

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY THIRTEEN

Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

The people of Jerusalem built a verbal monument that said, “This is our promise to You, O God! This is our constitution. We do not care if anyone else in the world lives by this. We will live by it. It will be our guide. We will be distinct.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

TIME. It’s one of life’s great equalizers. Every single person on earth shares the same twenty-four-hour days—regardless of age, gender, race, or class. So each morning, every person must answer the same question . . .

What will I do with the time God has given me today?

Another way to ask this question is, *Does the way I spend my time reflect what I value most?* It’s easy to identify our top priorities. Our walk with God and our relationships with family members typically sit at the top of most people’s priority lists.

Yet, sadly, some people’s calendars don’t reflect their values. Instead of filling their days by spending time with God and loved ones, they give their precious free time away to less important things. How easy it is to get sidetracked!

Thankfully, Scripture helps us set our priorities straight and put the first things first. The book of Nehemiah demonstrates how we can identify the most important priorities and align our lives around them.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prayer is an essential spiritual discipline for a follower of Jesus. It is a practical way to strengthen your relationship with Him. Offer this prayer before you open your Bible today:

Father, I want to give You the time You deserve so I can grow closer to You. As I study Your Word, realign my heart to Yours and reorder my priorities. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Revival was breaking out in Jerusalem.

When Nehemiah completed the walls, the city gained a renewed sense of identity. It was *God's* city. The city's residents, then, needed to rediscover their identity as *God's* people. Ezra and the other religious leaders sparked this spiritual resurgence by teaching the people the law of Moses. For many, this was their first substantial exposure to the Word of God.

This encounter with Scripture gripped the hearts of the people of Jerusalem, so they committed themselves to obeying God. They said, "In view of all this, we are making a solemn promise and putting it in writing" (*Nehemiah 9:38*). *Nehemiah 10* records the content of this promise.



Observation: Promised Priorities

Nehemiah 10:1–27 lists the names of all the priests, Levites, and other leaders of Jerusalem who swore to uphold the promises of this new constitution. Take a moment to read this list and imagine writing your own name on the list of the faithful people of God.



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Then, in *Nehemiah 10:28*, the rest of the city gathered as a community to commit themselves to God. According to *10:29*, what essential promise did the people of Jerusalem make to God?

In the spaces below, summarize the specific ways the people of Jerusalem promised to commit themselves to God in *10:30–39*. At this point in the Bible-study process, don't get too bogged down in the details. You'll be able to explore the far corners of these verses in the interpretation phase.¹

Nehemiah 10:30

Nehemiah 10:31



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

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Nehemiah 10:32–33

Nehemiah 10:34–39

The whole story of Nehemiah provides a powerful testimony to the importance of preceding any decision with careful thought and prayer and then following through with decisive and definite actions. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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S13
4

Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10



Interpretation: Holy Priorities

The promise of this ancient document was a promise to be holy. After all, in the law, God specifically said, “You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (*Leviticus 19:2*). What does it mean for God to be holy? What does it mean for the people of God to be holy? Look up the term *holy* in *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* and summarize what you learn.

Reread the document of promise in *Nehemiah 10:30–39*. In what practical ways did the people of Israel commit themselves to holiness in the following spheres of life? For some help interpreting the finer details of the passage, look at *Constable’s Notes*, available for free at netbible.org.

- Privately in the home
- Publicly in society
- Communally in the place of worship



Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader sets right priorities by . . . because*

When Nehemiah made a promise to God, he was terribly serious. Think about that for a minute. I'm concerned that too many Christians today fail to take God seriously.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Kingdom Priorities

The call to follow Jesus is a call to declare Him as Lord—to place Him above everything else. In His earthly ministry, Jesus addressed this topic from many angles, yet in one instance He specifically addressed the topic of rightly ordered priorities.

According to [Matthew 6:33](#), what did Jesus tell His disciples to seek first—above all else? What will result for those who heed Jesus' command? (To answer these questions, review [6:31–32](#) for context.)



Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

Food, water, and clothing certainly are important. After all, if you go too long without any one of these, you'll face serious physical danger. Yet Jesus cares about His followers' spiritual well-being too. What do these words from Jesus reveal about the priorities of the kingdom of heaven? In what ways did the people of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day embrace these priorities?

The apostle Paul later reaffirmed Jesus' words through his own testimony. Paul was "a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one!" (*Philippians 3:5*). He even "obeyed the law without fault" (*3:6*). Anyone would be eager to boast about such an impressive resume. But not Paul. He had his priorities straight.

According to *Philippians 3:7*, how did Paul view his personal accolades in light of Christ's work in his life? According to *3:8*, how did this reality reshape the way he viewed his priorities?

The kingdoms of the world invite us to pursue poor priorities like prominence, power, pleasure, and prosperity. But these upside-down values will upend a life. For citizens of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus must be the top priority. Set Him at the top, and everything else will fall into place. In the application section, we will consider how.



Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

Application: Proper Priorities

We live in an age of conformity—one where the world pressures us into embracing backward priorities—values that will ultimately harm us. Pastor Chuck shows how we can stand strong against the cultural current and move toward godly priorities.

- Serious thought and planning must precede any significant change.
- Written plans confirm right priorities, making them less likely to be forgotten.
- Loss of distinction and conformity to the world go hand-in-hand, while priorities reinforce a distinct mission.

What are your top priorities in your current season of life? How do your priorities as a disciple of Jesus Christ differ from those of your current cultural context?

How does the way you spend your time reflect these priorities?



Putting First Things First

Nehemiah 10

What practical steps can you take to order your life in a way that embraces God's holiness and sets you apart from the world? Commit yourself to one action item. Then write it down on a piece of paper and place the note where you will see it regularly.

Jesus calls His followers to seek Him above everything else. If you set your priorities straight and put first things first, you will naturally sail against the cultural current. And others may not like that. Resist the pull of the siren's song of conformity and keep your eyes on Jesus. His way may be different from the ways of the world . . .

But His way is far better.



A FINAL PRAYER

As you close your time in God's Word today, write your own prayer of commitment to God.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

