

(Intro Slide)



MYTH

A myth is an invented story, without a lot of basis in fact. Though they can be scary, many are pleasant thoughts that have been repeated so often that we start to imagine that they must be true.

TR: But the myths surrounding following God, seeking first His Kingdom, of being like Nehemiah and have the resolve to execute what God had shown him to do, . . . these myths will let us down.



Daniel Ambrust posted some pictures that can give us an image of what happens when we trust in a myth.

-- Like a weak bridge, myths just cannot support the load of real life.

TR: Nehemiah 2-3 give us a number of examples from history that can help us debunk some myths that are hurting too many of us.

Nehemiah 2:9
Page 439 in Handout Bibles

Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

ESV

Let's pick the story up in Nehemiah 2:9.

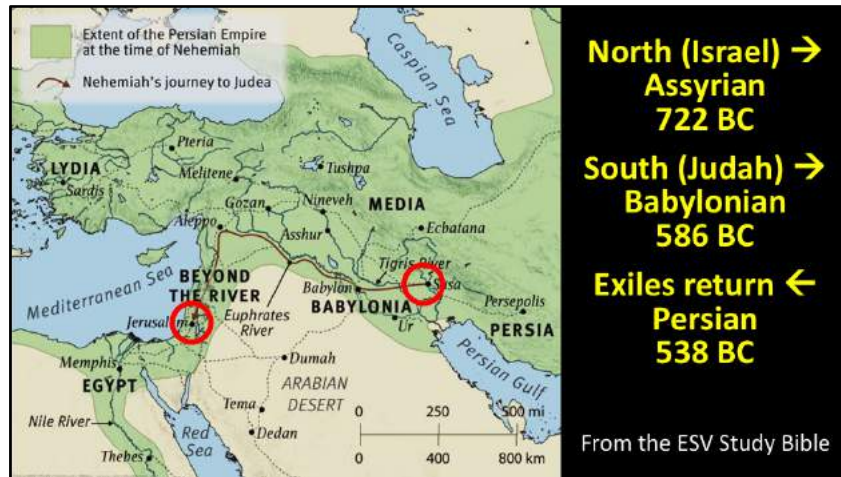
-- That's page 439 in our Handout Bibles

-- READ SLIDE

-- Review the story to this point (heard the news; sat down and wept, prayed and fasted; asked the Persian king for time off, letters of safe passage, and building supplies)

-- Now, after a trip that could have taken anywhere from two to four weeks, it is time to execute the call Nehemiah had received.

TR: A few maps may help put things into perspective a bit.



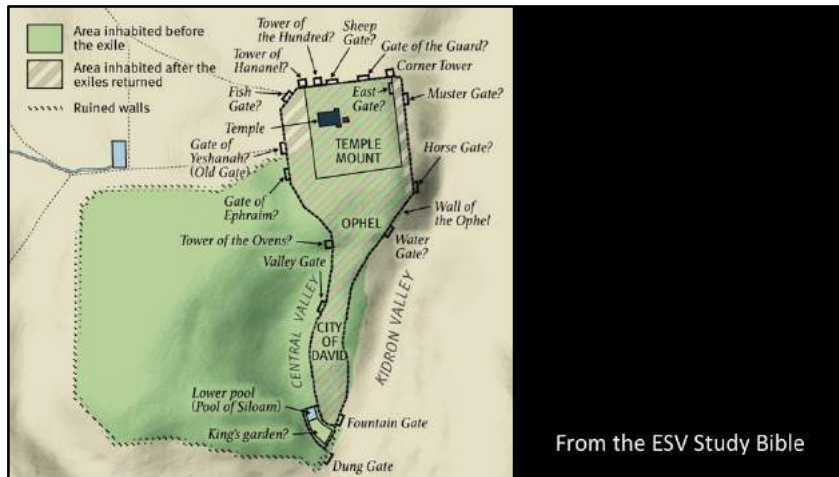
Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the king, starts out in Susa, the seat of government for the huge Persian Empire.

-- He makes his way, with the protection of Persian soldiers, to Jerusalem.

-- Remember, the exile of God's people was from Judah to Babylon.

-- In 538 a number returned. Almost a century later, the Temple is rebuilt but the city lies vulnerable because it has no wall.

TR: The environs of Jerusalem looked something like this.



What Nehemiah found was confirmation of what he had heard from his brother almost half a year earlier.

-- The walls were ruined around what used to be the extent of the city, and even the center most of the city.

TR: This illustration gives us a glimpse at what Nehemiah had probably hoped to find.

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, **it displeased them greatly** that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Two of the Tormenting Trio are found mentioned here.
- Sanballat from Beth Horon, which is about 12 miles from Jerusalem, was a government official, a Samaritan with a Babylonian name.
- Tobiah is from the North. He has a Jewish name but seems to work with Sanballat, providing him with intelligence because he has next of kin who live in Jerusalem.
- Geshem or Gashmu is introduced down in verse 19. He is an Arab who lives to the south. There seems to be some indication that he was involved in the lucrative trade in myrrh and frankincense.
- These men had a vested interest in the status quo . . .

changing things meant that things would change for the worse for them.

TR: The account of coming to face men like this introduces a myth that I've seen again and again in the lives of God's people . . .

Six Myths of Executing the Call

1. *If we are in God's will, it will be "smooth sailing."*

READ SLIDE

TR: Foolish followers want to wear . . .



. . . rose-colored glasses.

-- They want to believe the myth that the will of God is always health and wealth, this side of glory.

-- And it sets us up to have the bridge collapse beneath us.

-- Yes, there is a tension: the good hand of God upon us . . . dissenters around us.

-- How many believers are caught unaware . . . they feel sucker punched . . . and they start to doubt the goodness and power of God.

-- Has God given you a CALL TO MORE? A vision of what COULD BE and SHOULD BE? But then it has gotten hard, almost from the start?

-- Don't let this myth keep you from the fields white unto harvest.

TR: Nehemiah's example reminds us that we must press on with God's will, come rain or shine.

Nehemiah 2:11-12

So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹²Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. **And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem.** There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode.

ESV

Verse 11 continues . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 13

Nehemiah 2:13-14

I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 15

Nehemiah 2:15-16

Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. **16And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- This is an example of the quiet phase of executing God's call on our lives.
- We take the time and effort to inspect the situation, recalibrating our plans to the reality "on the ground."
- These three or four days in Nehemiah's life were a time of recovering from the trip, but also an opportunity for that vital counting-the-cost step.
- Nehemiah had raised his hand and asked God to put him in the game.
- He was a person willing to TRI, that is, to Take Responsibility and Initiative.

TR: His example countermands another myth . . .

Six Myths of Executing the Call

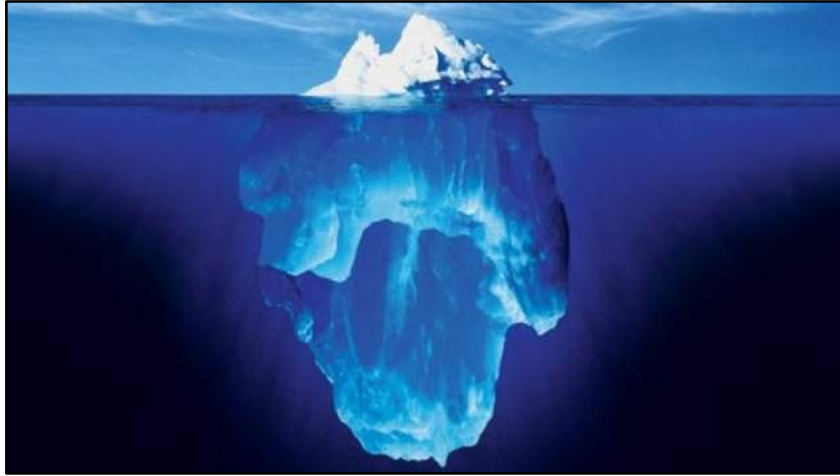
1. *If we are in God's will, it will be "smooth sailing."*
2. *A person called to TRI (Take Responsibility & Initiative) won't have to make many unseen sacrifices.*

READ SLIDE

- Visions from God of what **COULD** be and **SHOULD** be, are always challenging and hard, or so it seems.
- Even if we expect there to be dissenters, we often underestimate the sacrifices we will have to make that no one will see.
- And that no one will appreciate.

- But we must TRI . . . I give a special call to men in their homes.
- Doing so will be hard, but we have been **CALLED TO MORE.**

TR: Like an iceberg . . .



. . . there may be the success people see, but under the water level there is so much they may not see.

-- Cf. J. Oswald Sanders' Spiritual Leadership. I read this classic book in college.

-- When I read of his warning of what it took to be an effective spiritual leader -- that I would have to read while others slept, pray while others played, etc. . . . it brought me to a holy moment of choice.

-- We have to debunk the myth that people will see and appreciate all our sacrifices.

-- But, God does.

TR: Thus far, Nehemiah has kept pretty quiet. He's scouted things out for himself. But the time came for things to go public.

Nehemiah 2:17

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble **we** are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let **us** build the wall of Jerusalem, that **we** may no longer suffer derision."

ESV

Verse 17 . . . READ SLIDE

- He doesn't criticize them. He identifies with them in the problem. **"WE ARE IN"**
- And the call to action is not **"This is what you should do."** But **"COME, LET US"**
- Just weeping because we see a unmet need is not enough. How many times people have said to me, **"The church should do something about . . ."**
- Nehemiah doesn't do that.

TR: Our hero takes a huge step of faith in verse 18 . . .

And I told them of **the hand of my God that had been upon me for good**, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." **So they strengthened their hands for the good work.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Nehemiah fills everyone in on what God has already done and then issues the challenge.
- It is the moment of truth. What if no one else wants to get into the game?
- How can Nehemiah win if he has to tackle this all alone?
- But, graciously God seems to have stirred the people and they too responded in faith . . . rising up and strengthening their hands for the good work.

TR: There is joy in this moment, but Nehemiah's example also exposes another myth.

Six Myths of Executing the Call

18

- 3.** *We can avoid the step of faith when we risk asking others to join us.*

The myth that . . . READ SLIDE

- Nehemiah kept quiet for a long time, but the vision was just so big that he couldn't do it by himself.
- Even as the rescue of the boys trapped in the Thai tunnel couldn't have been saved by one person, so it is a myth that we can follow the call of God by ourselves.
- We are a body, a family, members of one another.
- Yet, the American independence streak makes us want to be Lone Rangers.
- There is a huge step of faith for those CALLED TO MORE, when we admit that we need others.
- That we need them to join us. That we can't do it without them.
- We cannot seek the kingdom of God alone.

TR: I understand why we try.



Some of us have felt “left out” since childhood.

-- Some of us have been hurt by those who left us out of their lives, whether families or spouses.

-- Some of us have been let down by other people and it is easier to just not depend on anyone but ourselves.

-- Well, we would say we depend on God.

-- But, the Scriptures make clear that to depend on Him means to entrust ourselves to the body of believers . . . even with their faults.

-- And, to trust that God will more than make up for the flaws of our brothers and sisters.

-- Are we trying to do it alone? Are we afraid to ask for help? Unwilling to join a small group?

TR: They strengthened their hands, but then Nehemiah

reminds us of myth number 1, that we just looked at . . .

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they **jeered at us and despised us** and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

ESV

We now read of the full Tormenting Trio . . . READ SLIDE

- They jeered, making fun of the project that seemed undoable.**
- They despised Nehemiah and those who said, "Let us rise up."**
- They accused them by suggesting that this was all an act of rebellion.**

TR: Nehemiah responds . . .

Nehemiah 2:20

Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Why is it that we need reminding of myth #1?

Six Myths of Executing the Call

1. *If we are in God's will, it will be "smooth sailing"*
AGAIN!

READ SLIDE

-- Whether wearing rose colored glasses or using the imagery of smooth sailing, so many professing Christians walk away from God and His Kingdom because things have gotten a bit rough.

-- It is not like we haven't been warned in the Bible.

TR: It reminds me of the imagery we used a number of years ago . . .



. . . with the Out of the Boat campaign.

-- Were the disciples, fearing for their lives, outside of the will of God?

-- How could they be? They got in the boat at the directive of Jesus Himself.

-- Yes, Jesus has the power to calm the seas with a word . . .

-- . . . but He also has the power to help us walk on the storm tossed waters.

-- If we are confident that we are doing the will of God, don't give up just because it gets hard.

-- As we move to chapter 3, we find the first of 7 lists in the account.

-- 38 individuals, 42 groups, 8 different locations

TR: Let's just get a sample beginning in v. 3

Nehemiah 3:3-4

The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. ⁴And **next to them** Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And **next to them** Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And **next to them** Zadok the son of Baana repaired.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- What a wonderful picture of unity and teamwork . . . “And next to them”
- But, if we imagine that we’ll get 100% buy-in most of the time, we are living in myth-land (not Midland).

TR: Verse 5 pops our bubble . . .

And next to them the Tekoites repaired,
**but their nobles would not stoop to
serve their Lord.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Of course there is a time and place when leaders must not get overwhelmed by the details, keeping their eyes on the big picture.
- But that is not what we have here.
- The language here would be literally rendered, “their nobles would not bring their neck to serve the Lord.”

TR: This is the imagery of . . .



. . . a yoke.

-- They would not yield their neck to the yoke (show how to scrunch up our necks).

-- “No way . . . no way . . . I’m not going to submit to that!”

TR: Their bad example reminds us of a fourth myth as we seek to EXECUTE THE CALL OF GOD.

Six Myths of Executing the Call

3. *We can avoid the step of faith when we risk asking others to join us.*
4. *Refusing to submit to the yoke of service isn't about pride.*

READ SLIDE

-- The ESV translation, "would not stoop," captures the pride element in the unwillingness to submit to service.

-- Christian myths are so frustrating. Kathy was writing up a review for a book she read. She shared a number of weaknesses in the work, including the oft-repeated nonsense that we need to forgive ourselves. We can't! We are not split personalities. We can only receive by faith the forgiveness God offers us in Christ.

-- My level of frustration with this distortion is almost as strong as the rationale people give why they won't submit to appropriate authority roles God has put into their lives. The long and short of it is the sin of the Tekoite nobles.

-- It is the sin of pride.

TR: The list in chapter 3 has more gold and fools gold to show us. Look to verse 7 for example.

Nehemiah 3:7-8

And **next to them** repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, **the seat of the governor of the province** Beyond the River. ⁸**Next to them** Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, **goldsmiths**, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the **perfumers**, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.

ESV

We see the repeated, “Next to them,” but what is amazing is who is doing the work.

-- These are people from 8 locations, not just the folks living in the immediate area of Jerusalem.

-- And some of these are people were anything but builders. They include men who did “delicate work,” like goldsmiths and perfumers.

TR: This is a reminder that cuts down to size another myth.

Six Myths of Executing the Call

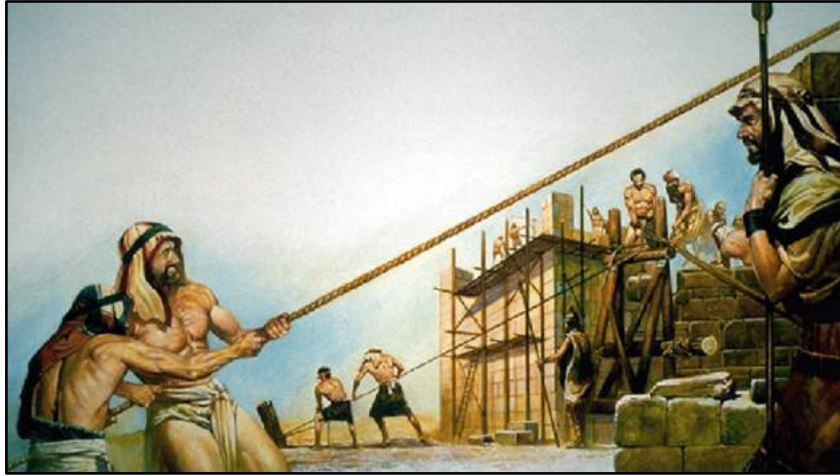
5. *Our pasts or our “distance” are appropriate excuses to not rise up.*

READ SLIDE

-- I am so proud of our congregation for not saying, “Why would we bother with Newaygo? Guyana? Spain? Papua New Guinea?”

-- I am delighted, as I know God must be, that our people haven’t said, “I’ll never do that.”

TR: Over the past 35 years, the vast majority of Trinity Fellowship folks have . . .



. . . risen up and strengthen their hands for the good work God has called us to.

TR: There is one last thing I want to point out from the list of chapter 3. You have to pay close attention to catch it.

And next to them **Meremoth the son of Uriah**, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them **Meshullam the son of Berechiah**, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired.

ESV

While I too am tempted to read lists and just say, “Hard name, hard name, hard name,” we need to be careful.

- Someone years ago pointed out to me that two men are mentioned twice.
- Meremoth and Meshullam.
- There is another Meshullam in verse 6, but he has a different father. A different last name in the way we do names.

TR: But, look at verses 21 and the second part of 30 . . .

Nehemiah 3:21, 30b

After him **Meremoth the son of Uriah**, son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib.

After him **Meshullam the son of Berechiah** repaired opposite his chamber.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- Meremoth and Meshullam. Wow!

TR: I think their example busts another myth.

Six Myths of Executing the Call

5. *Our pasts or our “distance” are appropriate excuses to not rise up.*
6. *Everyone does equal work. No one will be called to double duty, strengthening their hands again.*

READ SLIDE

- I've heard it again and again. “I've already done my bit.”
- “It's time for someone else to step up.”
- People who are truly seeking the Kingdom of God are willing to be like the Apostle Paul, who worked harder than them all.
- We've done our bit when they put us in a box or an urn, or the Lord calls us up in the air.

- We all have moments when we feel sorry for ourselves and begrudge another person for their apparent sloth.
- But kingdom builders have learned from Peter when he asks the resurrected Christ, “What about him?” referring to the Apostle John.
- Jesus said to Peter, “What is that to you. You follow me.”

-- Are we more like Meremoth and Meshullam or like the Nobles of Tekoa?

TR: Don't forget that these are six . . .

Six Myths

1. *If we are in God's will, it will be "smooth sailing."*
2. *A person called to TRI (Take Responsibility & Initiative) won't have to make many unseen sacrifices.*
3. *We can avoid the step of faith when we risk asking others to join us.*
4. *Refusing to submit to the yoke of service isn't about pride.*
5. *Our pasts or our "distance" are appropriate excuses to not rise up.*
6. *Everyone does equal work. No one will be called to double duty, strengthening their hands again.*

. . . myths. Don't welcome these distortions into your life. Don't let them keep us from executing the call of God on our lives.

-- Have you been deafened to the call because of dissenters and hardship?

-- Have the unseen and perhaps unappreciated sacrifices you've made caused you to be bitter?

-- Have you been unwilling to ask others to help?

-- Has pride kept you from stooping to the yoke?

-- Have you been making excuses for why you can't heed God's call?

-- Have you slipped into retirement mode and said, "I've already done my bit."

TR: Will we follow the myth-busting example of Nehemiah and those who rise up with him?

I will TRI.

When it gets hard, I will keep TRI-ing.

I will invite others to TRI with me.

**Even if they refuse
through pride or excuse,
I will TRI and TRI again.**

Will we execute the call of God on our lives for this next chapter?

-- Will you say this with me in a few moments? . . . READ SLIDE

-- EX: "She did what she could." Kathy's mom, Fanny Crosby,

-- Will you make these statements with me?