

STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

*The*  
NEHEMIAH  
CODE



IT'S NEVER TOO LATE  
*for a* NEW BEGINNING

*O. S. Hawkins*

*The*  
NEHEMIAH  
C O D E

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*for a* NEW BEGINNING

STUDY GUIDE | SIX SESSIONS

*O. S. Hawkins*



THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

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*The Nehemiah Code Study Guide*

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## INTRODUCTION

*R*ebuilding. Who among us is not in need of an occasional new beginning as we journey through different periods of life? Some of us deal with relationships that need to be rebuilt. Some are in the process of rebuilding businesses. Most coaches are continually engaged in the rebuilding process. Other people are seeking to rebuild their integrity after a misstep. Some are rebuilding their self-confidence. The good news is . . . *it's never too late for a new beginning.*

Nehemiah lived 2,500 years ago, and he “wrote the book” on rebuilding. He was a civil servant—an ordinary guy—who applied some universal principles that enabled him to rebuild a broken city and, in the process, rebuild a lot of broken hopes. His story unfolds many years after the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom, called “Israel,” was ruled by a series of wicked kings until 722 BC, when the Assyrian army swept in and carried the people into a captivity from which they never returned. The Southern Kingdom, called “Judah,” lasted until 586 BC, when it was finally devastated and destroyed by the Babylonians.

## *The Nehemiah Code*

The Babylonians broke down the walls of Jerusalem, burned its gates, demolished its temple, and led its people away as captives. But after several years, the Persians broke the Babylonian supremacy and allowed some of the Jews to return home. These Jews began to rebuild their temple and city . . . but the sheer magnitude of the task caused them to give up. Years passed. The city, still broken and burned, was in dire need of rebuilding.

In stepped Nehemiah, a Jew still in exile, with a cushy civil service job complete with benefits and retirement. But Jerusalem burned in his heart. So he left Babylon to return to Jerusalem, armed with a focused objective to rally the people, rebuild their hope, and, ultimately, rebuild their holy city. He had a plan for rebuilding, and in the pages of his book, he left us some secrets to his success—a sort of hidden “code,” if you will—that can become a fountain of hope and strength to anyone and everyone who will apply his formula.

The journey you are about to make will enable you to apply these marvelous truths so you can rebuild any broken walls in your life and reinforce your own legacy. As you go through this study, I think you will find that Nehemiah’s message to you across the centuries is plain and powerful: *It is never too late for a new beginning!*

*O. S. Hawkins*

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

*The Nehemiah Code Video Study* is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. Each session begins with a welcome section, several questions to get you thinking about the topic, and a reading from the book of Nehemiah. You will then watch a video with O.S. Hawkins and engage in some small-group discussion. You will close each session with a time of personal reflection and prayer as a group.

Each person in the group should have his or her own copy of this study guide. You are also encouraged to have a copy of *The Nehemiah Code* book, as reading the book alongside the curriculum will provide you with deeper insights and make the journey more meaningful. (See the “For Next Week” section at the end of each between-studies section for the chapters in the book that correspond to material you and your group are discussing.)

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of the teaching for the week,

ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only go through the motions, or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you're looking for during this study.

Second, remember the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a safe place. This means being honest about your thoughts and feelings and listening carefully to everyone else's opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, resist the temptation to fix a problem someone might be having or to correct his or her theology, as that's not the purpose of your small-group time. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, reflect on the material you've covered by engaging in any or all of the between-sessions activities. For each session, you may wish to complete the personal study all in one sitting or spread it out over a few days (for example, working on it a half-hour a day on different days that week). Note that if you are unable to finish (or even start!) your between-sessions personal study, you should still attend the group study video session. You are still wanted and welcome at the group even if you don't have your "homework" done.

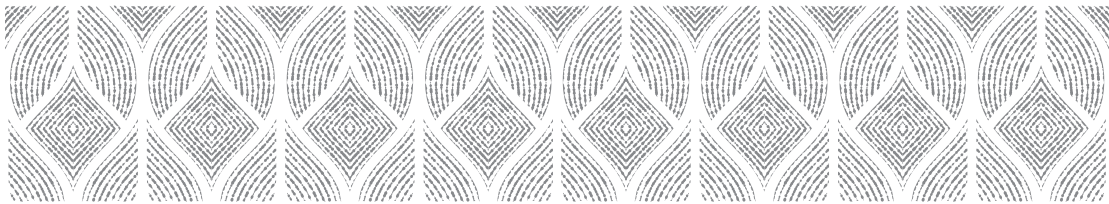
## *How to Use This Guide*

Keep in mind the videos, discussion questions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination so you are not only open to what God wants you to hear but also how to apply it to your life. As you go through this study, be watching for what God is saying to you as learn from Nehemiah's example that *it is never too late for a new beginning*.

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**Note:** If you are a group leader, there are additional resources provided in the back of this guide to help you lead your group members through the study.

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SESSION

*One*

## GET STARTED RIGHT

*Nehemiah 1:1–11*



*When we are in the process of rebuilding (no matter what it is we are seeking to rebuild), there are not just things that need to be done, but things that need to be undone. There are habits that need to be broken and hearts that need to be healed. Anyone who has ever sought to rebuild a marriage, a business, a dream, or a church knows this to be true. It often is easier to walk away and start over than it is to invest the effort and energy needed for rebuilding. But if we are ever going to be successful in rebuilding, it is essential that we get started right.*

O.S. HAWKINS

## WELCOME

---

In 1690, the explorer Alonso De León led an expedition to establish a mission in what was then called Spanish Texas.<sup>1</sup> Several years before, the Spanish authorities had learned the French, their rivals in the region, had established a colony in their territory. De León was dispatched to locate this colony, which he did in 1689.<sup>2</sup> A year later, he returned to build the mission of San Francisco de la Espada. The structure would serve not only as a base of operations for the Spanish but also as a warning to the French not to plant any more colonies in the region.

The builders of the mission knew they had to clear the ground, remove the debris, and build a solid foundation if they wanted the walls of the structure to stand. In other words, they had to *get started right* if they wanted their building project to be a success. But beyond the physical construction, the workers knew they also had to *get started right* with the local people in the region. For the priests at Espada, this meant extending an invitation to the Hasinai, a tribe who had already expressed interest in Christianity, to join in their efforts.<sup>3</sup> In time, the mission would become a place where the local people were not only taught about Christ but also vocational skills such as farming, blacksmithing, weaving, masonry, and carpentry.

In our own rebuilding efforts, we can never underestimate the importance of *getting started right* by having a firm

## *Get Started Right*

foundation in God's Word. And as we look to the Bible for guidance, we find no greater example of a rebuilders than Nehemiah. Today, we will look at part of his story to see what we can learn about *getting started right* in rebuilding our lives.

## SHARE

---

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to kick things off, discuss one of the following questions:

- Why is it important for a house to have a strong foundation? What problems will a homeowner have to face if a strong foundation is not in place?

—or—

- What happens when people strike out on a project without first having a good plan in place? When have you been guilty of rushing ahead without a plan?

## READ

---

Invite someone to read aloud the following passage. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then discuss the questions that follow.

*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.*

*It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, that Hanani one of*

## *The Nehemiah Code*

*my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."*

*So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*

*And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive*

*Get Started Right*

*to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”*

*For I was the king’s cupbearer (Nehemiah 1:1–11).*

1 What is one key insight that stands out to you from this passage?

2 What steps did Nehemiah take to *get started right* when faced with a crisis?

## WATCH

---

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

### *Notes*

Rebuilding is a subject that touches everyone. We all have something that we are “rebuilding” in our lives.

In 586 BC, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar broke down the walls of Jerusalem, burned its gates, and led its people into captivity.

Under the Persians, the Jewish exiles were allowed to return in several waves back to their homeland. But by Nehemiah’s day, they still had not rebuilt the city or its walls.

**Step 1** in getting started right is to *make an honest evaluation of the situation*. Nehemiah demonstrated this by . . .

## *Get Started Right*

**Step 2** in getting started right is to *identify with the need*. Nehemiah demonstrated this by . . .

**Step 3** in getting started right is to *take personal responsibility*.

- Nehemiah took *personal responsibility* for his people's sin by . . .
  
- Nehemiah walked in the *fear of God* by . . .

**Step 4** in getting started right is to *move out of your comfort zone*. Nehemiah demonstrated this by . . .

## DISCUSS

---

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

- 1 Who are some of the people you know who have needed to go through a time of rebuilding? What are some times you had to go through your own rebuilding process?
- 2 In what ways did Nehemiah make an honest evaluation of the situation? Why is this such an important first step in any rebuilding effort?
- 3 How do we know that Nehemiah identified with the need of his people? Why is this step especially important in rebuilding any broken relationships in our lives?
- 4 Why did Nehemiah feel the need to take personal responsibility for his people's sin? What would have happened if he blamed others for the state of affairs in Jerusalem?

*Get Started Right*

- 5 Nehemiah was informed that the remnant in Jerusalem had become a “reproach” or a “disgrace” to God. Why did this serve as a strong motivation for him to act?
  
- 6 How do we know that Nehemiah moved out of his comfort zone? When are some times that God has called you to take a risk for Him? What was the result?

## RESPOND

---

Briefly review the outline for the video teaching and any notes you took. In the space below, write down the most significant point you took away from this session.

## PRAY

---

End the gathering by partnering with one or two people from your group and praying for each another. Pray especially that God would help you to get started right in your own rebuilding efforts by making an honest evaluation of your situation, identifying with the need, taking personal responsibility, and moving out of your comfort zones. Write down any specific requests in the space below so you can remember to continue praying throughout the week.

## SESSION ONE

# BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY



*R*ebuilders get started right . . . and when they do, they discover it is never too late for a new beginning. This week, start your rebuilding process right by spending some time with God each day. Reflect on the material you covered during your group time by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities. Be sure to read the reflection questions after each activity and make a few notes in your guide about the experience. At the start of the next session you will have a few minutes to share any insights you learned . . . but remember, the primary goal of these questions is for your own spiritual growth and private reflection.

## STARTING BLOCKS

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When Nehemiah heard the report that the walls of Jerusalem were broken and the gates were burned, it caused him great sadness. So much sadness, in fact, that when the king asked what was troubling him, Nehemiah requested permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. The king granted Nehemiah's request, and he made preparations for the journey home.

In many ways, the news about Jerusalem served as a “starting block” that got Nehemiah motivated for action. In running events, sprinters use starting blocks to hold their feet in place at the beginning of the race. The blocks give the runner an advantage, as he or she can push off them to gain momentum when the starting gun sounds. With this in mind, take a few minutes to reflect on the “starting blocks” in your own life as you respond to the following questions.

- 1 Have you ever watched a friend, family member, colleague, or teammate struggle to get out of a starting block in a particular situation? What was the situation? Why do you think it was so hard for them to get started?
- 2 What encouragement or advice did you give to that person in the moment? Or what kind of advice would you have given if he or she had asked you?
- 3 Think back to when you were a child. What were some of the hardest starting blocks in your childhood (*learning to tie your shoes, riding your bike, starting school*)?

*Get Started Right*

- 4 What made a difference for you in those starting blocks? How did the support of others and the examples you witnessed help to guide you?
- 5 Now consider the starting blocks in your adult life. Where have you had the most trouble getting started on something big in your life (*a project, a new business, getting more involved in your community*)?
- 6 Why do you think it is so hard to get started? What are some thoughts or excuses that have kept you from getting out of the starting blocks?
- 7 How did it feel to actually get started? What was your experience like?

- 8 Nehemiah responded to his desire to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem with passion, strength, courage, leadership, confidence, and integrity. What have your *starting blocks* required of you? List a few of the words and write a brief sentence about how you had to exercise those words as you got started on something big or new.

Read 2 Peter 1:2–4. Pay attention to verse 3, where Peter states that God has given you everything you need to lead a godly life—including the momentum you need to get out of the starting blocks. Close your time in prayer by thanking God for past opportunities you’ve been given to start something new, something big, or something hard—and ask God for whatever you need in your current season to get out of the starting blocks.

## THE BEST APPROACH

---

Nehemiah wasn’t interested in just getting *started* with rebuilding the walls of ancient Jerusalem. He wanted to get started *right*—and to do this, he had to consider the best approach to tackle the situation. For Nehemiah, this involved making an honest evaluation of the problem, identifying with the need of his people, taking personal responsibility for his part, and moving out of his comfort zones. Nehemiah thus gives us a *thoughtful approach* and a *helpful framework* for starting something new in our lives. Take a few moments to likewise reflect on your own approach to rebuilding as you respond to the following questions.

1 Consider an area or broken piece of your life where you need a small or large amount of rebuilding (*losing weight, rebuilding a relationship, switching gears with a ministry opportunity*). What has been your approach so far to rebuilding those broken places?

2 When it comes to addressing problems, many of us adopt one of three approaches:

- **Superficial optimism:** We put a positive spin on our difficult situations, often pretending the problem does not exist.
- **Busy optimism:** We attack the problem by diving into work and busyness and develop all things “new” as a distraction from the problem—new policies, new plans, new people, and the like.
- **Honest optimism:** We seek to address the issue with wisdom, understanding, strength, and patience, and actually work to correct the issue.

Which of these approaches do you typically take when faced with a problem? What has been the result of responding in that manner?

- 3 Why do you think you've responded this way? What, if anything, is keeping you from responding as the honest optimist?
- 4 Now consider some of the roadblocks that are currently getting in the way of your rebuilding process. What are the top three to five things that are keeping you from rebuilding (*problems, mindsets, people, processes*)?
- 5 Now use Nehemiah's approach to assess your own rebuilding process. Begin with an honest evaluation. What facts do you need to face right now about the situation that needs rebuilding in your life?
- 6 Nehemiah identified with the needs of his people. He wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed for days. He considered the pain and the distress of his people and allowed himself to feel their pain. How do you feel about this area of your life that needs rebuilding? What is hard or painful about the situation?

### *Get Started Right*

How does this situation affect the people around you? What have you noticed about their responses to this scenario?

What is hopeful about this situation?

7 How are you taking personal responsibility for this situation? Notice the moments where you may have placed blame on others by using the term “they.” In what ways can you start taking personal and collective responsibility by saying, “I” and “we”?

8 Is there a comfort zone (or two) that you need to move out of in order to focus on the rebuilding process? If so, list those below, and then write down one or two steps you will take to move out of them as you begin rebuilding.

My comfort zones:

Steps I will take to move out of these comfort zones:

Read John 1:1–14. Jesus left the “comfort zone” of heaven to identify with our plight and provide a way to rebuild our broken relationship with God. He became one of us and made His dwelling among us—and because of this, you can be sure that He understands what you are facing in this life. Close your time in prayer by thanking God for Jesus—the ultimate rebuild—rebuilder—and for the thoughtful approach to rebuilding our lives that we see in the life of Nehemiah. Ask God to give you the wisdom and insight to rebuild in this way as well.

## SERVE THE KING

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Nehemiah briefly mentions his status by saying, “I was the king’s cupbearer” (Nehemiah 1:11). In ancient Persia, this meant he was the most trusted confidant of the king of the most powerful nation on earth. He was constantly by the king’s side. There was no greater role for Nehemiah, the exiled Israelite, to hold in ancient Persia. And yet he left this prized role to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He left the service of one king for the service of *the* King.

From the outside looking in, Nehemiah’s decision likely did not make sense to the people around him. But Nehemiah knew, with strength and conviction, that rebuilding the wall was what he needed to do. Consider the times when this has been true in your own life as you reflect on the following questions.

*Get Started Right*

- 1 How can you identify with Nehemiah's decision to leave the kingdom of Persia behind and begin rebuilding the wall in Jerusalem? Has there ever been a time when you sensed God asking you to leave something behind to pursue a new task or vision?
- 2 If so, what was that like for you? What did the people around you think or say about your decision?
- 3 Consider the area of life you are currently rebuilding. What brought you to the point of deciding to rebuild this particular area, situation, or relationship?
- 4 Have there been moments when rebuilding didn't seem to "make sense"? If so, what keeps you moving forward, or what keeps you wanting to move forward, in this area?
- 5 How does your relationship with God motivate or influence the rebuilding process in your life?

*The Nehemiah Code*

- 6 How does the idea of considering God's presence in your everyday life change the way you view the areas of your life that need rebuilding?
- 7 What do you sense God saying to you at this moment about the area of your life that needs rebuilding or is in process?
- 8 What has been your response to God? (Remember, there is no right or wrong way to respond to God. God already knows what is on your heart and your mind, but He longs to hear your thoughts in conversation as well.)

Read Psalm 119:15, 59. In these verses, the psalmist writes about *considering the ways* of God. We see Nehemiah doing the same in the passage we've studied this week. Close your time in prayer today by thanking God for being near to you as you embrace the area of your life where you need to rebuild. Ask God to give you the willingness to consider His ways as you rebuild, even when they may not make sense to the world around you.

## MODERN-DAY NEHEMIAH

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Is there a modern-day Nehemiah in your world? Someone who has rebuilt from the rubble of their life—a relationship, business, team, idea, church or ministry, his or her own physical health? If so, ask that person to share more of his or her story with you. If you can't think of anyone in close proximity, find a podcast or read a book about someone who has rebuilt something. Either way, find a few people who inspire you with their stories, like Nehemiah, as you get started right on your new beginning. Write down some names that come to mind.

*The Nehemiah Code*

*For Next Week:* Review chapters 1–4 in *The Nehemiah Code* and use the space below to write any insights or questions from your personal study that you want to discuss at the next group meeting. In preparation for next week, review chapters 5–9 in *The Nehemiah Code*.