

# Nehemiah 8 – The Joy of the Lord is Our Strength

Hook (1005-1007) –

Share Suffering and Success  
Repent

## How to enjoy the joy of the Lord

Be able and willing to hear  
Enjoy

Book (1007-1010) – Nehemiah 8:1-18

Look (1010-1040)

Share Suffering and Success

**V1** – The walls were built and the census was complete. A short time before Israel was scattered like lost sheep and near destruction at the hands of men like Haman. Now Israel had everything that they needed to make a secure and prosperous nation state for themselves:

1. A fertile land to provide food and resources
2. Secure urban areas to provide large marketplaces, luxury manufacturing, centers for learning and worship, stable government, and unique culture. While villages provided all of these things at a basic level, the greater population density of towns and cities allowed for greater specialization in all areas. They formed centers of gravity in civilizations.
3. A census of the people, to allow government to direct their work to the greatest public good, and try to meet their needs.

After these great triumphs, only one thing remained, to reeducate the people in the Law and rededicate the people in their service to God. With the unity born of shared suffering and shared success, the people came together to listen to Ezra.

What did the people do?

1. They endured the harassment of Israel's enemies together, supporting each other during the suffering times. They did not try to suffer in silence or bear their burdens alone.
2. Despite their trials they continued the work that God had given them, and they did so together. Everyone did what they could, whether weak or strong. Those more successful did not leave those less successful behind.
3. Nehemiah and Ezra were godly men who knew what needed to be done. The people recognized their virtue and intelligently followed.
4. Once the work was done, they set aside time to rededicate themselves to the Lord and to each other. The people looked back on the great things that God had used them to do, and looked forward to their future tasks.
5. They did not scurry frantically from job to job, heedless of each other or the command of the Lord.

### Illustration

"PICTURES" (Parents (family), Interests, Chores (work), Television (entertainment), University (education), Recreation (sports), Environment, Shopping (consumer))

Spoken story

Drama - script, costumes, props, acting

Music – appropriate song

Art – object

### Discussion Questions/Application

How often do we suffer alone? How often do we allow others to suffer alone? How often do we succeed

alone, or at least take the credit for success for ourselves?

## Be able and willing to hear

**V2** – The first day of the seventh month was New Year's Day (Leviticus 23, Numbers 29). Not everyone in the nation was present at the assembly, but those who could hear and understand. This meant people who not only were able, but also willing, to listen to the word of the Lord. Women were included, and since they were the primary caregivers children old enough to understand also came.

How do we make ourselves able and willing to listen?

1. Adopt the heart of a student, not a critic.
2. First commit, so that we can then understand
3. Take time to listen.
4. Hear the word of God with our ears, showing due respect to the message and the messenger with our bodies.
5. Worship God
6. Hear the word of God again, studying with our teachers and our peers and growing in our understanding.
7. Repent.

How did Nehemiah, Ezra and the other leaders help their followers be able and willing to hear?

1. They loved, worshipped and enjoyed God.
2. They knew what they believed and they lived it.
3. They cared for their followers, listening to them and helping to meet their needs, both felt and unmet.
4. They set aside time for their followers.

**V3** – Ezra and the religious leaders read the Scripture all morning, probably from 0700 to 1200, and the members of the congregation kept themselves attentive to the word.

**VV 4-5** – Ezra did not try to rededicate the people by himself, but had many respected religious leaders with him on the raised platform from which he spoke. Unlike modern classes, in ancient times the teacher sat to teach and the students stood to listen and to show respect for the teacher and for the material. In so doing, students used their bodies to build and to demonstrate the right heart attitude towards each other, their elders, and the word of God.

**VV 6-8** – After coming together as a body, having heard the Scripture, worshipping the Lord, reflecting on His magnificence, and humbling themselves, the people were able to understand the Scriptures. Individual leaders read and explained to the people what each part signified, so all could understand.

**Illustration** "PICTURES"

**Discussion Questions/Application**

Are we able and willing to hear today? How can we help others be able and willing to hear us?

**Repent**

**VV 9-11** - Tirshatha means governor. Man's first response to truly understanding the word of God is a genuine understanding of his wickedness and a move to repent. No other response is possible for a sinful human encountering a holy God. For His part, the Lord forgives. God never withholds His pardon for the man who is truly repent, for He longs to forgive and longs to bless those whom He has made.

However, repentance must be followed by joy or else it is not true repentance. To ignore sin is sin, to repent from sin is obedience, but to continue to wallow in sin is sin. Our Lord wants our sins forgiven and forgotten. He wants our emotional baseline to be joy.

**Illustration** "PICTURES"

**Discussion Questions/Application**

When was the last time that we really saw our sin and repented of it? When did we last help our family to do that?

**Enjoy**

**VV 12-18** – Under the leadership of Ezra and his helpers, and under the watchful of Nehemiah, the people learned of God, worshipped and enjoyed him for seven days. Without a doubt it was one of the highlights of their lives, and the people spoke of that day for decades to come. Such experiences are vital to the life of faith.

Soren Kierkegaard said that experiences, not reason, are what make the difference in the life of the Spirit. Reason is important, but Paul the Apostle, the most reasonable of men, did not cite reason when he explained why he followed Jesus. We would have thought that Saul the Pharisee would have searched the Scriptures carefully, finding every place that could have predicted the Jesus the Messiah, but he didn't. In his greatest extremes, Paul cited his experience with the Lord as the reason that he gave up everything to serve Him.

**Illustration** "PICTURES"

**Discussion Questions/Application**

Think of two wonderful experiences in which you really felt the presence of God. What about one? When was the last time that you really enjoyed your Creator? In some ways, God is the ultimate hedonist – He created the pleasures and wants His people to enjoy them – within His plan.

**Took** (1040-1045) –

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**Verdict** – What do you want them to DO as a result of the truths they have just received?

**Additional Reading** – MDHarrisMD.com.

**Closing prayer**