

It's Not My Fault, But It Might Be Your Problem

There is a particular kind of weight that settles on a person when they become aware of a broken situation they had no hand in creating. A toxic workplace. A neighbor spiraling from the consequences of decades of poor choices. A relationship fractured by someone else's misunderstanding or cruelty. The instinct is natural and, in many ways, entirely reasonable: this is not my fault. I did not cause this. Why should it occupy my mind, my prayers, my energy?

But what if that persistent, nagging awareness is not an accident? What if the burden that keeps pulling you back — the one you have prayed over and released and somehow picked right back up again — is less about assigning blame and more about issuing an invitation?

A Man Who Inherited Someone Else's Ruins

The Old Testament book of Nehemiah opens with a man in exactly that position. Nehemiah was not in Jerusalem. He was hundreds of miles away, serving as cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes. The fall of Jerusalem had happened 140 years before Nehemiah was even born. For generations, the people of Judah had rejected God's patient warnings, resisting his calls to return to him in faith. God had sent messenger after messenger. The people filled their lives with everything except their God. Eventually, the judgment God had promised came through the Babylonian empire. Jerusalem's walls were torn down, its temple destroyed, and its people carried into exile.

Nehemiah had nothing to do with any of it.

So when a group of men arrived from Judah and reported that the returned exiles were in great trouble and disgrace, that the walls of Jerusalem remained in rubble and the gates destroyed by fire, Nehemiah could have shrugged. He could have offered a sympathetic word and moved on. The fault was not his. The responsibility, by any reasonable measure, was not his either.

But in Nehemiah 1:4, something remarkable happens. When Nehemiah heard the report, he sat down and wept. He mourned for days. He fasted and prayed. The brokenness of a city he had never lived in, the disgrace of a people he had not personally failed, broke him open.

Why? Because Jerusalem was not merely a city. It was the place where God's presence had dwelled among his people. It represented the covenant between God and Israel. Its ruins were not just a civic problem — they were a spiritual wound. And Nehemiah, hundreds of miles away in comfort and relative security, could not look away.

The Shift That Changes Everything

What Nehemiah did next is the heart of the story. When the king noticed his sadness and asked how he could help, Nehemiah prayed and then spoke. He asked to be sent to Judah to rebuild the city. In that moment, Nehemiah made a quiet but profound shift in his thinking. He moved from "it's not my fault" to "it is my problem."

He did not start the fire. He did not knock down the walls. But God had given him proximity, influence, and opportunity. And Nehemiah recognized that those three things together were not a coincidence — they were a calling.

This pattern did not end with Nehemiah. History is full of people who refused to let "not my fault" become "not my concern."

William Wilberforce was born in 1759 into a wealthy English merchant family. His family's fortune came from Baltic Sea trade, not the slave trade. When he was elected to Parliament at 21, the transatlantic slave trade was deeply embedded in British commerce and culture. Wilberforce had not built it. He had not profited from it. But after a profound conversion to Christianity in his mid-twenties, he could no longer look away from its horrific injustice.

He joined the abolition movement and became its leading voice in Parliament. He introduced legislation to abolish the slave trade in 1789. He lost. He introduced it again. He lost again. The bill failed eleven times over fifteen years. But in 1807, after nearly two decades of persistent effort, the House of Commons voted overwhelmingly to abolish the British slave trade. And Wilberforce did not stop there. He continued fighting until, as he lay dying in July of 1833, he learned that legislation abolishing slavery entirely was on the floor for a vote. He died on July 29th. The Slavery Abolition Act became law the following month.

The slave trade was not William Wilberforce's fault. But he made it his problem.

Not Every Problem Is Your Assignment

It is worth saying clearly: not every broken thing in the world is yours to fix. There are eight billion people on this planet and an overwhelming catalog of suffering. No one is called to carry all of it.

But there is a particular kind of burden — the kind that follows you into sleep and greets you in the morning, the kind you have prayed over repeatedly and still cannot set down — that deserves a second look. When that burden comes paired with proximity, influence, and opportunity, it may be less a coincidence and more a commission.

The question worth sitting with is this: what brokenness has God placed you close enough to see, to care about, and to influence?

You Were Not Meant to Rebuild Alone

Nehemiah's story also makes clear that owning a problem does not mean carrying it alone. When opposition came — and it did come, fiercely — Nehemiah did not isolate. He gathered the people. He reminded them of who God was. He organized them so that some worked while others stood guard. He positioned leaders at the back of the group, not to protect themselves, but to watch for anyone whose strength was failing and to move in and help.

The work of rebuilding, whatever form it takes in your life, is not a solitary assignment. It requires community. It requires people who will pray when you are weary, encourage when you are faint, and stand beside you when the resistance feels overwhelming.

A Brick in Your Hand

You may not have knocked the wall down. You may be entirely innocent of whatever created the brokenness you keep returning to in your thoughts and prayers. But innocence and calling are not the same thing.

Nehemiah prayed, and then he acted. Prayer is where faithful action begins — not where responsibility ends.

You do not have to rebuild everything today. You do not have to rebuild it alone. But there may be a next faithful step right in front of you: a conversation to initiate, a community to join, a hand to extend, or simply the decision to stop looking away.

It is not your fault. But it may be exactly your problem.

Here is a list of scripture references mentioned in the sermon:

DIRECTLY REFERENCED

Nehemiah 1:1-3 -- Nehemiah receives the report about Jerusalem's condition from Hanani and the men from Judah

Nehemiah 1:4 -- Nehemiah's response of weeping, mourning, fasting, and prayer upon hearing the news

Nehemiah 2:2-5 -- The king notices Nehemiah's sadness, asks the reason, and Nehemiah makes his request to go to Jerusalem

Nehemiah 4:1 -- Sanballat's anger and mockery upon learning the wall was being rebuilt

Nehemiah 4:8 -- Sanballat and his allies plot to fight against Jerusalem and create confusion

Nehemiah 4:14 -- Nehemiah gathers the nobles and people, urges them not to fear, and calls them to fight for their families and homes

ALLUDED TO OR THEMATICALLY PRESENT

2 Chronicles 36:15-16 -- God's repeated sending of messengers to warn his people, whom they persistently rejected

2 Kings 25:8-11 -- The Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, its walls, and the temple, and the exile of the people

Ezra 1:1-4 -- The decree allowing exiled Jews to return to Judah

Nehemiah 2:7-8 -- The king's provision of letters of safe passage and requisition orders for building materials

Nehemiah 4:16-18 -- The division of workers into those who built and those who stood guard

Proverbs 3:27 -- The call not to withhold good when it is within your power to act

James 2:14-17 -- Faith without works being dead, aligning with the sermon's emphasis that prayer is where action begins, not where responsibility ends

Esther 4:14 -- The theme of being placed in a position of proximity and influence for such a time as this

Galatians 6:2 -- Bearing one another's burdens as the fulfillment of the law of Christ, supporting the sermon's theme of not carrying the work alone