

Main Idea: There’s a statement in Nehemiah 8 that should shape the way we live in 2020. *Bring out the Book*. We need the Book in 2020. In Nehemiah 8 we find an illustration of the inherent power of God’s self-revelation. It’s the account of a tremendous revival that occurred in the fifth century BC, produced by the ministry of the Book.

- I. We see the importance of the Book (1-4).
 - A. Notice what the people did (1).
 1. They assembled.
 2. They asked to hear the Book.
 - B. Notice what Ezra did (2-4).
 1. He brought the Law (2).
 2. He read the Law (3).
 3. He stood on a platform (4).
- II. We see the appropriate response to the Book (5-12).
 - A. There was reverence (5).
 - B. There was worship (6).
 - C. There was explanation (7-8).
 - D. There was implementation (9-12).
 1. We’re told what Nehemiah did (9-10).
 2. We’re told what the Levites did (11).
 3. We’re told what the people did (12).

Implications: Lessons from Nehemiah 8...

1. We must hold the Book in high esteem.
2. We must be convinced that the Book always produces an effect on people.
3. We must seek to keep the Book at the center of our lives.

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 8

There’s a statement in Nehemiah 8 that should shape the way we live in 2020. *Bring out the Book*. We need the Book in 2020. We need to bring out the Book personally. We need to do it as a church. This community needs for us to bring out the Book. So does the world.

There is no book like the Book. I was in college when I heard a chapel speaker, Don Jennings, quote the following. I’m not sure who wrote it, but it expresses my heart’s desire.

*Though the cover is worn, and the pages are
torn, and though places bear traces of tears,
yet more precious than gold is this Book worn
and old, that can shatter and scatter my fears.*

*This old Book is my guide, it's a friend by my
side, it will lighten and brighten my way; and
each promise I find soothes and gladdens the
mind, as I read it and heed it each day.*

*When I prayerfully look, in the precious old Book,
Many pleasures and treasures I see;
Many tokens of love, from the Father above,
Who is nearest and dearest to me.*

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Wednesday Bible study series at WBC in 2001.

*To this Book I will cling, of its worth I will sing,
though great losses and crosses be mine; for I
cannot despair, though surrounded by care,
while possessing this blessing divine.*

Bring out the Book! That's my new year's challenge as we begin 2020. Bring out the Book personally, every day. Be intentional about your time in the Book this year. I'll have more to say about this later, but I don't think it's wise to let your smart phone or tablet be your primary source for your Bible. There are too many inherent distractions. Get a copy of the Book and let it become your best friend. Get to know the feel of its pages, the location of key verses on those pages. Mark up that Book, highlight key words that stand out, make notes in the margins of lessons learned, write down dates of when the Spirit of God taught you particular truths. I want to share my own daily practice with you at the end.

Also, bring out the Book in your homes. Read it together. Talk about it together. Memorize it together.

And of course, bring out the Book in this church. For starters, bring your Bible to church. Again, there's nothing wrong with using a Bible app to supplement what you do with the Book, which I do myself. But you're robbing yourself of a multitude of blessings if you don't literally bring out the Book, and that includes at church.

Pray for our missionaries this year as they're seeking to make the message of the Book known to the nations. Spend time in your Sunday School classes praying for them.

Make it priority this year to bring out the Book. Bring it out with your friends and neighbors this year. Ask them if they would like to study the Book with you and get to know better the Author of the Book. Look for ways to help others bring out the Book too. Plug into existing ministries like CRADLE and Kids Club and our Monday CDT that bring out the Book. Consider launching a new ministry that aims to help others get in the Book. We're looking at some changes in our Wednesday evening Bible study time, perhaps moving it to the Community Center and offering some seminars on biblical topics (like parenting) that would be of interest to people in the community.

What happens when we bring out the Book? What difference will it make in our lives if we give God's Word the place it deserves? That's what I want us to see this morning.

This Book is so powerful that the very reading of it can transform lives. That's what happened in today's text. In Nehemiah 8 we see the inherent power of God's self-revelation at work. It's the account of a tremendous revival that occurred in the fifth century BC, produced by the ministry of the Book.

The Setting:

- A remnant of God's people returned from captivity. That's Nehemiah 1-2.
- The Wall is done. That's Nehemiah 3-6.
- A problem surfaced in Nehemiah 7. The city of Jerusalem has a wall around it, but there were few people living in it (7:4). Nehemiah began to address this problem by taking a roll call of the Jews back in the land which he recorded in 7:6ff.
- Then came the seventh month (7:73b)...

The seventh month was the month of Tishri and occurred in September/October. It was one of the most sacred months in the Jewish calendar (see Lev 23:23ff.).

Day 1 – verses 1-12 (also mentioned in Ezra 3:1)

Day 2 – verses 13-18

Day 24 – chapter 9 (9:1ff.)

Our focus pertains to what happened on Day 1, October 8, 444 BC. Notice verse 1 “All the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.”

We’re going to see two things today from this text, and here’s the first.

I. We see the importance of the Book (1-4).

The Book’s importance is demonstrated in two ways. First...

A. Notice what the people did (1). Two things...

1. They assembled. Where? “In the square before the Water Gate.”

Don’t miss the location. We’ll talk more about it in a moment.

Why did they assemble? We’re not told. Perhaps it was in accordance with God’s command in Leviticus 23:24, “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts.’”

Though it’s not so called in the Bible, today the first day of the seventh month is called Rosh Hashanah, “the beginning of the year,” the Jewish New Year. “With no calendars available, the trumpets sounding across the land were an important signal of the beginning of the new season.”²

What did they do after they gathered together? How did they choose to begin their new year?

2. They asked to hear the Book. “They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses.” There’s something special about this Book. It’s self-evident, although apart from the Holy Spirit’s illumination the natural man considers it foolishness (1 Cor 2:14).

What makes the Book so? It has to do with its twofold source. First, it’s called “the Law of Moses,” in other words, the Torah. Today we possess the completed canon, all sixty-six books, but they asked for the first five books, the ones Moses recorded.

But Moses didn’t originate this Book. What’s the source of this Book according to the end of verse 1? “Which the Lord commanded for Israel.” Moses wrote what the Lord commanded. When you hear this Book read, you are hearing the very words of God Himself.

What a great scene! The people are requesting to hear God’s Word! Friends, this is what every person needs, even those who presently don’t know they need it. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

Sadly, many churches are neglecting this reality. They’re offering hungry people many things, but failing to give them what they need most. Bring out the Book!

You say, “Why am I not hungry for the Bible?”

² NIV Study Bible, note, p. 175.

I think John Piper answers that question well in his book, *A Hunger for God*. “If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great.”³

Piper elaborates, “The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night.”⁴

If we want “Bring out the Book” to become our heart’s cry in 2020, we need to stop nibbling at the table of the world, or as my mother used to say, no candy before supper. Friends, this is reality. I’m not very hungry for the Book after I watch You-tube for 45 minutes. Nothing wrong with You-tube and Facebook and a video game, any more than a good book or a television show. But they’re candy, not the meal. No candy before supper in 2020.

B. Notice what Ezra did (2-4). Verses 2–4 “So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. ³ He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. ⁴ Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriaah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.”

The text mentions three activities.

1. *He brought the Law (2).* From where? We’re not told (the temple?). For whom? For the assembly, which was comprised of men and women and everyone that was able to understand (which seems to indicate that children over a certain age were there too).

2. *He read the Law (3).* He read it *aloud*. This was the public reading of the Scriptures. For how long? From daybreak till noon. What’s that? About five to six hours?

And where was it read? “As he faced the square before the Water Gate.” Notice that the Book is being read, not in the temple courts, but at the Water Gate. The gate was where community decisions were made (like our Court House).

Think of the significance of the location of the reading. The nation is in trouble. Why? Because of matters pertaining to real estate. The city of Jerusalem has a new wall around it but the people aren’t moving there. What’s the solution to a real estate dilemma? They’re not sure. So where do they go to find the answer? To an economics seminar? No. They read the Book, and not in the house of worship but where they do business. They get the Book out into the public sector because that’s where they need it.

Are we going to face any problems in 2020? For sure. Where should we turn? We call our Monday evening course “Biblical Answers for the Problems of Life” for this very reason. In this Book God tells us what we need to know, about marriage problems,

³ John Piper, *A Hunger For God*

⁴ John Piper, *A Hunger For God*

and parenting, and dealing with fear, anxiety, and everything pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

Who listened to the reading? Notice the repetition of the phrase, “in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand.” Everyone who had the ability to understand was there, listening to the reading of the Book.

How did they respond to the reading? The text specifies, “And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.” Notice that word. *Attentively*. They gave God’s Word their full attention. They are choosing *not* to do other things, even legitimate things (like chatting with their neighbor, or planning next week’s menu), in order to give their undivided attention to the Book.

And for how long? From daybreak till noon. Was this easy to do? No. It took intentionality and work, and a little help according to verse 4.

3. *He stood on a platform (4)*. “Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion.” It was *high* so people could see the one speaking and hear what he was saying. It was *wooden* as opposed to a rock ledge because someone invested the time, effort, and resources to build this. And the words “for the occasion” indicates there was planning that preceded and prepared the way for this significant reading of the Book.

So Ezra spoke from a platform. This says something about the way he and his people viewed *the Book*.

Have you thought recently about how furniture is picked and placed in a church? Show me the furniture in the front of a church’s sanctuary, and I’ll tell you something about that church. The furniture sends a message. What’s the central piece of furniture in this room? It’s the piece of furniture where the Book is placed and read.

That’s not true of all churches. In some churches what catches your eye is the video screen, or the orchestra pit, or the table where the mass is observed. Don’t miss the significance. Architecture speaks loudly, and it’s not just about function and beauty. It’s telling you what that church values.

Why did they build a platform? So the people could hear the Book. It’s tough enough for our carnal minds to focus when there distractions in the room, so they designed a piece of furniture to get rid of distractions.

Again, is it sinful to use your smart phone for your morning devotions? Certainly not. But you know it’s coming. It’s going to vibrate, and ding, and ring. Why not do something, like Ezra’s people did, to eliminate the distractions before they occur?

I see something else that’s significant. According to the end of verse 4, there were six men standing on Ezra’s right (Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah and Maaseiah) and seven standing on his left (Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam). Why were they there? We’re not told, but think with me. If for the reading of the Book this morning thirteen men joined me on the platform, would it affect how you listened? It would. How? Aside from the fact that it’s harder to daydream when fourteen sets of eyes are looking at you rather than one, one of these men may be your father or grandfather or neighbor. And by his very presence on the platform he is saying, “This is important. Listen carefully.”

And they did.

II. We see the appropriate response to the Book (5-12).

Four things happened in response to the reading of the Book.

A. There was reverence (5). “Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up.”

How did the people demonstrate their reverence for God’s Word? They stood up. Does this mean we should stand every time we read God’s Word? Some churches do just that, and it’s certainly not a bad practice, although as with any other practice, it won’t be long before you’re standing on the outside and sitting on the inside. The posture of the heart is the real issue.

I see spontaneity here. This isn’t a forced reaction. The people see the Book being opened, this Book they know has come from the God who redeemed them and rescued them from captivity and provided for every other need they have. And they respond with a heartfelt reverence that causes them to stand up.

Reverence. It’s increasingly rare in our irreverent age. And reverence towards the Book? Even more rare. Do you revere this Book? Parents, are you teaching your children how to treat this Book? What do you do when they throw it in the back seat of the car and it slides to the floor? What a great teachable moment.

B. There was worship (6). “Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, ‘Amen! Amen!’ Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.”

So hearing this Book is unlike hearing any other book. This Book, when responded to rightly, produces an adoration for the person and work of God.

That’s worship. Worship is the proper response to God, His Word, and His work. How the people express their worship here? With their whole bodies. Hands lifted. Voices calling out, “It is true! It is true! Amen. Amen.” Bowing down.

And don’t miss what produced this expression of worship. There was no music, no telling of stories that tugged at the heart strings. Simply the reading of the Book.

I don’t think we grasp as we ought the inherent power of this Book. Many today are abandoning the straightforward teaching of God’s Word in search of other methods to produce worship. But if you pull a rabbit out of a hat today, next week it needs to be an elephant, for if we merely give people what their carnal senses demand, they get bored, and want more, and bigger.

No, there’s only one thing that can produce true God-exalting worship. It’s this Book in the hands of the Author of this Book, God the Holy Spirit.

But they didn’t just read the Book. Notice what happened next.

C. There was explanation (7-8). “The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there.⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.”

It’s called expository preaching. Read the Book to people, and then explain the Book for people. Ezra read it, and then thirteen Levites explained it.

Verse 8 is key. We see some important steps that must accompany the reading the Word of God. What are they? First, read it. Second, then make it clear [translate?]. Third, give the meaning. And fourth, make sure the people understand.

That’s what the Levites did with the Book. That’s what every Sunday School teacher, and Kids Club worker, and Youth Leader, and pastor, should do with this Book.

Don't use this Book to say what *you* want to say. Just expose what the Book says, emphasizing the purpose right into the passage you are exposing.

There's a tremendous need for this in our area. There are people today all around us in this community who have heard the Bible but don't *understand* it. This is our passion at WBC, to explain the Book.

Last week we received an email from someone over two hours away who was helped by the teaching of God's Word he found on our website after doing a google search. And there are hundreds and thousands more like him. Would you pray that God will bring them to us? Will you help us find ways to expose people to the inherent power of this Book?

D. There was implementation (9-12). The purpose of explanation is always implementation. The Word must get into our lives. It must affect us where we live as we see it did here...

1. *We're told what Nehemiah did (9-10).* [along with Ezra and the Levites] Verses 9-10 "Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, 'This day is sacred 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. ¹⁰ Nehemiah said, 'Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'"

What had the people been doing in response to hearing God's Word, according to verse 9? They were weeping, apparently convicted by what they were hearing. God's Law ought to convict us for it exposes where we are falling short.

But notice what Nehemiah did. Keep in mind he's not a preacher. He's basically the governor, and he uses his political platform to help his people implement the Book. He and the other teachers told the people *not* to weep. Their tears weren't bad, just insufficient. There was action needed. Obedience. "Go, get something to eat and drink," said Nehemiah. "And share some with those who don't have any. Because this is a sacred day. The joy of the Lord is your strength."

When the people heard the Book, they knew they needed to make some changes. And that overwhelmed them, as it does us. They needed this word of encouragement, as do we. You have the strength you need, but you won't find it within yourself. It comes from joy, the Lord's joy, the joy that the Lord gives, the joy of the Lord.

So the joy doesn't come from the Book, which is why a person can have a doctoral degree in biblical studies and not have joy. Joy comes from knowing the Main Character of the Book, God Himself.

Another group helped with the implementation of the Book.

2. *We're told what the Levites did (11).* Verse 11, "The Levites calmed all the people, saying, 'Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve.'"

This is so practical. People come on Sunday and hear the expositional preaching of the Book. They hear the preacher, but more is needed. They need businessmen, and doctors, and fellow students to come alongside them after the sermon, who will do what Nehemiah and the Levites did. Help the hearer implement the Book. "I see your tears. That's fine. Now be still, stop grieving, and make the joy of the Lord your strength."

I challenge you this year, members of WBC, look around after the Book is preached. Yes, make application to your own life, but help others do the same.

3. *We're told what the people did (12).* “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.”

So the people took to heart what they heard and, get this, they *celebrated*. What was the cause of the celebration? Because they now “understood the words that had been made known to them.”

Friends, we have reason to celebrate every time the doors of this building are opened. It's so frustrating to have a Book that makes no sense to you, and that's true of thousands all over this county. Yet there's reason to celebrate when, by God's grace, you hear the Book and begin to understand the Book, and that happens every week at WBC.

Thanks be to God for opening our eyes to the message of this Book! In this Book we learn that we are sinners, yes, but also what He has done by His grace to take care of our sin problem. We learn about His Son, Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life in our place, then died on the cross to pay sin's penalty, who conquered the grave, and is now seated in heaven, giving eternal life to all who repent and put their faith in Him.

Thanks be to God for the privilege of have the Book and knowing its Author. If you don't know Him, why not today?

Implications: Lessons from Nehemiah 8...

1. *We must hold the Book in high esteem.*

What are some practical things we will do if we truly hold God's Word in high esteem? We see the answer most clearly by looking at Jesus. Jesus was a man of the Book. Think about what Jesus did with the Book.

He read it. He made learning it a priority when He was a boy. Remember when He was twelve? Where was He? In the temple, talking to the teachers of the Law about the Book. He submitted to its authority.

He memorized it. He quoted it. He responded to temptation with it. He taught it. He prayed the Book. He let the Book shape His response to suffering. When He cries, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” He is quoting Psalm 22.

This is what Jesus did with the Book. And He says to us, “Follow Me.”

2. *We must be convinced that the Book always produces an effect on people.* It's like rain coming down to the soil, says Isaiah. It will not return void. It will produce fruit. It will with our children, so make it top priority to get your kids in the Book this year. It will with our neighbors and people we work with, so keep sharing the Book with them. And it will from this pulpit.

This Book always produces an effect on its hearers. Always. Sometimes it softens. Sometimes it hardens. Sometimes it saves. Sometimes it condemns. Please join me in praying in 2020 for a harvest of righteousness from the ministry of the Book.

3. *We must seek to keep the Book at the center of our lives.* It's easy to give the Bible a token spot in our lives. It's another thing to make it the center of every decision we make, every relationship we have, every thought we think.

To do that we need to be intentional about *Bring out the Book* in our lives in 2020. I want to help you do that by being transparent and showing you how I do it. I don't want you to imitate what I do, for we are different people. But I hope you can observe what I do and make applications appropriate to your own life, personality, family dynamics, etc.

I've set up the platform here to look like my study at home in the basement. In the corner room of our basement there is a desk with the Book on it. It's the same Book I've used since 1984 or so. Off to the side are two study Bibles which I may or may not open. On the desk are also two hymnbooks. A folder with memory verses. A pencil and paper. A guitar. A sweatshirt, sweatpants, and running shoes, for once I've exercised my soul, it's time to exercise God's temple.

I'd like to talk about a way to begin your day by talking about how I do. I hesitate to do so because we are all different. But Paul did say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." This is how I begin my day, and I encourage you to consider, modify, improve, but by all means, bring out the Book.

Here are some practical steps to consider.

Pick a place to spend time in the Book. Go to the same place every day, at the same time unless you're sick. Use the same Bible. It's not the Bible I use for my sermon prep and preaching. I'm not looking for sermons to give you. I want to hear what the Lord has to say to me. What needs to change in my life? What does He want me to know about Himself, about myself, about my life and family, etc?

Mark your Bible. Put dates in it so you can look back and see things you've learned in the past, and when you learned them.

Memorize verses that stand out from the Book. Sing them. Meditate on the Book. Use a hymnbook which will in essence help you sing the Book.

Pray the Book. Always finish your time in the Book by thanking the Lord for His Word and asking for His help to be a doer of the word and not just a hearer (James 1:22).