Devotional Series

Week 1: A Burden Worth Carrying

Defining Question: "What breaks my heart?"

Prayer Challenge: Give God your heart. Ask Him: "God, break my heart for what breaks Yours."

Day 1: When the News Breaks You

Scripture: *"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the palace, Hanani, one of my brothers, came, he and certain men out of Judah; and I asked them about the Jews who had escaped, who were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. They said to me, 'The remnant who are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.' When I heard these words, I sat down and wept, and mourned several days; and I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."* - Nehemiah 1:1-4

Reflection: Nehemiah was comfortable. He had a good job - cupbearer to the king. A life of proximity to power. Safety. Provision. Everything a man in exile could hope for.

Then he asked about Jerusalem. And everything changed.

The news wasn't just bad. It was devastating. The people were afflicted. The walls were broken. The gates were burned. And Nehemiah didn't just feel sorry - he *broke*. He sat down. He wept. He mourned for *days*. Not a polite, spiritual tear rolling down his cheek during a worship song. This was gut-level grief. The kind that empties you. The kind that rearranges your priorities in an instant.

I wonder what breaks *your* heart. Not what annoys you. Not what frustrates you on social media. What actually makes you sit down and weep? What keeps you up at night? What makes your stomach turn when you think about it long enough?

For Nehemiah, it was the condition of his people. The brokenness of a city that was supposed to be a light to the nations. The walls that were supposed to protect were rubble. The gates that were supposed to welcome were ash. And he couldn't look away.

Here's what strikes me: Nehemiah wasn't in Jerusalem. He was hundreds of miles away in a palace. He could have shrugged. He could have said, "That's sad," and gone back to pouring wine for the king. But he didn't. The news broke him open - and that breaking became the birthplace of everything that followed.

Making room for God to work often starts with letting Him break our hearts for the things that have broken His. We can't build what we haven't first wept over. We can't fund what we haven't first felt. Before there's a blueprint, there's a burden. Before there's a campaign, there's a cry.

Takeaway: Before Nehemiah built anything, he wept. What breaks your heart today? Don't rush past the grief - let it do its work.

Prayer: God, break my heart for what breaks Yours. I don't want to stay comfortable while others suffer. I don't want to look away from the rubble. Break me open - break open my indifference, my busyness, my carefully managed comfort. Give me tears for the things that matter to You. Let the breaking become the beginning. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tomorrow: When brokenness becomes a prayer that moves heaven.

Day 2: A Prayer That Moves God

Scripture: *"I said, 'I beg you, Yahweh, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and loving kindness with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear now be attentive and your eyes open, that you may listen to the prayer of your servant which I pray before you at this time, day and night, for the children of Israel your servants, while I confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against you. Yes, I and my father's house have sinned.'"* - Nehemiah 1:5-6

Reflection: Nehemiah doesn't start by asking God to fix the walls. He starts by confessing sin - his own, his family's, his nation's.

That takes guts. He's not pointing fingers at the Babylonians. He's not blaming the economy. He's not writing a strongly worded letter to the government. He's on his face, saying, *"Yes, I and my father's house have sinned."*

There's something powerful about leaders who begin with personal repentance before asking for corporate breakthrough. Nehemiah understood something we often forget: the broken walls weren't just an engineering problem. They were a spiritual one. The walls fell because the people had wandered. And before the walls could be rebuilt, the hearts had to be returned.

When I pray about this campaign - about the building, the funds, the future - I have to ask myself: *What needs to change in me first?* Not in the budget. Not in the congregation. In *me*.

What if God is waiting to do something big externally, but He's first asking for something small internally? A heart shift. A surrender. A confession. A willingness to say, "God, before You rebuild anything out there, rebuild something in here."

Nehemiah prayed day and night. Not once. Not a quick prayer before bed. *Day and night.* He carried this burden to God with a persistence that wouldn't let go. And God heard him.

Takeaway: God often rebuilds outwardly what we first surrender inwardly. What needs to change in you before God can move through you?

Prayer: God, I confess. Not just the obvious sins - the hidden ones. The pride I dress up as leadership. The fear I call wisdom. The control I mistake for responsibility. Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Clean me up before You build through me. I don't want to carry this campaign in my own strength. I want to carry it on my knees. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tomorrow: When God answers with a promise - and a challenge.

Day 3: Gather the Scattered

Scripture: *"Now these are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. Lord, I beg you, let your ear be attentive now to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name; and please prosper your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Now I was cupbearer to the king.* - Nehemiah 1:10-11

Reflection: Nehemiah finishes his prayer and then drops this line almost as an afterthought: *"Now I was cupbearer to the king."*

I love that. Here's a man who just poured out his heart to God - fasting, weeping, confessing, pleading - and then he goes back to work. He doesn't quit his job. He doesn't retreat to a monastery. He doesn't announce a spiritual sabbatical. He goes back to pouring wine for the king, trusting that God will use his ordinary position for extraordinary purposes.

And God did. The king noticed Nehemiah's sadness. Nehemiah prayed - and the king gave him everything he needed: letters, materials, protection, authority to go rebuild the walls. The very position Nehemiah held in exile became the doorway to Israel's restoration.

Sometimes God answers prayer through the most unexpected doors. The job you have right now. The relationship you're in. The position you didn't think mattered. The neighbor you've been meaning to talk to. God can use any of it - if you're willing.

I think about the people in our church who feel ordinary. Who feel like they don't have much to offer. Nehemiah was a wine server. He wasn't a general. He wasn't a priest. He was a guy with a daily job and a broken heart. And God used him to rebuild an entire city.

Takeaway: God answers prayer through ordinary people in ordinary places. Your current position might be the door He opens next.

Prayer: Lord, I surrender my life to You - including my workplace, my routine, my ordinary days. I don't need a platform to be useful. I just need a willing heart. Use where I am for what You want to do. Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Gather the scattered through me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tomorrow: What if God's word was meant to be lived, not just learned?

Day 4: Written on Your Heart

Scripture: *"Hear, Israel: Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is one. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. These words, which I command you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up."* - Deuteronomy 6:4-6

Reflection: This is the Shema - the most foundational prayer in all of Judaism. And it starts with a command: *Hear.*

Not "know." Not "study." Not "memorize." *Hear.* Listen. Let it land deep.

And then: *"These words shall be on your heart."* Not on a poster. Not in a notebook. Not on a coffee mug. On your *heart*. The Hebrew word is *lev* (H3824) - the center of who you are. Your will, your mind, your desires, your deepest self.

God doesn't want His word living in your head. He wants it living in your gut. In your decisions. In how you raise your kids, how you spend your money, how you treat your neighbor, how you respond when the bank account is low and the campaign ask feels impossible.

And notice the rhythm: *when you sit, when you walk, when you lie down, when you rise up.* That's everything. That's not a Sunday thing. That's an everything thing. God's word saturates the ordinary moments of life - morning coffee, afternoon commute, evening conversation, middle-of-the-night anxiety.

This is what obedience looks like - not rigid rule-following, but a life so saturated with God's presence that His word flows out naturally. You don't have to force it. You just have to stay close.

Takeaway: God's word isn't meant to be displayed - it's meant to be lived. Is it written on your heart or just your shelf?

Prayer: God, write Your word on my heart. Not just my memory - my life. Let it shape how I live Monday through Saturday. Let it be the first thing I reach for in the morning and the last thing I carry into sleep. Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Saturate me with Your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tomorrow: What if today is the day you draw a line in the sand?

Day 5: As for Me and My House

Scripture: *"Now therefore fear Yahweh, and serve him in sincerity and in truth. Put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, in Egypt; and serve Yahweh. If it seems evil to you to serve Yahweh, choose today whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh."* - Joshua 24:14-15

Reflection: Joshua draws a line. Not angrily. Not arrogantly. Just clearly. *As for me and my house - we will serve Yahweh.*

I love that he doesn't say, "You all should serve Yahweh." He starts with himself. *As for me.* The most powerful leadership is personal leadership. When your own life is surrendered, your words carry weight. When your life contradicts your words, nobody listens.

"Choose today." Not tomorrow. Not when things settle down. Not after the campaign is over. Not when you feel more financially stable. *Today.*

I think about the decisions we face in a season like this. Some of us are weighing whether we can afford to give. Some of us are deciding whether to step up and serve. Some of us are choosing whether to go all in or play it safe. And some of us have been sitting on the fence for weeks, waiting for the "right moment."

Joshua's answer is clear: there is no right moment. There's only today. Don't let fear choose for you. Don't let comfort choose for you. Don't let the what-ifs choose for you. Choose today whom you will serve.

"In sincerity and in truth." Not half-hearted. Not going through the motions. Sincerity - *tāmîm* (H8549) - whole, complete, without blemish. That's the kind of obedience God is after.

Takeaway: Obedience is a daily decision. What are you choosing today?

Prayer: Lord, as for me and my house - we choose You. Today. Not perfectly. But fully. Not with a divided heart. With sincerity and truth. Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Help me obey You faithfully - not someday, but right now. I draw the line here. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tomorrow: What if God doesn't want a piece of your life - He wants all of it?

Day 6: Living Sacrifice

Scripture: *"Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God."* - Romans 12:1-2

Reflection: Paul says *living sacrifice.* Not dead. Not once. A living, daily, ongoing offering.

Here's the problem with living sacrifices: they keep crawling off the altar. A dead sacrifice stays put. But a living one has to be placed back - every morning, every decision, every moment when fear whispers, "Play it safe."

That's why Paul says *present* - it's a daily, deliberate act. Not "I gave my life to Christ thirty years ago and that's enough." Today. Again. Fresh.

"Don't be conformed to this world." The Greek word is *suschēmatizō* (G4964) - it means to be pressed into a mold. The world has a mold for you: protect your comfort, accumulate for yourself, don't take risks, play it safe. Don't conform.

"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The word is *metamorphoō* (G3339) - where we get "metamorphosis." It's not behavior modification. It's identity transformation. God doesn't want you to just act different. He wants you to *become* different. A butterfly doesn't just flap its wings like a caterpillar with wings. It's a completely new creature.

That's what this campaign is asking of us. Not just a financial commitment - a life commitment. Present your body. Renew your mind. Stop conforming. Start transforming. That's what "life to the full" actually looks like.

Takeaway: A living sacrifice is a daily choice. What part of your life is God asking you to place on the altar today?

Prayer: God, I present myself to You today - not once, but again. Transform me from the inside out. Renew my mind. Break the molds the world has pressed me into. I don't want to just look different - I want to *be* different. Break my heart for what breaks Yours. I surrender my life to You - every corner, every closet, every hidden fear. Do Your work in me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tomorrow: They gave themselves first - and everything else followed.

Day 7: First Themselves

Scripture: *"This was not as we had expected, but first they gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us through the will of God."* - 2 Corinthians 8:5

Reflection: We'll look more at the Macedonians in an earlier week - the churches in severe poverty who gave beyond their power. But Paul highlights the most important detail in this single verse: *"First they gave their own selves to the Lord."*

Not their money first. Not their time first. Not their resources first. *Themselves.*

That's the order. That's always the order. When you give God your heart, the rest follows. When you hold back your heart, everything else is just performance - generosity without surrender, service without worship, giving without transformation.

I think about Nehemiah, who wept before he built. I think about Joshua, who chose before he commanded. I think about Paul, who begged for transformation before asking for action. And I think about the Macedonians, who gave themselves before they gave a single coin.

It all comes back to the heart. Every campaign. Every building. Every act of obedience. It starts with surrender.

"And to us through the will of God." They gave themselves to God *and* to the mission. Not one without the other. Personal surrender and corporate obedience. That's what making room looks like. That's what being "all in" means. Not just writing a check. Not just showing up on Sunday. Giving yourself - fully, completely, holding nothing back - and then letting God direct where it goes.

Takeaway: Everything flows from surrender. Give God yourself first - and watch what He does with the rest.

Prayer: Lord, I surrender my life to You. I give You my sin. I give You my strengths. I give You my fears and my ambitions. I give You the parts of me I've been protecting - the comfortable parts, the controlled parts, the parts I'm afraid to lose. Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Help me obey You faithfully - not someday, but today. Not partially, but fully. I'm all in. Not just with my wallet. With my whole life. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.

This devotional series is part of the "Making Room" Capital Campaign at Grace Covenant Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia. For more information or to participate, visit gcch.org/mr or contact the Church Office via email: questions@gcch.org or by phone: (540) 433-9244.

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