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NEHEMIAH 8:9-12

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

[PRAYER] Lord, I thank you that you've done something inside of our hearts that makes us different from the world. Thank you, Lord, for reminding Neil about that recently and you've been drawing him to your word. Lord, thank you also for Rose's testimony and the grace that you've shown in her heart that she's even able to talk about her experience. Lord, I pray that you would use that in the lives of others here today. Lord, we know that your word is powerful and we want to look at it now and ask for you to speak to us and teach us. We open your word with anticipation. In Jesus' name, amen.

Today we come to that passage in God's word which is Nehemiah 8:10. You can open there if you'd like. But in Nehemiah 8:10 there's this quote. The quote that you'll see on plaques. Maybe you've underlined it, maybe you've memorized it. The verse goes this way: *The joy of the Lord is my strength*. It's the Bible verse that is talked about here today. *The joy of the Lord is my strength*.

Now when we see a quote or we take a quote out of scripture, that's fine. We can take that quote out. But it's often helpful to go back and find out the history of it. Find out what's going on in the story, what's happening that brought that quote to be there in the first place. That's what we're going to do today. We're going to go and look at the context. It's very important for us to look at the context of the passages that we're considering and we're thinking about. The context makes it more rich for us. It gives us a greater sense of application. So as we look at Nehemiah 8 we're going to see that context. Enlighten us about that phrase – *The joy of the Lord is our strength*.

Let me bring you up to date about the context of our passage in Nehemiah. Now as you know in Nehemiah he was sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. And after the walls were built in fifty-two days then he realized the need to bring revival or restoration to the people, not just the buildings. And so he's bringing this restoration, he has Ezra the priest stand up with the Law (the Law is the first five books of the Bible, the Law of Moses from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) and he had Ezra get up and read parts of that. We don't know what parts he read. But he's reading part of that and he's on a stage. We saw last week thirteen guys on the stage with him, thirteen guys in the audience that are listening that are then interpreting or explaining the Bible to all of the people.

So they are listening to this from the time the sun comes up over all the wall, which is about 6:30 a.m. at this time of year in Jerusalem, and Ezra is in front of the wall on a platform with thirteen guys. And so the sun's coming up behind there and the temperature is about 65, probably at that

time of year and it'll get to be 75 or 80. So during that whole period of time it's a nice warm time, but they're really focusing on this new Book of the Law that they haven't heard for a long time. It's been years since anyone read it to them. They had forgotten what it says. And when they hear the words of God's word read, they are touched in their hearts and that's what we're going to read about and see today.

If you'll stand with me. Let's read Nehemiah 8:9-12 or read it in your own scriptures. Look it up and you can underline and circle some things. I think you'll find some good things to mark up your Bible with today as we go through this passage. Verse 9 – *Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all...* So these are thirteen Levites out in the community or out in the congregation assembly and they're speaking and helping them understand. And there's thirteen guys on the stage. They're also helping people understand when Ezra reads the passage. That's the picture that we have here.

And these people said to them all, *"This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.*

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve." Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

You may be seated.

These people hadn't heard the word of the Lord for a long time. They had drifted away from the Lord and that's why we have the whole exile experience where they were sent away for seventy years into exile. They come back now and there's this place of coming back to this revival that they're experiencing. The whole history of humanity is this experience of people coming close to God and then drifting away somehow – getting busy or thinking about other things or worshipping other gods or whatever. So there's this call back then to revival. So there's this back and forth experience.

You see it in the garden. Do you remember? Adam and Eve walked in the garden in fellowship with God. But then they took matters into their own hands, ate of the forbidden fruit, and that created a separation between them and God. Only for God to bring them back and give them a promise about the future that would become.

We see this happening over and over again. In fact the prophets are written to warn the people don't fall away. Come back to the Lord. You remember in the Book of the Law, the first five books, the story of how God rescued the people of Israel out of Egypt and He brought them to Mount Sinai, leading them with His great compassion and caring for them. But while Moses was up on the mountain it was just a little bit too long for them and they're already creating a golden

calf and worshiping it. They're pulling away from the Lord. They're getting distracted. They're doing their own thing. And God wants to bring them back. He continually does it all through the wilderness wanderings.

I just want to suggest today that if you've found yourself drifting away from the Lord, come back to Him. Recapture that revival inside of your heart. When John wrote the book of Revelation the angel said to one of the churches that they have left their first love. The idea that they drifted away from the close relationship with God that they needed. That's what happened in this story that the people had drifted away. So then there was the exile. Now they're coming back and their hearts now are focused in on the Lord in a special way.

You can see in verse 9 at the end there *they listened to the words of the Law*, the first five books of Moses. We don't know exactly which part of that that Ezra read. He couldn't have read all of it in six hours. There's a lot that he could read. But it's not just the Ten Commandments that he's reading to them. He's reading about the experience of God and His people and the covenants that are mentioned in those first five books of the Bible. This relationship with God and the fact that they can choose to be close to Him.

I think probably if I were choosing I would choose this part out of the first five books. I think Ezra may have read these words. This is from Deuteronomy. Listen to these words and just imagine. See the people are going to start crying. They're going to start grieving about their loss that they've experience. But listen to the statement that Moses is making now as he's talking to the Israelites before they go into the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. He reminds them of these things. He says to them – *See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.*

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The people are listening to the words and it's touching them in their hearts and they're convicted in their hearts, recognizing the loss that they've experienced over the last years, grieving because of the brokenness that they've experience. And see now that God wants something and they missed out on something that they feel bad about. So the Bible tells us that in verse 10 they're weeping as they're listening to the words of God. They're weeping and grieving because of the loss that they've experienced, because of the regrets that they've experienced.

So Nehemiah has a solution. He's going to come to this solution. They're in the midst of this broken experience and they're grieving about the loss and Nehemiah says this. He says two things. He says in verse 10 – *Do not grieve*. That's the first thing. And the second thing – *for the joy of the Lord is your strength*.

Now I just have to pause there. In my own thinking, in my own study this week I'm saying why stop the grieving? Because many times it's the grieving that leads to something really good in a person's life. We really do need to grieve sometimes. In fact 2 Corinthians 7:10 tells us that *godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death*. So there is a sense of grieving. It seems like a godly grieving that's going on with them. Why, I'm asking myself, does Nehemiah say stop the grieving? That's a good question.

One of the things that we share in the human experience is brokenness. The brokenness that leaves a place inside of our hearts, a room inside of our hearts that contains loss, pain, hurt, suffering, regret. We all experience it. For some the room is bigger than others. For some the room is really organized with all kinds of things to think about when you get in there. It's a place of grieving. It's a place of mourning. And sometimes the mourning comes or the regrets come because of personal sin.

God calls this brokenness that affects all of our lives sin. Sometimes it's personal sin. Sometimes we actually did something wrong to cause the problem that we're experiencing now. Sometimes we're experiencing a loss in a relationship of some kind. Sometimes grieving some kind of a loss in our health, some kind of financial loss, some kind of loss at work or opportunities. There's some kind of loss or regret. And we spend some time there in that loss and we're mourning the pain of that experience inside of our hearts. And sometimes it's because we did something that caused this. But that's not always the case. Sometimes the mourning and the loss that we experience is because of someone else's sin.

I tend to think that these people in our story in Nehemiah 8 are grieving the loss of the bad decisions of their parents. Some of you I know are suffering because of bad decisions that other people have made. You've kind of inherited that, either from parents or from a lost relationship, or someone else has hurt you in some way. And so it's so heavy, isn't it? The grieving and the loss that we experience inside of our hearts when we come into contact with the brokenness that comes into our lives is just so heavy. We call it being brokenhearted. Sometimes the brokenness comes not because of other people or not necessarily that we know or other people or ourselves, sometimes the brokenness or the sin is just present in our world. And so disease has taken place in our world because of sin. So it affects us. So somehow this disease causes this loss of health or other problems that exist in our world that create this internal grieving that we all experience. It's like that room that has a door and sometimes we want to shut the door. We don't want to go in there.

When I asked my little three-year-old friend how old she thinks I am, sometimes she thinks I'm really old like twenty and other times she says I'm one hundred because that's how far she can count. Well I assure you I'm somewhere between there, twenty and one hundred. But I just have a passion for young people because there are ways to live now that will guide you through your life to avoid some of the regrets that you can experience later. There are a lot of adults here that

would say the same thing. Oh yeah. I could tell you a few things that you could do now to avoid the challenges that you would have later. You want to deal with it. There are things we can do that are personal choices that we make that can prevent the loss and the grieving that might take place. But there's also things that just happen in life.

One of the things that we share together is that we are broken people living in a broken world. That loss, that pain, that suffering that we experience, the regrets that we have do something for us. They allow us to connect to each other. They give us a greater sense of compassion. There's something really valuable that can happen in the midst of all of that that God can do in our hearts. That someone could stand up and talk about having an abortion means that she has allowed God to work in her heart in a really powerful way to be able to discuss something like that.

So I ask the question why. Why stop the grieving? And I want to put that question on hold. Let's put it aside for a minute. I want to come back to the question. But I want to go on and I want to look at the rest of Nehemiah's solution for a moment. Because notice he says in verse 10 – *Do not grieve*. That's part of what he's saying. But then he says – *the joy of the Lord is your strength*. What in the world does that mean?

The joy of the Lord. Just start with the joy of the Lord. What is that? Is that the joy of getting to know God? Is it the joy of connecting with God? What does it mean the joy of the Lord is my strength and why is Nehemiah bringing it here in this moment?

As I look at scripture and I start thinking about this idea of joy, I recognize that inside of this idea of joy that God has established for us is something really powerful. It's going to provide strength, but it's full. There's a whole bunch of things wrapped up in this idea of joy. It's God's joy that He wants to give us. And then when God gives us this joy, it does something inside of our hearts that provides this strength.

But Nehemiah isn't the only one who talked about this joy. We're going to want this. We might not understand it, but look at when Jesus was talking to God in John 17, this is just after He had told His disciples He's going to leave. So they're upset. He says to them – *Do not let your hearts be troubled, do not be afraid. I'm going to prepare a place for you*. And then there's this dialogue that Thomas says – *Well where is this place? How are we going to know how to get there?* And so Jesus is talking to them about all of this and then He gets into John 17 and here's what He prays for His disciples. He says – *But now I am coming to you, Father, and I am saying these things while I am in the world, so that the disciples may have my joy fulfilled within them*. Jesus is saying there's some joy, there's a package here that I want to pass on to them. And Father, I'm asking you to guide that passage of that joy, my joy into their hearts.

He further describes it a couple chapters earlier in John 15 when He's talking to His disciples directly. He says – *I have told you these things so that my joy....* So there's something about God's joy that's different from our joy. Notice that's what He says. *My joy may be in you, but your joy may be complete*. So we have this joy inside of us, but there's something about God's joy making its path into our hearts, into our lives in a very special way.

What is this, God's joy? I'm becoming more intrigued about the idea in my studies and wondering that what is it that God is doing here? What is it about this joy that's so powerful? That even Isaiah as he's prophesying about the exile and about these people that are going to be exiled, he says these words: *Provide for those who grieve in Zion. Zion is Jerusalem. These are the grieving people in Jerusalem. Provide for them to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks...* This is the strength. *They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.*

All three of those things are things you feel. They're tangible, that you can touch. Joy is a feeling. There's no doubt it's a feeling that comes from some things inside of it, but it's going to make our joy complete. And here in this passage Isaiah is imagining what God's going to do to make this transformation from what Nehemiah says *do not grieve, the joy of the Lord is your strength*. Isaiah's making the comparison between a crown that you wear on your head that's beautiful instead of the ashes that you experience inside of your heart that weight you down sometimes and you feel so disheartened and feel regret and feel lonely and guilty or shameful about things that have happened inside. The oil of joy instead of mourning about these things. And a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. There's something real contrast there that you are experiencing and Isaiah's asking for that, describing what that's going to be.

So what is this joy that we're talking about here? When Nehemiah says to them in verse 10 – *Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength*. There's this joy that's going to...something's going to happen. In the passage this is what he's saying. Something's going to happen. You've got this room inside of your heart that has a door shut on there because it's so sad to go there. There's pain and suffering that we experience living in a broken world. God is going to want for us, I believe, to allow for the door to open. The problem is, when it opens all of this pain just oozes out. We've got to "shut the door, shut the door, oh I can't take that anymore." It's so hard to think about all of the pain that's coming out of that door. But God wants to open that door so that something can come in. It's that joy of the Lord that comes into that dark place, that place that's very difficult for us to wrestle with.

There are some people...the door is just clamped so hard that there are people who are called grief counselors. These are people who help you process the opening of the door because it's so hard to open. They help you open that. But as you work through this and you understand this idea that we're going to share some more about here, the joy of the Lord is your strength. When you get that then the joy of the Lord becomes this big pillar inside so that the door can flow on its hinges freely and the pain is there. I don't think the pain, the loss, the mourning, the regrets you'll ever forget. And whenever you go there you'll still feel them. But there's something else that's there that's going to be so strong, such a big pillar that you're going to have this strength that comes from the joy of the Lord.

What is this joy of the Lord? My anticipation is growing as I'm trying to think about what is this joy of the Lord that you have for us? As I start picking it apart, what does it mean to have this something that all of us need in order to deal with the grieving and the loss that we all experience in our hearts? I call it the joy solution. As I went through and tried to understand this I realized that the grieving that we do has limits. This is why Nehemiah is saying you need to stop the

grieving. Because when grief becomes an end in itself, it becomes dangerous. We get stuck there. You know sometimes you wallow around in there. Self-pity can drag you down and bad things just happen to your soul in those moments. But grief has this ability to lay out the arena in which this bigger experience of God's joy can be revealed.

I think this joy solution contains four parts. Just as I pondered what this joy does, how it operates, what it does in a person's heart, what you need to make it work. I think these are the four parts that exist in joy. I'm going to take this apart in a moment, but let's just look at an overview of this.

First of all it's focused on God. It's God's joy. Jesus says *it's my joy*. This is big because we have to get outside of ourselves to see the bigger picture of what God is doing. God is in control. Then there's dealing with the past, the present, and the future. I think joy does that. It deals with the past, the present, and the future. In the past we've got to be able to deal with the forgiveness. Be able to receive forgiveness from God for the mistakes that we've made. We've got to also though be able to forgive ourselves for the mistakes that we've made so that we can go forward. So if there's past stuff, it's got to be addressed somehow in the midst of this in order for joy to be present and to grow inside of our lives.

The present is very important. We've got to cherish goodness. In the present we've got to cherish the goodness, the things we have, be grateful for what we have instead of just feeling about what we don't have. There's something we have. Cherish the goodness. All of this is feeding the joy. I think that as you read these things and you hear this, your understanding of joy is going to grow and you're going to feel something by the time you're done here today. You're going to be able to feel something growing inside of you. And that something is the putting together of these pieces so that you can experience God's joy. This isn't just laughing at a joke that's funny or seeing something that makes you feel good. Not that kind of joy. This is something supernatural that God does inside of you that is really powerful. Cherish the goodness.

And then lastly anticipate a bright future as Jeremiah 29:11 says. Let me just read you some of these verses. I want to take you to another grieving passage in order to do this first one. Because Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Spent years and years in slavery. God was working in his life and enabled him to move up the ranks to become the prince of Egypt so that he has tremendous amount of power to do a lot of things.

There's a famine in Israel and his brothers come to Egypt to get food because Egypt has the food because Joseph was wise enough to put it all aside. So they had this food. So the brothers come and there's some things going back and forth over some time. But there's a point when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and they realize the guilt that they've lived with all of these years for doing something when they were young. It was foolish what they'd done. They sold their brother into slavery. What a foolish thing. And they had regrets all these years. You can see in the passage it's just talking about oh God is doing something to us because of what we did to our brother. So there's these regrets that they're experiencing in those moments.

Joseph reveals himself to his brothers in that experience and then he makes this statement in Genesis 50:20. A statement about God's sovereignty and His control even in the most difficult,

distressing, and abusive situations. Joseph says – *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.* Joy is going to be made up of this confidence that God is in control.

Let's go to a second part. Freedom of forgiveness. This is a real challenge because sometimes when you open the door, even though you really weren't at fault or maybe you had a little bit, but we tend to feel guilty for things that we didn't do or we tend to feel shame about things we did do. Shame is attacking the person. Saying I'm unworthy, I'm unloved, I'm unacceptable. We've got to come to that place of forgiveness. Forgiving ourselves and allowing God to do that deeper work for our past. That we need to be able to wipe away those sins. And we can't do it ourselves. We come to God and we experience freedom. Joy is a freedom inside. A freedom that God has dealt with the past.

So Romans 8:1 comes right after Romans 7 where Paul is giving those really dark moments in his life where he's like I try to do the right thing, but I can't do the right thing. He's wrestling in his heart about this. You know I really want to do what's right, but I keep doing the wrong thing. And then in chapter 8 he says these words: *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* There's freedom that comes with forgiveness that allows us to experience something called joy inside of us. It's starting to bubble up inside of your heart at the moment as you're already acknowledging that God is in control and that we're wiping away the past and we're having the freedom to experience forgiveness. Then we go to the present where we cherish the goodness. We'll come back to this in our passage in Nehemiah. But just cherish the goodness that we have.

In Romans Paul says these words: *Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* There's good all around us and we need to invest in that. We need to understand it. We need to appreciate and value it. And as we do it just starts to do something called joy. A supernatural joy starts to take place inside of us, created by God to nurture something that He wants so that we will have strength inside of us. It's starting to build inside of you as you're starting to recognize God's sovereignty, as you recognize His freedom that comes from forgiveness, as you recognize the good that's around. It's just starting to change your heart and starting to build that strength as we move to the last part which is looking to the future and anticipating this bright future. Because joy has in it this essence that something good is coming. Even if you're on your death bed and dying, you can experience joy. Knowing that something good is coming. Heaven is coming. But it's also the fact that God is at work now in our lives. There's this bright future that He has for us.

So in Jeremiah, another passage talking about the exile and what will happen to these people, and he's talking about judgement and all kinds of things. But then he says this: *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Joy at its depth is theology. Joy at its depth is understanding God and what He's done for us. And then when we're able to deal with this, when the joy of the Lord comes into the room of grieving and mourning and regrets, it's such a pillar of strength that the door can open and shut freely without us trying to barricade it, hold it shut.

Those of you who are in school know that many of your teachers, especially those that are not Christians, are often trying to point the way using humanism. Humanists by definition aren't Christians. A humanist is someone who believes that the human solution is found in humanity. That if you dig deep inside of yourself you can find the good and go forward. That you can be positive, have positive thinking, that positive thinking will carry you through the day. And I would suggest that that's a good idea. Positive thinking is good. But when the roar of the entertainment comes down and in those quiet moments when the positive thinking tends to drift away, you still have inside of your heart those feelings of loss. Humanism cannot solve this problem.

God has solved this problem in a supernatural way by allowing us to experience joy. That the brokenness of sin that takes place in our world is not something we try to ignore, distract ourselves from, but we acknowledge it and we say, "I have sinned. I am broken because of other people's sin. I live in a broken world. That's why I need a Savior. I need someone who's going to rescue me from this brokenness." And in the darkness of those heart moments that we have when we experience the grieving and loss, the best solution and the biggest solution is recognizing Jesus Christ and the strength that He provides and the joy that He gives that gives us the joy of the Lord, which is our strength.

Now if you want to exercise this in your life, Nehemiah is going to go on in the passage and tell us how to do that. Let me just outline for you what that looks like. How do we maximize, how do we exercise this joy solution? This is what I'm going to show you in the passage, but I want you to see the outline of it just so you see the observations first.

- 1) People are going to celebrate God's grace.
- 2) They're going to share God's grace with others.
- 3) They're going to understand God's word.

That's where I'm taking you now back into the passage that we're reading right now. You want to exercise this in your heart? Here's how you do it. Let's go back into the passage and look at it.

He says in verse 10 – *Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks*. Practice experiencing the grace of God. There's nothing like having a good meal or having a sugared iced tea. You know the real good kind. That just does it. You go, "Yes, this is good! It may not be good for my diet, but it's good. I just really like this." He says go out and practice this. Go out and have a good meal. Drink some sweet drinks. Notice down in verse 12 he says *then all the people went away to eat and drink*. They're exercising this. They're allowing God to bring this joy into their heart to deal with the mourning and the regrets and the grieving that's going on. They're practicing it, number one.

Number two – they're supposed to share it with other people. Notice in verse 10 he says – *Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared*. Go give some away. When we start giving some things away in our lives and we start giving some of ourselves away, we start giving things that we own away, money or time or energy or whatever, we start giving that away in the name of the Lord, it does something inside of us to exercise the joy factor and to help us see that it's not just about us. We can't just be focused on our heart and our painful things that we're experiencing, but we need to give away the things. So

you see down in verse 12 – *Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy.*

The last verse is important in our passage today because it kind of brings it all together, helps us understand how they were able to experience joy even in the midst of their internal loss. Because they now *understand the words that had been made known to them*. They understood the word of God and when they understood the words of God they realized there's something bigger here. Don't grieve. Let's move forward. Let's try to understand more about joy. Let's receive the joy of the Lord because it's the joy of the Lord is our strength.

But there's one more observation I want to point out in this passage. Because when we start thinking about the losses and the griefs and the regrets that we have, it's about those days. "Oh I remember that day in the past I did this." Or "those days I just didn't know what I was doing and I made this mistake." Or "those days when I was suffering in that relationship were really bad." Or "those days when I was growing up were hard." So there's a contrast being made from those things.

Three times it says *this is the day that is holy before the Lord*. Let's go right from the beginning there. Let's go back up to verse 9. *This day is holy to the Lord your God*. Not those days. This day. It starts today. That's so cool. This day is where we started. This day is holy to the Lord. Don't forget it. Don't be worried about the past, what's going on because it starts now. We're going forward on this day.

Look down in verse 10 when Nehemiah speaks he says – *This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength*. It starts now. And then the Levites in verse 11 say – *Be still, for this is the holy day*.

Today is the day. Today is the day we're moving forward. Today is the day we're going to embrace the joy of the Lord in our hearts. Today is the day we're going to be different people. We're going to think about the future, we're going to allow God to forgive us for the past, and when the grief and the loss and the pain that we experience in our hearts reveals itself, we are going to rely on the joy of the Lord as our strength. And that joy's going to grow to be so strong that we may not forget the regrets and the mourning, but the perspective of having the joy of the Lord is our strength allows us to be able to have compassion on others, to be able to give a testimony about the things we've done in the past that we regret, and allow others to grow in the midst of that. Remember this: *The joy of the Lord is our strength*.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I'm sure that this joy that Nehemiah is expressing and instructing the people is a foreshadowing of the Holy Spirit and the joy that happens in the fruit of the Spirit. I'm just sure that you're working in the lives of people there so that we could learn about the joy that we need in our hearts. Lord, I ask that you would give us the handles we need in our own spiritual lives in order to understand more about you and who you are and what you're doing. We want this joy. We feel weak at times. We know that in those weak points that you are made strong. Oh Lord, show us what that means in practical terms. I pray for those in particular that are experiencing

some major losses in their lives, grieving about regrets or pain or suffering. And we know, Lord, that this joy is a healing joy. So we ask that you'd use it as an oil of joy. That it would be healing in our hearts. Grow us to be people that are like oaks of righteousness, strong before you because of who you are and what you've done in our lives. Lord, we just thank you. We are ever so grateful for the joy you've given to us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.