"Shattered"

Nehemiah 9

In last week's study of Nehemiah 8, we learned that a few days after rebuilding the Jerusalem wall, the people of Israel heard and heeded the Word of God. They celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) in the seventh month with great joy.

This week our study will focus on Nehemiah 9. The mood of this chapter is very different. Soon after the Feast of Tabernacles had ended, God's people assembled again for a day of Scripture reading, spiritual reflection, and repentance.

It is fitting, in light of the tenth anniversary of 9/11, that we who follow Christ should spend some time reflecting not on the sin of Muslim terrorists but on our own sins and shortcomings, and lamenting the fallen condition both of ourselves and our fellow human beings. Perhaps Nehemiah 9 will serve as a model for your own prayer of confession and lament.

KNOWING GOD

Read **Nehemiah 9**. The setting is a national assembly of the Israelites as they seek God's forgiveness and renew their covenant with him. This chapter records a long prayer of confession by the people's spiritual leaders. What lessons do you take away from the review of Israel's history included in this prayer (vss. 7-31)?

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The last part of the prayer (vss. 32-37) is a lament over the people's trouble and distress. What is the value of pouring out one's complaint and heartache to God?

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Read one or more of the Psalms of Lament (examples: Psalms 13, 77, 80, 88, etc.). What does God reveal about the world through the laments of the Bible? What does he reveal about himself?

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GROWING TOGETHER

If you were being totally honest, what things related to yourself or the world around you would you lament to God?

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Do you hesitate to pray "unedited" prayers about the things that distress you? If so, why? If not, what would you say to someone who does?

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SERVING OTHERS

The Levites named in vss. 4-5 served their fellow Israelites by praying for them. Their prayer shows that they identified with their people in distress. They did not pretend to be "holier than thou" or pray in a judgmental way. How well do you feel you truly identify with the plight of suffering people? What steps might you take to become more empathic?

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IN YOUR FAMILY...

(a) Parents, start a family conversation about 9/11. If your children were alive in 2001 and are old enough to remember that day, talk about what you were doing when the planes hit the World Trade Center. Reflect on how you felt then, and the feelings you still have about the event.

(b) Read **Luke 13:1-5** as a family. In this passage, Jesus teaches that when bad things happen to people, it is not always appropriate to assign blame or dwell on the possible reasons for the tragedy. Instead, it's time to look at one's own sins and repent. In light of 9/11, of what sins (both of omission and commission) do you need to repent?

SERMON NOTES