

# 5

# PRIORITIZE



*What are some of your early experiences with the Bible?*

**QUESTION #1**

## THE POINT

*God's Word must be central to our lives to truly serve Him.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It took a drunk man to teach me a great truth about the Bible. I was at a men's Monday night Bible study when we heard a beat-up, old car screech in the church parking lot. A man was pushed out of the car. He stumbled to the door and began to share about his struggles. Then he said to me, "You look like a preacher. Tell me what to do." At the time, I was a banker!

Since I didn't know how to respond, I randomly opened my Bible and began to read a psalm—one in which David asked God to kill his enemies! I cringed at every word. Then the guy interrupted, "That's what I need! I need Jesus!" Christ's name was not in the psalm! God's Word worked, in spite of my hasty verse selection. We sobered him up and led him to Christ. He joined the church and stayed focused on God's Word.

As they rebuilt Jerusalem's walls, Nehemiah and the Jewish people learned the importance of focusing on God's Word. Since God's Word was central to them, they had insight in how to serve Him.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ***Nehemiah 6:1-3,15-16***

**<sup>1</sup> Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), <sup>2</sup> Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm. <sup>3</sup> And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” ... <sup>15</sup> So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. <sup>16</sup> And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.**

A celebration was close at hand for Nehemiah and the Jewish workers. They had almost finished rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls. The gaps were filled. All that remained was to install the doors in the city gates. Consider all they had accomplished: In addition to doing the physical construction, they had endured ridicule and threats from outside enemies. They overcame systemic problems within the Jewish community when wealthy Jews had taken advantage of poorer Jews. Now the finish line was within sight, and they simply needed to finish strong.

Unfortunately, their enemies made a final attempt to stop the completion of the walls, but this attack seemed more subtle than the others. Sanballat and Geshem sent Nehemiah a letter requesting a meeting. Nehemiah knew they had evil intent: “They intended to do me harm.” These enemies could kidnap Nehemiah—or worse. They knew the Jews viewed Nehemiah as more than a project manager; he was their spiritual leader. Without Nehemiah, the people would be demoralized and work would probably cease.

***What’s something you’ve seen recently that could only be attributed to God?***

**QUESTION #2**

Nehemiah recognized Sanballat and his gang for the enemies they were. He and they were all well aware their window of opportunity was closing. The work on the wall would soon be done. Once the gates were in place, only a siege could take the city, a move Sanballat was not likely to take. So Nehemiah stayed focused on the task of leading the final push to complete the wall.

**We are to stay focused because God's name and His work are at stake.** The work was important because God was behind it. After only 52 days, the wall was completed. When Nehemiah's enemies heard the news, they "were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem." This was a complete reversal; the intimidators became the intimidated. Why? "They perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God." God's work pointed to Him and brought Him glory and recognition—even among their enemies.

We simply must stay focused on the God-given task before us; we must keep serving until God completes His work. And He will complete His work in us and through us. What God starts, He finishes! God does not do things halfway. "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

## ***Nehemiah 8:1-3***

**<sup>1</sup> And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup> So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.**

*Who has been instrumental in teaching you the importance of God's Word?*

**QUESTION #3**

## BIBLE TIME

*The Bible must be central to our lives for us to truly serve Him. Complete the following questions to help you prioritize the study of God's Word.*

How much time do you currently spend reading or listening to the Bible each day?

How much are you willing to commit to?

When is the best time for you to read the Bible?

Where is the best place for you to read the Bible?

In addition to reading the Bible, it is important to memorize God's Word. Begin this week by memorizing Philippians 1:6 below.

See what a difference this Bible time will make in your other priorities as well!

*"I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ!"*

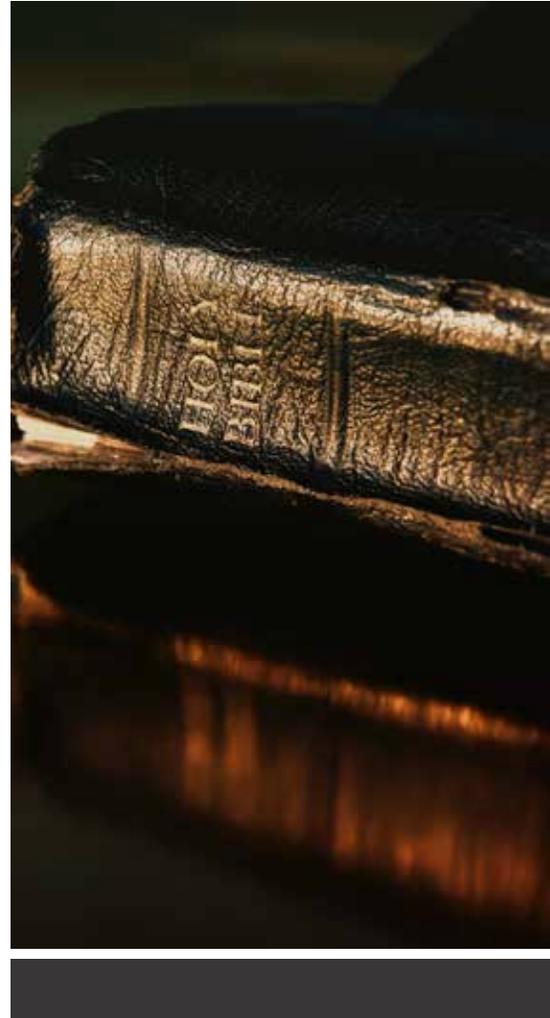
— PHILIPPIANS 1:6

Nehemiah knew the people also needed to give God's Word their attention. Nehemiah did more than rebuild a wall; he wanted to rebuild the people spiritually. As the crowd gathered, they requested Ezra the priest to bring out God's Word and read it.

God's Word has value for all of us.

- ▶ **The Bible shows us God.** It drives me crazy when I drop food in my car. I've got to find it because I don't want to remember it weeks later when I find it melted and ground into the carpet. It's a frantic search. People frantically search for God, too, but where do we find Him? The Word of God.
- ▶ **The Bible shows us how to live.** The Bible doesn't just show us God; it also reveals who we are and who we can be in Christ. If God had inspired no written record, then we could not have any assurances of what He wants for us!
- ▶ **The Bible shows us how to live and serve together.** When we come to Christ, we come to His body, the church. Growing in that relationship, then, is something we do together. Churches that are the most focused on God's Word will be the most unified.

The only way this unity occurs is when the church is completely focused and devoted to the foundation of Scripture. Giving attention to God's Word—and obeying it—helps us stay unified in the work He has given us.



## ***Nehemiah 8:5-8***

**<sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.**

Ezra and thirteen other men stood on a large wooden platform. Ezra “opened the book,” or more technically, unrolled the scroll of God’s Word. The Word of God led the people to worship, and their worship was both vocal and physical. They shouted, “Amen, Amen,” an expression of confirmation and agreement with God’s Word. Worship is a natural response to hearing and accepting the truth God had revealed.

Verse 7 mentions thirteen other men—Levites—who explained the law. They translated the law and gave “the sense, so that the people *understood* the reading” (emphasis added). They went beyond just making sure the people *heard* God’s Word; they also wanted the people to understand God’s Word. We do not know exactly how this scene played out, but it appears the people may have gathered in small groups to study together.

The principle remains today. We need to *hear* God’s Word proclaimed in a large corporate gathering and *study* God’s Word in smaller group settings. When we are teachable, we can understand and apply God’s Word to our lives. How should we thank God for His Word?

The answer is simple. We worship the One to whom the Bible points: Jesus Christ.

*What are some ways we can make the Word of God a bigger part of our day?*

### **QUESTION #4**

*Why do you think it’s important for us to study the Bible as a group and not just by ourselves?*

### **QUESTION #5**

## LIVE IT OUT

We will not know what God wants for us unless we are studying Scripture regularly. How can we best do that?

- ▶ **Read.** Make the reading of God's Word a daily priority. Adopt a Bible reading plan or use a devotional guide to help you read systematically through the Scriptures.
- ▶ **Study.** In addition to being a part of a weekly Bible study group, plan for a time of concentrated study by yourself or with one to two other people. One option is to take the passage you study each week in your group and study it further.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Hide God's Word in your heart through memorization. Memorize one to two verses a week that encourage you, challenge you, and help you draw closer to Christ. Apps like ScriptureTyper can be used on your phone or tablet to help you memorize scripture during the week.



God's Word must be central to your life in order to serve Him faithfully. Cherish your time in the Word, and God will honor your efforts.

My thoughts