after the church service, we would serve beer and slide it down the bar, right?

And so I was like, really, people, you're thinking that's what we're doing as a church, right? Let it go. Let it go. Our integrity, what we're doing as a ministry will speak for itself.

A couple years later, we had a music group come in from Jesus People USA down in the Chicagoland area. They were a music group that did a couple concerts for us.

They kind of embodied the hippie lifestyle way back in the 70s, never kind of got out of that. And so they had the long hair, the dreads, what I would say, a peculiar type of clothing.

[ 34 : 39 ] They had hemp necklaces, the stuff my wife wears, boho kind of stuff. And the reality is that we had a rumor around town that these guys, because they wore hemp necklaces, they were smoking dope while they were giving the concerts at our church.

church. And I go, really, people? Let it go, because God, what we're doing here will honor God. And then I remember one more particular thing, out of many, but there was another, there was somebody who was briefly associated with a church that had a negative experience with us.

and he worked in a factory, John Deere is the biggest factory in our community. And he would speak out to somebody else who was a part of our church working across the assembly line.

And he would just cut us down and cut us down and say that we weren't a good ministry, that we are a cult and that we are this and that. And he would say it loud enough, not just for the person who was part of our church, but for all of the other people on the line around.

And that was going around church, that we were, around the community, that we were a cult. And it's like, really people? I said, let it go.

[ 36 : 03 ] Because God will take care of it if we continue to do with integrity what God has called us to do. And so, you know, I was really pleased to see this morning too that you do a school drive for school supplies, right?

We just did that yesterday in our community. And we had about 60 kids that came through that needed school supplies. And out of those 60 kids, and it was about 30 families, just under 30 families, one of the mothers came up to me and she says, you know what, I've been recently unemployed, and I don't know how I was going to buy the school supplies for my kids, so thank you for being faithful and providing this kind of stuff for us.

And that's the kind of things that build a reputation in a community of serving with integrity and consistency and doing the work that God calls us to do and doing it with mercy and love and respect of others.

And so it leads me kind of to the last point here is that it leads to a God honoring testimony. It says in verse 15 and 16, it says, so on October 2nd, the wall was finished, just 52 days after we had begun.

And when our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done, with the help of our God.

[ 37 : 40 ] Now, if you have your Bibles or you have notes or you want to highlight this later, I love that last phrase. See, it wasn't about Nehemiah's great leadership.

I mean, though he was a great leader, but it was a work of God that led to this restoration that was taking place. What was going on? The people who opposed them, the surrounding nations, realized that it wasn't just Nehemiah, wasn't just all the builders, but it was a work of God's blessing.

And I think that that is a powerful testimony for a church. I think that is a powerful testimony for us individually as well. I want to wrap this up this morning just before communion.

Is that in the rebuilding of this city of Jerusalem, the wall, the temple, and their society, it never really met their expectations.

The temple, even though they praised it that the new temple was being built, it didn't have the grandeur, the glory of the old temple of Solomon. The wall was completed, yes.

[ 38 : 58 ] Society still had its issues, its problems. The city took years to rebuild, and it never really came to the full strength and the power that people anticipated.

And along the way, there was not only Nehemiah, the governor, kind of the political leader, but there was Ezra. Nehemiah and Ezra, Ezra and Nehemiah are twin books.

They were actually one book together, but Ezra was a priest. And along the way, there was a couple of prophets, Haggai and Zephaniah, that all worked together to spur the people on to this rebuilding, renewing of God's people and God's place in God's ministry.

And I think about that. There was a prophet, there was a priest, and there was a king, in a sense, of Nehemiah. And isn't that how we see Jesus in our lives, right, too, as a prophet, a priest, and a king, doing the work of renewing and rebuilding of his people, of his church.

So it becomes a witness to the world. And even though those early people in the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem never quite saw the glory of what they anticipated, we see the full glory of Jesus as prophet, priest, and king that is to come.

[ 40 : 30 ] Where there will be a full rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, God's people, in a sense, that there will be this magnificent restoration that takes place.

And I think it's in the lives of us as individuals, as a society, and it all gives glory to Christ. And so in this book of Ezra and Nehemiah, there is all these foreshadowing events of Jesus to come that are not quite fulfilled in the earthly sense, but will be fulfilled in Jesus in the heavenly sense.

And that's what we get to hold on to this morning as we take communion and we receive the promises of Jesus that he will be with us.

He will never leave us. He will never forsake us. And we hold on to that until the full realization when Jesus returns. And let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you.

in this vast book of Nehemiah, and we just looked at such a small section of it, that you can encourage us along the way.

[ 41 : 45 ] That when there are distractions and when there are things that want to derail us, obstacles along the way of our personal journey and faith with you, but also, Lord, as a church, as a ministry, may we embody some of the things that Nehemiah presented to us today.

Because that story of Nehemiah was a foreshadow of what is to come. We can engage in the ministry of the church. We can engage in our faith on a personal level with the hope and the anticipation and the fulfillment of Jesus Christ.

Give us courage along the way. give us discernment. Help us, Lord, not to take it in a sense personally in which where we face attacks, where we face those distractions, so that we can give the honor and glory, and so that we become a worshiping community that gives glory to God.

That we disciple one another and build each other up in the faith, and ultimately that it becomes a witnessing community and the community around us and the people that we encounter and the people that we engage with, they can see God working in us and through us, and so they can see that God is blessed.

Lord, we give this all to you this morning, and as we come to the table in both confession and assurance, Lord, we thank you that you are present.

[ 43 : 24 ] in Jesus' name we pray, amen. Amen.