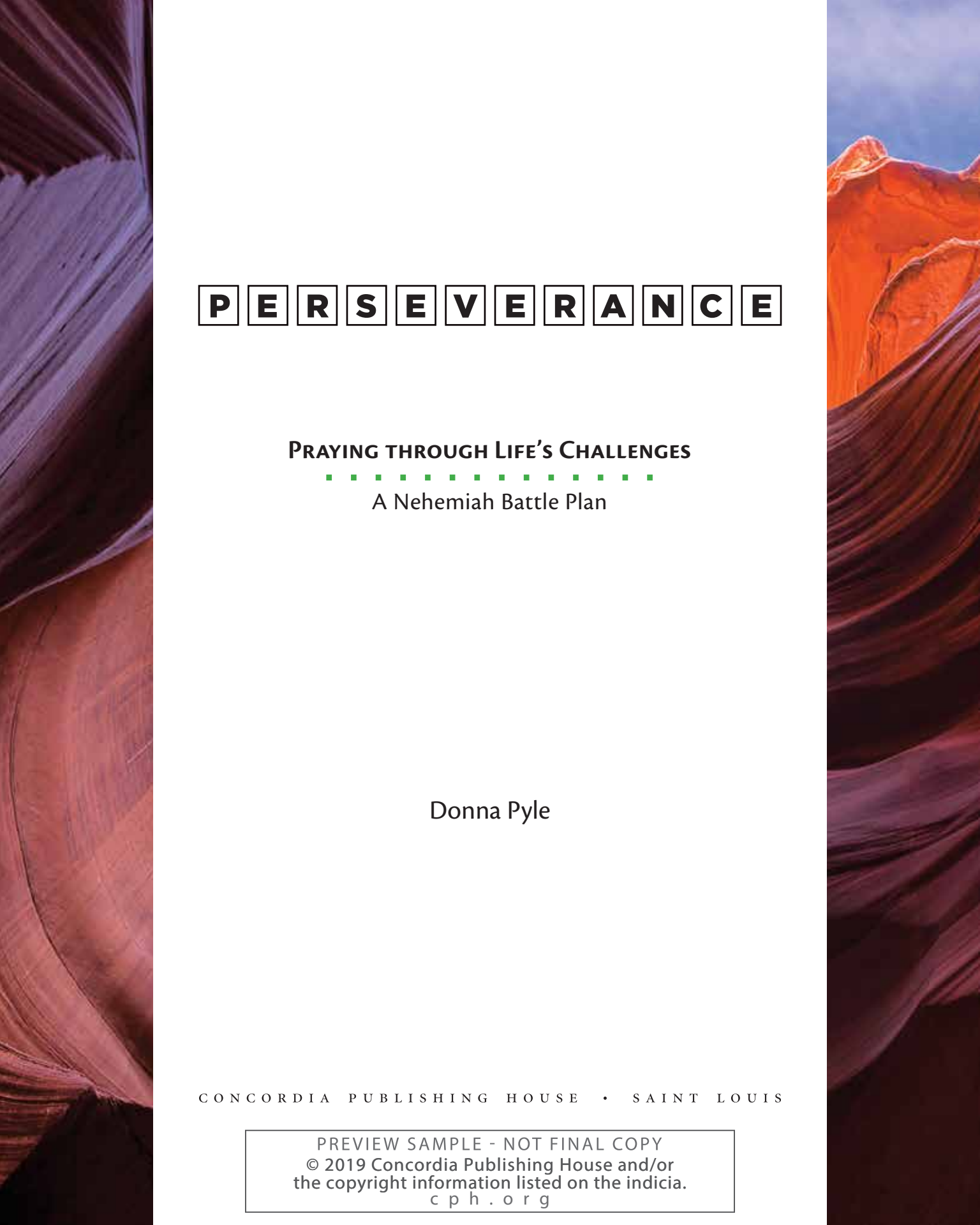




P E R S E V E R A N C E

PRAYING THROUGH LIFE'S CHALLENGES

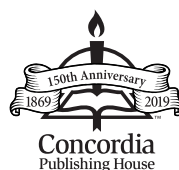


A Nehemiah Battle Plan

Donna Pyle

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INTRODUCTION

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We all have *one thing* hanging over our lives that has been there far too long. It could be a habit to break, an addiction to conquer, a goal to accomplish, a long-standing project to complete, a relationship to restore, a toxic one to end, or a debt to retire.

That one thing keeps showing up and outstaying its welcome.

It sits smack dab in the middle of the room like the proverbial pink elephant. Everyone tiptoes around it—never acknowledging or discussing it.

What is your one thing?

We all have one thing, if not eight. We've tried everything we can think of and failed more times than we can remember. Or maybe we haven't really tried.

What if we decide that we are finished playing games and recognized our one thing for what it really is? Sin. Since God is the only one who can take care of sin, what if we resolved to surrender it to Him for real this time? God calls us to constantly strive against our sin. In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther says to drown the old self daily in Baptism and emerge each day as a new person. Such diligent striving requires perseverance—persevering in prayer and focusing on His promises, resources, and strength, which He gives in Christ through Word and Sacrament.

So, what does this resolve have to do with the Book of Nehemiah?

In 2 Timothy 3:16, the apostle Paul says that “all Scripture is breathed out by God” and profitable in many ways. He never said that some parts of Scripture are more beneficial than others.

Nehemiah's narrative provides a window through which we can observe how Nehemiah persevered against great odds and enemy attacks. His attitude and actions offer insight into how you and I can respond to the struggles—the one things—in our lives.

The purpose of this study is not to emulate a person from Scripture but rather to examine Nehemiah to learn from him and perhaps apply those lessons to our own lives.

It is important to note that the Book of Nehemiah is not solely about perseverance. Nehemiah's overarching purpose reveals part of God's greater plan of salvation, which He ultimately brings about in Jesus Christ. The

Book of Nehemiah makes known God's work and how He worked through Nehemiah to restore Jerusalem's walls and His people to Himself.

As we walk through this study, it is crucial to keep in mind that Nehemiah's work was incomplete. Despite his efforts, the people continued to rebel. They needed constant prompting to return to the Lord (just like you and me!).

Nevertheless, how can God use ancient accounts of dusty building projects to teach us modern-day applications about perseverance? What profitable lessons can we glean from a cupbearer holding a privileged position?

The better question to ask is this: *What will God teach me about perseverance through His inspired Word contained in the Book of Nehemiah?*

Paul answers that question in Romans 15:4: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Hope is vital. I think we could all use a lot more hope in our day-to-day one-thing struggles.

The writer of Hebrews called hope an "anchor for the soul" (6:19). Such a vivid image paints steadfastness and confidence despite life's maelstroms.

How is rebuilding a wall or mending gates relevant to tackling our one thing? Oh, dear reader, there is *so much relevance*.

Through faith given to him by God, Nehemiah prayed and persevered so that God's people once again had a secure place to worship God and study His Word in community.

The incredible story of Nehemiah reveals that those who love God and are called according to His purpose are avid students of the Word, diligent in prayer, and fearless to persevere against the sin—that one thing—that God has brought to light.

Nehemiah rearranged *his entire life* from the moment God burdened his heart and issued his call. That's impressive, but what strikes me most about Nehemiah is his *perseverance*.

We can observe the specific steps Nehemiah took as he persevered. Perhaps we can apply these steps in our lives, as well. By the grace of God, I have done that very thing and experienced truly amazing strides regarding my one thing. I will share more as we progress through this study.

Enemies will oppose us at every turn. They certainly kept throwing roadblocks in front of Nehemiah. But Nehemiah offers insightful lessons to cast a compelling vision that draws people to our corner, fully committed to God and the goal.

Nehemiah was an exiled Jew serving as cupbearer to the Persian king. Just an ordinary person like you and me. But when God burdened Nehemiah's heart to rebuild the destroyed walls around the city of Jerusalem, Nehemiah accomplished the extraordinary in God's name.

He prayed, fasted, set goals, and flung himself after that task wholeheartedly, trusting God to lead the charge.

God can do the same for us.

As we seek the Lord in prayer and the Word through these pages, I ask that you put a name on your one thing.

In God's strength, we rely on His guidance to persevere against our one thing—not because of our willpower, which is faulty, but because of the unwavering perseverance provided by the Lord God Almighty.

Our sinful nature and choices certainly play a significant role. We will look more closely at that in day 4 of session 2.

It is essential to understand that when we read through the entire Book of Nehemiah, later chapters beyond the scope of this study reveal that Nehemiah had to eventually return to Jerusalem to redo much of what he accomplished because the people did not diligently persevere. They fell back into sinful patterns. This has always been true in the life of God's people—including you and me.

There is the daily cycle of sin, repentance, and being restored by God's grace. Ultimate success, including ultimate success over our one thing, will come only when Christ comes again and makes all things new.

It may seem discouraging to know that ultimate success eludes us despite faith-filled perseverance. But take heart! By His grace, He enables us to make wiser choices each day as we remain faithful in prayer and the study of His Word.

We have the only true hope in the promise of Christ that He conquers all things. In Him, our one-thing struggle will one day be put to rest. Meanwhile, we persevere in the strength He provides, trusting His promise of ultimate victory in the day of Christ.

You may believe that your life is far too busy to try to face that sin and tackle your one thing right now. Your schedule is already too challenging and packed, thank you very much.

Believe me, I get it. *Really*. Threading time through a needle comes down to a question of priority. But I encourage you to prayerfully, honestly try because countless benefits are worth the investment of your time.

Since only He can change your life and provide needed strength to persevere against our sin—our one thing— I urge you to faithfully complete each week. Ask God daily what He wants you to learn and apply. Ask Him to help you in your efforts.

By the time you turn the last page in this study, I pray that God has moved you from the chair of complacency to God-honoring perseverance!

Let our journey begin.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY



You can walk through this study in a variety of ways: on your own, in a small group, during family discussions, or in Sunday Bible classes. But may I challenge you beyond your comfort zone? Consider stepping out and asking some friends to join you in this study. Encourage your church's small-group ministry to walk through this together. Ask your pastor to offer it as an adult Bible class. Gather some neighbors in your home.

Persevering through life and our journey of faith is not easy, but linking arms around the Word to encourage and cheer one another on can make all the difference. The more we gather in community to grow in faith and daily persevere, the more influence we as Christ-followers will have on the fabric of society.

Each lesson provides valuable tools for exploring important aspects of your faith walk with other believers who also desire spiritual growth regarding perseverance. During this process, you will get to know one another, your stories, struggles, and faith journey. Some stories will be similar, while some will differ greatly from your own, but my hope is that they will provide you with a fresh perspective.

If you are walking through this study individually, take your time. Each week revolves around a particular set of passages from Nehemiah in order to understand the context. Work through each lesson carefully, allowing time for God to move you through at your own pace. But keep moving!

If you are walking through this study with a small group, one person should be designated as the group facilitator. He or she does not need to have prior training in leading a Bible study or discussion group, just the ability to keep the discussion on track.

Sessions conclude with time in your small group and a video segment, guiding you to dig into Scripture together and engage in meaningful discussion as you explore God's truth and life application for that week's topic.

As your group exchanges insights, diligently pray for God to expand your understanding of Scripture and deepen the bonds of faith, friendship, and Christ-centered purpose in your group.

Each small group's dynamics and study pace will vary. Some groups may complete an entire session each time they meet. Others may take their time to get as far in a session as time allows and then pick up where they left off at their next gathering. This study may take eight weeks or eight months, but the most important focus is learning and growing in faith.

And let's be honest, the learning and application of perseverance is a lifelong process.

Now that your plan is in place, you are ready to embark on the journey! I pray that through this study, God transforms you more and more into the likeness of His Son.



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ASSESSING THE SITUATION

.....

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

NEHEMIAH 1:1-3

DAY 1

NEHEMIAH'S SITUATION

• • • • •

Before writing this study, I was not very familiar with the intricacies of the Old Testament Book of Nehemiah. Since you may find yourself in a similar situation, let's start by looking at it from a bird's-eye view.

CONTEXT

The Book of Nehemiah is classified as a historical book and reveals the fulfillment of God's prophecies to rebuild Jerusalem's walls after they sat in ruin for decades following the exile.

Nehemiah led the third of three waves of exiles returning to their homeland: the first was led by Zerubbabel around 538 BC (Ezra 1–6), the second by Ezra around 458 BC (Ezra 7–10), and the third by Nehemiah around 445 BC (Nehemiah 1–2).

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

The returned exiles had been in Jerusalem for more than seventy years, yet the city walls remained as piles of rubble. Upon learning about the condition of his fellow Jews, Nehemiah became very distressed, so he leveraged his trusted position with King Artaxerxes to travel to Jerusalem and help.

Nehemiah secured the king's permission, along with necessary supplies, and arrived in Jerusalem to mobilize the people for the rebuilding project.

Opposition reared its ugly head from both inside and outside the city, yet he faithfully persevered. God gave the talents and position to Nehemiah that allowed him to successfully complete that gargantuan project in *less than two months*.

Even though the task must have seemed daunting to Nehemiah, he did not waste time complaining or wallowing in despair. He took action! He began by praying for God to bring success and provide the strength to cope.

JERUSALEM'S WALL

One of the most fascinating travel days I ever experienced was exploring inside the ancient walls of Jerusalem in 2010. The old stone streets and facades stood unchanged after thousands of years. It felt like stepping back in time.

Inside those ancient walls, shopkeepers conducted business, farmers sold colorful fruit and vegetables, and tailors offered silk scarves. It was a loud, colorful, multisensory experience.

As I wrote this study, I tried to imagine that lively, bustling city with only rubble for walls. The cozy vibrancy would have been noticeably absent.

Why was it so important to rebuild Jerusalem's wall? Modern US cities offer little, if any, meaningful comparison, but in Nehemiah's day, a city's wall served as an integral part of its defensive structure. It protected the people, as well as the temple and its priests, whom God used to minister to the people's spiritual needs. In fact, to "possess the gate" of a city was ultimately to control the city itself (Genesis 24:60).

A restored, rebuilt city wall around Jerusalem would help ensure that the spiritual life of God's people would be less likely interrupted by enemy raids.

NEHEMIAH'S POSITION: CUPBEARER TO THE KING

To be a king's cupbearer was a coveted position. The cupbearer was usually the chief financial officer and bearer of the signet ring (or seal), and he tasted the king's wine before it was served to ensure it had not been poisoned.

The signet ring served as the king's official signature in the ancient world. Imagine the misuse of power at stake if the cupbearer lacked the highest moral character.

Nehemiah's position was one of privilege, worldly comforts, extravagance, and influence. Yet we will discover that he was a God-fearing man of great character, compassion, and prayer.

Do you believe those characteristics are important for people in positions of influence? Explain.

Are they important both inside and outside the Church? Explain.

For all practical purposes, the only person Nehemiah answered to was King Artaxerxes. We will learn more about him later. But that brings up a significant point for us. To whom (besides our King of kings) are you accountable?

Do you believe that those to whom you are accountable would consider you to be of high moral character? Why or why not?

Nehemiah’s godly character repeatedly and consistently rose to the surface. In order to follow God’s call, Nehemiah left his privileged position to travel to a strange land and tackle a daunting task. Nehemiah needed *perseverance*.

How would you define *perseverance* in your own words?

The dictionary definition of *perseverance* is “steady persistence in a course of action, a purpose, a state, etc., especially in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement.”

As we will see throughout this study, God gave Nehemiah the eyes to see a problem and the faith to rely on Him to solve it. I pray that, through his example, you learn valuable lessons that you can apply to your one thing as well.

PERSONAL PONDERING

[illegible]

DAY 2

ASSESSING YOUR SITUATION

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My perseverance journey started several months ago as I stepped on the scale after yet another failed “healthy lifestyle” attempt. The egregious number blaring up at me seemed to confirm the lie I had already believed for years: *This is just who I am.*

I slunked off the scale, walked into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator in search of my usual comfort food, and stopped midreach. Then I got mad at myself. *Really mad.*

That’s when Satan started his usual attack: *What’s wrong with you? Why can’t you get a handle on this? Everyone else seems to balance their lives without a problem. I thought you were strong in the Lord? Isn’t He listening? Don’t you trust Him? You quitter!*

Ouch.

I used to believe that I had an issue with food. Then God put a wise, godly friend in my path who helped me understand that was not accurate. My real struggle is what food *represents* to me.

When I was a girl, every so often our family fell on hard times as Dad’s career ebbed and flowed. Sometimes our refrigerator was almost bare. I remember splitting a lettuce and mayonnaise sandwich with Mom as we sat in front of an open, empty refrigerator the night that we moved into yet another house. I still remember the eerie glow of the refrigerator light that cast a strange shadow around the unfamiliar kitchen, and we ate in silence.

During high school, I remained height and weight proportionate because of my activity in the marching band and living an active teenage life. But once I graduated and struck out on my own, my activity level changed. I landed a desk job with no exercise built in and still ate all the junk I wanted.

Without really understanding why, I found that the refrigerator in my small apartment always needed to be full. It didn't matter if my rent would be a few days late. A full refrigerator meant *security*. It meant having enough.

No matter what happened, I never wanted my stomach to growl. The sensation invariably threw me back in front of that empty refrigerator in the eerie light with Mom, wondering if there would be anything there for the next meal.

In essence, food became my comfort. *For everything*. When I was happy or sad, living in plenty or want, food made everything right. The shelter of food became an unhealthy stronghold.

But let's be clear: my root problem was not food—it was my sinful reliance on a false god. Essentially, food became my god and has been for decades. Instead of God as my stronghold, my mighty fortress, the idol of food had slithered onto the throne of my life.

Thankfully, that same wise friend pointed out that “diets” often deprive us, so a growling stomach is par for the course. God used my friend's simple words to clarify a decades-long struggle. *No wonder every diet failed!*

Once my true struggle was finally clear to me—the sin of gluttony and embracing a false god of food—that fresh insight was significant and served as a catalyst to wholeheartedly persevere toward that one thing: a healthy lifestyle. *Not a diet*. A lifestyle of balanced meals and healthy snacks that keep a growling stomach at bay. For now, my exercise is simply walking through my neighborhood or taking the two flights of stairs at work instead of an elevator.

For the first time in my life, I am beginning to see real, lasting progress. It's slow, which can be frustrating, but steady as she goes is the key. Rome wasn't built in a day, right?

In the midst of my struggle, God had to convict me that my problem went far deeper than a surface issue regarding what food represented. I bet your one thing goes deeper too. My problem is a sin problem. The answer is forgiveness in Christ. Even our persevering is a gift from God—a gift He faithfully provides as we are nourished through His Word and at His table of forgiveness.

Successfully accomplishing any goal involves accurate assessment of the situation.

We all have one thing—a goal or struggle—that has lingered in our lives for years. And no matter what method we use or determination we expend, it is a source of shame, guilt, and failure.

Only the Gospel can bring about the restoration we need. Only the Gospel gives us what we need to persevere. Only Christ provides the strength to stay the course.

IDENTIFYING YOUR ONE THING

In order to understand perseverance, you need to put a face on your one thing. What goal to accomplish or struggle to overcome has God laid on your heart? Be specific.

Do you believe persevering regarding your one thing will be relatively short (a few months) or a long haul (years or perhaps the rest of your life)? Explain.

Since I am more than a little overweight, my perseverance journey will be a long one. And since my sin struggle goes beyond skin-deep, it will last my lifetime. That realization is a breakthrough as well. In the past, I always pressured myself to be skinnier *immediately*.

For the first time in thirty years, I know that God has equipped me with the truth about my struggle—a powerful tool for lasting change. God used that wise friend to help me dig down deep, ask hard questions, analyze repetitive behavior patterns, and reach certain conclusions to provide an accurate assessment of my struggle. And may I say—it was hard coming face-to-face with the depths of my pet sin. Perhaps you feel the same way about your one thing.

I have allowed the sin of my one thing to hold me captive instead of embracing the true freedom found only in Christ. Perseverance means pressing on to identify that one thing, acknowledging it for the sin that it is, and relying on God to daily set our feet on the right path.

ENEMY ATTACKS

What we discover throughout the Book of Nehemiah is that we can be faithful to God and still experience relentless enemy attacks. I know, completely unfair, right?

How does Satan, our ultimate enemy and the father of lies, attack you regarding your one thing? Again, be specific.

Our faith is evidenced by how we handle challenges, not whether or not we experience them.

Faith connects us to the limitless power of God and makes all that was impossible now possible. That's the nature of faith.

Scripture not only talks about faith that heals (such as Jesus saying, "Your faith has made you well" [Matthew 9:22]), but it also talks about the importance of persevering faith.

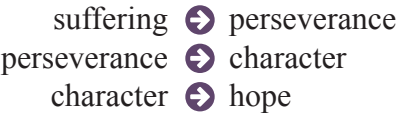
Write out Hebrews 11:1.

Hebrews 11 has been referred to as the Hall of Faith because it lists those who remained faithful to God despite persecution, ridicule, and trials. Reading through Hebrews 11 reveals that those beautiful witnesses persevered through extraordinary challenges.

Persevering faith by nature implies that hoped-for change does not occur immediately. Rather, it is the ability that God gives us to hold to faith in the middle of struggle or stagnation. Persevering (enduring) faith produces character.

Write out Romans 5:3–5.

In this passage, the NIV translation uses the word *perseverance*. There is a clear progression that is important for us to see as we strive against sin—our one thing:



You and I do not struggle in our one thing without hope! Christ died to give us life—abundant life in Him. We do not have to look at our struggle, give up, and say, “I guess this is just who I am.”

Ultimate victory is complete when Christ comes again—that is our hope. But as we persevere in the strength of the Lord, we will experience milestones of progress along the way. For me, that sometimes looks like passing on desert after dinner, taking smaller portions on my plate, and choosing healthy options. Yes, they are small victories, but God provides great encouragement through them!

The truth is that we will fail to consistently persevere. Chances are you, like me, have felt that sting of failure far too often. But those failures don’t have to lead us into defeatist mode and believe that “this is just who I am.” God’s Word encourages us to continually struggle against sin by the power of Christ and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Our identity is in Christ, not in failure. What is our identity according to the following verses?

John 1:12

Genesis 1:27

1 Peter 2:9

Colossians 1:14

God delights in answering our prayers and demonstrating His love over us, but He desires to build us into people of character. As one of my pastors routinely says, “God is far more interested in your character than your comfort.” So very true.

If we struggle to trust Him during the rocky steps of hardship, we will struggle to give Him praise as we experience new milestones along the journey. If we cannot trust Him with loss, we will never trust Him with gain. He desires to build in us the character to stand firm in our relationship with Him despite the opposition.

Understanding that our identity is rooted in victory over sin accomplished by Christ’s death and resurrection makes all the difference. He gives us His Word and perfect strength to navigate disappointment, loss, criticism, and betrayal.

We live in the ultimate victory that Christ won for us on the cross, but experience the daily struggle of temptation and sin, the daily need for repentance and forgiveness, receiving the grace of God at His Table.

Daily perseverance against our one thing comes down to trusting God and His plan for our life.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

DAY 3

UNDERSTANDING PERSEVERANCE

• • • • •

One of the beautiful teachings contained in the Book of Nehemiah is the importance of protecting the Sabbath. In our 24-7-365 technological connectedness, we have lost much of what the Sabbath provides: *rest* and *renewal*.

How can we persevere if we're exhausted?

You may ask what the Sabbath has to do with Nehemiah or perseverance. Precisely this: the Sabbath is connected with the exodus theme. The Israelites who had been trapped in bondage in Egypt worked seven days a week without rest. Their worth was tied to their daily brick count.

When God redeemed the Israelites from Egypt, He gave them the Ten Commandments.

Write out the commandment listed in Exodus 20:8–10.

Everyone is included in Sabbath rest. It is not merely physical rest, but spiritual refreshment as well. God had to reteach the Israelites that it was permissible, even commanded, to rest. In so doing, He lovingly reminded them that their worth was not based on how many bricks they could make.

Sabbath rest provides God's people time to focus on His Word, time for corporate worship, and time to build family and community relationships with one another aside from work.

Our perseverance journey is a lifelong task. Honoring the Sabbath will provide what we desperately need: rested bodies and refreshed minds for the road ahead.

The New Testament addresses perseverance in various ways. The most common is to adhere steadfastly (Acts 8:13; 10:7; Romans 12:12; Colossians 4:2), as well as to be devoted, to continue in something, to be content, to be steadfast, and to persevere.

Do any of those sound instantaneous to you?

In a culture of microwave popcorn and instant grits (yes, I’m from Texas), perseverance suffers. How do we develop perseverance in this day and age?

In the following verses, what does Jesus promise to those who endure?

Matthew 10:22

Matthew 24:13

Our perseverance cannot succeed by depending entirely on our efforts. God is faithful to work in us to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose (Philippians 2:13). We need Him and His endless strength!

So, how do we develop the art or character of persevering? We need four things: tests (trials), truth, time, and trust.

1. TESTS AND TRIALS

We cannot persevere without the severe. Tests and trials include both external troubles (such as persecution: 2 Timothy 3:12; 2 Corinthians 11:24–28) as well as internal struggles (addictive behavior, self-imposed pressure).

According to the following verses, what happens when we persevere?

1 Peter 1:7

James 1:12

Tests and trials are inevitable. They can tear our heart out and make us feel like giving up. But remember, God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

2. TRUTH

Truth provides, among other things, a reason to persevere. We need something solid to hold on to in order to persevere. In a world of gray and relativism, God's truth provides an anchor despite the trials.

Truth is vital. Pilate even asked Jesus, "What is truth?" Truth allows us to persevere in doing the right thing (John 8:31–32) even if everyone else is telling us it's wrong.

Also, persevering in doing what's right means our quest is not empty or in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

According to John 8:32, what is the key?

In school, I hated reading tragedies (like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*) because the hero always had a fatal flaw that eventually destroyed him. We have a fatal flaw that would destroy us, if not for our Savior, Christ, who gained victory over our fatal flaw through His death and resurrection.

3. TIME

A necessary, yet sometimes frustrating component to perseverance is time. If we have struggled with something for a few hours or a few days, we cannot usually classify that as perseverance. Kind of like a child in a long car trip: “Are we there yet?”

Only when sufficient time has gone by can we classify our struggle as perseverance. We may be asking God, “Are we there yet?” for years. Time also allows for repetition. The more we struggle with our one thing, the more God strengthens us to persevere because we know where the tempter lurks.

By God’s grace, our struggles are confined to our time on earth. Whew! Such truth helps us to persevere. Write out the following passages:

Psalm 90:9–10

2 Corinthians 4:17–18

In Philippians 3:13–16, Paul urges us to persevere in straining toward “the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (v. 14). Yes!

4. TRUST

My repeated failure with my one thing proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that I cannot persevere in my own strength or with my own resources. That’s precisely why I have failed. Persevering well means acknowledging the struggle as the sin it is and trusting the Lord to provide the strength we need every single moment.

Look up Proverbs 3:5–6, and finish writing it below using personal pronouns:

Trust in the LORD with all my heart, and do not lean on my

Now read it aloud. Trusting in the Lord means that you understand that your feet are steady in Him despite rocky paths, your future is secure (Psalm 37:5), you have a safe haven (Psalm 62:8), and you shall endure (Psalm 125:1) because God has given you His great strength (Isaiah 41:10). If you have difficulty trusting the Lord to provide the perseverance you need against your one thing, look up these verses and write them out on a separate sheet of paper. Keep it handy as a constant reminder that only God is worthy of your trust.

We live in a world where we will surely have trouble, but Jesus says, “Take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

According to the following verses, in what ways are Christians urged to persevere?

Colossians 4:2

Acts 2:42; 2 Timothy 3:14

1 Corinthians 16:13

John 15:4–10

Hebrews 6:12

Hebrews 3:12; 4:1–10

2 Peter 1:10

The last verse in this list is particularly applicable to our Nehemiah study because Nehemiah trusted God to confirm his call. God called Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, not for his benefit, but for the benefit of God's people. Then God provided Nehemiah with all he needed to be successful in that endeavor.

When you and I trust in the Lord to confirm our calling through His Word to persevere against our one thing, we can be assured that He will faithfully provide all we need to persevere for His glory.

PERSONAL PONDERING

[illegible]

DAY 4

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PERSEVERANCE, PERSISTENCE, AND PATIENCE

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As I was researching to write this study, I asked my best friend to pray and let me know any insights that God gave her regarding perseverance.

The very next day, she texted me this question: “What is the difference between perseverance, persistence, and patience? They seem the same, but different.”

What a *great* question! How would you define them?

Perseverance—

Persistence—

Patience—

I had never taken time to differentiate them, and chances are neither have you. Clarifying the difference is highly valuable in our quest to understand perseverance.

In order to understand whether others also struggle to differentiate them, I took the issue to social media. On December 20, 2017, I polled my Facebook friends:

I'm up for a thought-provoking discussion. How would you differentiate patience, persistence, and perseverance? Clearly different, but same? How so? I'd love to hear your wisdom.

Literally hundreds of responses came in with a *wealth* of amazing insights. (I encourage you to add me as a Facebook friend and go back in my posts to find this particular discussion. It is truly incredible.)

The general consensus of those who responded was twofold: (1) All three take faith; and (2) patience is passive, while persistence and perseverance are active.

Would you agree? Why or why not?

As I read through the responses, it became clear that contentment was often at the core. People tended to be patient if they were content with themselves, their life trajectory, their circumstances, and what God had given them that day.

A few people responded that even though they relied on the Lord, patience was more a test of strength—of sitting back and waiting—where persistence and perseverance required a response. Basically, passive versus active.

Do you find that to be true in your one thing? How? If not, why not?

One friend, Carol, who struggled through cancer, offered this invaluable insight:

I was a patient patient, but I also persevered through surgery, recovery, and chemo. Now I am persistent in finding different ways of dealing with the effects of chemo. Being patient was sometimes the most difficult thing, but also the one that took less physical and mental strength. They all three paid off. [I am] seven months post-surgery and one month cancer free. Now I just need to be persistent during all the future tests that will be happening for the rest of my life. It's my new normal, and thank God I have this new normal to deal with.

My friend Deborah put it like this:

In this world we need perseverance to endure the trials and tribulations; persistence to work through them; and patience through it all, knowing that in the end, it was all part of God's plan.

Then my friend Leslie added these wise thoughts:

I think of these in relation to Hebrews 12:1–2. Patience is waiting on God's timing. Think of it as the start of the race, waiting for the starting gun. I don't think it is passive since trust, faith, and anticipation are still engaged. Knowing something will happen, just not when.

Persistence is the intentional stubbornness we embrace while exhibiting patience. It can be passive or active, depending on the situation. In a race, it is the determination of staying the course, maintaining focus on the end goal.

Perseverance is seeing the fruition of the patience and persistence. It is the conquering of doubt and completing the race that has been set before us. Reaching the goal without faltering, holding on to God, who provides all we need to succeed, even though we are tired, hurting, or longing for peace. And the faith that it can only come from Him.

Friend and fellow Concordia Publishing House author Heidi Goehmann put it like this:

I hear various levels of struggle in them. Patience feels like grocery store clerks, moms trying to get kids to put their shoes on, etc. Persistence feels like goals and fighting past roadblocks. Perseverance feels like hard stuff, fighting the good fight, crying through it, and diving in where there is risk—Aaron holding up Moses’ arms kind of stuff.

When thinking through the similarities and differences between patience, persistence, and perseverance, several other helpful responses came in:

Mark: Are persistence and perseverance possible without patience? If I am impatient, I have little desire to persist or persevere.

Ann: To me, the difference is that patience is more internal whereas persistence and perseverance are more external actions. To be patient is to yield in submission, calm and at peace, in the midst of the situation. Persistence succeeds. Perseverance is staying the course to the very end.

Teresa: Okay, a bit of a funny look. Patience—I have none. Persistence—I will keep on keeping on and not give up. Perseverance—I will endure with God’s help. [I love Teresa’s humor and honesty!]

Nancy: Patience is like waiting in a doctor’s office. Persistence is like a child wanting a toy in a store. Perseverance is like a cat with a blue jay constantly pecking at its back.

Jessica: Patience is waiting while God works. Persistence is forging ahead at God’s leading. Perseverance is standing your ground firm in the faith and not giving up. I think sometimes, most times, you’re doing all three at once. They’re three cords woven together, aren’t they?

As you read those comments, what did you find helpful regarding your one thing?

It may seem odd, but differentiating patience, persistence, and perseverance hit me most clearly in regard to dating. If you are single or single again, perhaps you can relate.

Patience looks like waiting on God's timing to send a special someone into our lives—if that is even His plan. Just waiting, with no forward momentum. It means knowing that God may want your undistracted attention on Him for the rest of your days as a single person. Some have classified my patience in this relationship area as trust, others as complacency, and others as fear. (I'll let you decide.) Persistence looks like this: no matter how many negative responses we get or dating experiences we endure, we stand up, shake off the dust, and dive in again.

Perseverance looks like striving to pursue and make space for a relationship instead of sitting idly by. Perhaps that looks like letting friends set you up on blind dates or joining an online dating site.

On a personal note, I find it interesting that when it comes to relationships, people overwhelmingly want me to move forward instead of being patient. I have heard my patience classified as laziness, apathy, and fear, to name a few. Granted, divorce brings truth to the saying “once bitten, twice shy,” but careful consideration should never disintegrate into careless abandon.

In contrast, in every other area of life, people are perfectly happy giving my patience space.

You and I are whole in Christ. A human being cannot fill that role. We are not half of a person seeking another half to complete us. Christ alone completes us and makes us whole. In His loving grace, He often sends those special someones into our lives. But do not fall for the enemy's lie that you are incomplete without one. Talk about an unhealthy breeding ground for dissatisfaction and discontentment! God has a unique calling on each of our lives based on the gifts, talents, and experiences that He has provided for His good and perfect purposes.

As we follow Nehemiah's quest to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, we will see all three at work: patience, persistence, and perseverance. Even though patience can be passive (much like endurance), patience can also be active (like perseverance), which Nehemiah's prayer later in chapter 1 clearly reveals.

In every situation, Nehemiah relied completely on God's timing, provision, and plan. No matter our situation, I pray that God gives us the strength to be as faithful.

PERSONAL PONDERING

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DAY 5

HOPE FOR THE BROKEN AND BURNED

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As we learned in day 1, ancient city walls provided safety and security for a city's inhabitants. The walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and had lain in ruins for over a century. *A century.* God decided it was time for a change.

Read Nehemiah 1:3.

What had happened to Jerusalem?

Nehemiah was a Jewish man, born in Persia during the exile, which meant that he had relatives in Jerusalem. His ancestors were buried in Jerusalem. Nehemiah 1:2 refers to Hanani as Nehemiah's brother. Scholars are divided on whether or not Hanani and Nehemiah were blood brothers or simply brothers in the faith. But they were brothers nonetheless.

Hanani's report to Nehemiah must have sounded like a broken record. *Nope, the wall is not fixed yet.*

In Nehemiah 1:4, how did Nehemiah respond to the news?

***Nehemiah wept.* God burdened his heart for the city and its broken state. In the New Testament, Jesus’ heart was also burdened over Jerusalem. What did Jesus do in Luke 19:41?**

Jesus wept. He also lamented over Jerusalem in Luke 13:34–35. In both instances, Jesus was weeping or lamenting over Jerusalem’s lost opportunity. God’s people who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover missed the opportunity to be saved from earthly and eternal destruction.

The promised Messiah had arrived, but they did not recognize Him. Instead of receiving their Savior, they killed Him.

Nehemiah wept over Jerusalem and over lost opportunity as well. God’s people were living in great shame and trouble. Even though some of the exiles had returned nearly a century before, the city walls and gates still lay destroyed.

Scripture does not record that Nehemiah had ever visited Jerusalem prior to rebuilding the wall—yet he wept. Living in this broken world, your heart has likely been broken over situations that have personally affected you. However, has your heart ever broken over the suffering of others? If so, what was it? How did God resolve it?

Nehemiah’s heart broke for people he had most likely never met. There were people living within Jerusalem who had no first-hand memory of a time when their walls were not torn down and the gates not burned. Can

you imagine? It would have been a constant struggle to maintain a sense of national unity or pride amid such rubble.

Going back one verse to Nehemiah 1:3, three words about God's people in Jerusalem are significant. They had "survived the exile." They were the remnant, but they were also *survivors*. The word *survivor* usually brings two things to mind: hardship and hope.

HARDSHIP

When someone is referred to as a survivor, it usually means that they have gone through a very unpleasant ordeal. We hear of people surviving cancer, accidents, or even genocide.

Several years ago, not long after a co-worker lost her mom to cancer, my co-worker was herself diagnosed with cancer. She and her husband were a young couple with two young children, so they opted to fight it.

Thankfully, the doctors caught her cancer early, so after months of radiation, surgery, and chemotherapy, she was pronounced cancer-free. All seemed to be well. Then their young son was diagnosed with cancer.

How much hardship can one family take? Even though she has since changed jobs and we are no longer co-workers, I keep apprised of her situation through mutual friends. Their son is still fighting cancer, and has even had a Make-a-Wish Foundation wish come to fruition. But their battle is far from over.

**Have you ever faced one hardship after another? What were they?
What happened?**

Chances are, you feel like a survivor as well. The first place we turn during hardship makes all the difference. Nehemiah turned to the Lord. He wept, mourned, and fasted for months.

Where did you turn during your hardships? How did it help or hurt your situation?

The sin struggle over our one thing can be the biggest hardship of our entire life and remain a thorn in our side for the rest of our earthly days. Have you turned to God as you struggle with your one thing? If so, how? for how long?

Prayer is the key. Hardship and hurt causes us to rethink our thoughts and actions. But there is no pain we suffer that Christ has not personally experienced.

We will see in session 2 that Nehemiah was a man of prayer who abided in God’s Word. We will take an in-depth look at prayer next week. Nehemiah knew that no matter what great shame and trouble the world throws at God’s children, there is always hope.

HOPE

The second thing that usually comes to mind when we hear the word *survivor* is hope. Hope that someone survived the hardship. That all was not destroyed or lost. Even though Nehemiah’s people lived in less-than-ideal conditions, they had survived. Where there is survival, there is always hope.

How have you felt like a survivor simply because you faithfully relied on the Lord to persevere over your one thing just one more day? Be specific.

We feel like survivors, and that we certainly are. Survivors of this world, preserved for the next thanks to the redemptive work of Christ on the cross.

Our life in Christ is empowered by the faith that He gives us, yet also sustained by hope.

According to Romans 5:2–5, what does hope do for us?

Our secured hope is rooted in the faithfulness of God, who equips and enables us to survive the storms of this life. Hope is a life preserver regardless of the weather. Simply put, without hope, people give up.

Fast-forward in Nehemiah's narrative a little further. Nehemiah eventually arrives in Jerusalem and tells the people that God has sent him to restore their walls and city gates. Talk about hope for the survivors!

The walls of Jerusalem had been broken down and its gates destroyed by fire, but God was not finished with that story. And He is not finished with ours. There is a 100 percent survival rate for all who turn to Christ by faith. In Him, we are protected, preserved, and ultimately victorious.

If you are struggling today with your one thing, know that God is not finished with your story yet. You are a *survivor*.

The enemy attacks our walls and burns our gates to rob us of dignity and identity. We try to cover our sin to excuse. Satan exploits our sin to accuse. But Christ forgives our sin to reuse for good what we thought was destroyed.

Jesus lived the perfect life we couldn't to give us a new identity in Him. We are loved, secure, and treasured.

And even though you are enduring hardship on your perseverance journey, He gives you hope in Him and His faithful promises. Because with God, *nothing* is impossible.

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VIEWER GUIDE

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SESSION 1: ASSESSING THE SITUATION

Nehemiah 1:1–3

- Habit to break
- Addiction to conquer
- Goal to accomplish
- Long-standing project to finish
- Degree to complete
- Relationship to restore, or a toxic one to end
- Debt to retire

Assess your situation.

Perseverance: to be devoted; to continue in something; to be content; to be steadfast; to persevere

Romans 5:3–5

There is **hope** for the broken and burned.

VERSES TO BOOKMARK

Locate the following
verses in your Bible prior
to starting the video.

Romans 5:3–5