

Momentum

Nehemiah 3

CONTEXT: We've seen so far in our study this man Nehemiah working for the King of Persia - Artaxerxes in the citadel at Susa. He held what amounted to a Cabinet position. When one day he received a visit from his brother who had recently returned from Jerusalem. He was greatly anticipating a report because years earlier Ezra and Zerubbabel had led a remnant back to the city to reinstate temple worship.

It seemed God was doing what He promised in Deuteronomy - and returning the people and restoring the glory of Israel. Perhaps - he would even send the King of all Kings to deliver Israel once and for all.

But the report was not positive it was very negative. The walls were torn down and the people were in great shame. That began for Nehemiah a period of 4 months of fasting and prayer. He had a bone crushing burden for the city and the people.

Then he had what I call his, "Popeye Moment" He had all he could stand and he couldn't stand no more. He went before the King in fear and trembling and asked for the freedom to return to Israel and rebuild the walls... and oh yeah, he wanted the King to pay for the rebuilding. Miraculously, the King agreed.

Nehemiah went back to the city, gathered his strength and began an examination of the state of the wall. Then he called all the people together, told them about the favor of the King, drew their attention to the unacceptable state of the city... the he showed them the vision. They were all in!

From there Nehemiah lead an effort to rebuild the walls and refortify the city that took only 52 days, with amateur builders.... they had MOMENTUM.

INTRODUCTION: Any leader knows as John Maxwell says, "Momentum is a leaders best friend".

TRACTOR - Growing up my uncle had an old **Farm All Tractor** without power steering. I remember my cousins and I would climb up on that tractor and pretend to be driving it. But no matter how hard we tried, we could not steer that tractor as long as it was sitting still. But once it got moving, my uncle could steer it with two fingers. What's the difference? Momentum.

TRAIN - A train traveling 65 mph on a railroad track can crash through a 5-foot thick steel-reinforced concrete wall without stopping. That same train, starting from a stationary position, won't be able to go through an inch-thick block in front of the driving wheel.

It is never the size of your problem that is the problem. It's a lack of momentum.

Without momentum, even a tiny obstacle can prevent you from moving forward. With momentum, you'll navigate through problems and barely even notice them.

Have you ever notice that when a team gets Momentum, the opposing Coach will call a time out? It's not so much to change the strategy, it's to break their momentum.

- **Organizations** need Momentum if they are going to reach their goals.
- **Teams** need Momentum if they are going to win games.
- **Churches** need Momentum if they are to fulfill the great commission.
- **Families** need Momentum if they are going to be successful.

John Maxwell calls Momentum the Great Exaggerator -

- When a team has momentum the Quarterback seems better than he really is.
- When a team lacks momentum, he seems worse than he really is.

Not only does Momentum allow the leader to look better than he or she is, it also allows the team members to **perform on a higher level**. The opposite is true - when you lack momentum everyone looks worse, and performs worse.

Momentum will turn a 6 player into an 8.

In Churches we have a tendency to **over-spiritualize** momentum... when things are going well, people are being baptized, people are joining, moral is high - we say... we **God's is just blessing**. That is true, but it might be more helpful to ask, **"What is God blessing?"** and, **"How can we do more of what God is blessing?"**

NEHEMIAH AND HIS TEAM HAD MOMENTUM

They have momentum to such a degree that they will accomplish this massive task of **refortifying** the walls around Jerusalem in 52 day with a work crew of novices. They will have to press on through people laughing at them, mocking them, literally attacking them with weapons. But in 52 days - their faith became sight.

In Chapter 3 the team begins to come together and I believe in chapter 3 we see the formula for momentum.

1. Know what Motivates Your Team -

Nehemiah understood what personally motivated the citizens of Jerusalem.

a. They were Motivated by Protection

He communicated to the people the fact that if those walls were only rebuilt... everything they knew and loved would have security and prosperity.

Nehemiah 2:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned."

In Nehemiah's day - cities equaled security. Today, cities can be one of the more dangerous places to live and work.

- But in this day - laws were enforced in cities.
- You stood a fighting chance against invading armies in cities.
- You could buy the things you need at the market.

b. They were Motivated by Patriotism

17b. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision."

I've never known a people will more nationalistic Patriotism than the Jews. I think that is one of the reasons we American's are kindred spirits.

c. They were Motivated by Prophecy

If you read those minor prophetic books, Haggai, Zechariah, you will find that they are preaching during this same time frame. So a lot of the anticipation you see they were stoking. Verses we love to quote were written during this season - "Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord", "Do not despise the day of small things, I will rejoice when I see the plumb line in the hand of Zerrubabel".

As a leader you MUST understand the factors that motivate your team.

- If you are a **father** of a teenager you better understand what motivates them. You see you may find that their ultimate motivation isn't bad, just the direction they are going in to fulfill it is bad.
- **Small group leader** - why do people come to class? Why do they come to your class? I'm sure it's partially because of your teaching... But I would bet you that is not their primary motivation. You need to know what it is. Is it relationship?
 - **ILLUSTRATION: CHEERS** - Do you remember the theme song from cheers? Sometime you want to go where everybody knows your name... and their always glad you came... you want to be where you can see our troubles are all the same... you want to go where everybody knows your name.
- **Business owner** - you better know why your employees have their chosen career. It may not be financial motivation primarily. You better know what motivates your clients. Why do they want your particular good or service?

So often leaders give the majority of their time to things that really aren't relevant in the eyes of the people we are trying to lead.

3 Questions that Reveal Motivations:

- a. What do they cry about?
- b. What do they celebrate?
- c. What do they dream about?

2. Make Sure Your System Serves Your Goals

ILLUSTRATION: If you find a chair factory that consistently produces three legged chairs... it is because, if you dive into the factory you will find that there is a system issue that causes it to be perfectly designed to produce the occasional three legged chair.

- If you are always broke, needing to go into debt. There is a system problem.
- If you are always physically out of shape. There is a system problem.

You are working a system that doesn't serve to meet your goals.

But if you can align your system with your goals, you work in the Zone - work is like a downhill side of a downwind bike ride. All of your favorite songs are on the radio, your flight get bumped up to first class, the lights are all on green as you pass through town. You my friend are in the zone.

NOTICE how Nehemiah got his team organized.

a. They were Organized by Passion

Nehemiah 3:1 (ESV)

¹ Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel.

Why do you think that Nehemiah assigned the rebuilding of the sheep gate to the High Priest and his fellow ministers? Because every day they would have to bring the sheep from the fields into the city for the ritual sacrifices. No one cared more about the safety and security of the Sheep gate than the priests.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember when we were house hunting back in Alabama. Julie would say things like this, "that is where your office can go... and your recliner over here". She was selling based on my priorities. She didn't care where my office went. Nehemiah didn't care who built the sheep gate, but he aligned for MOMENTUM.

b. They were Organized by Proximity

Nehemiah 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Next to them Jedaiah the son of Haru-maph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hatt-ush the son of Hashab-neiah repaired.

So they repaired the wall next to his house. Why? No one cared more about the portion of the wall next to Jedaiah's Home more than Jedaiah.

Do you think he's going to do a careless or sloppy job? Considering that when an attacking army would lay siege to a city they would first inspect the walls looking for weak spots. Do you think this man is going to let his portion of the wall, where his children sleep be the weak spot? No way!

3. Consistent Encouragement and Recognition

Neh. 3

At first glance many of us are probably tempted to skip over this section because it reads somewhat like a genealogy. A long list of names that we cannot pronounce. But you have to think about it from the perspective of the people who did the work and their family.

Nehemiah recognized their contribution to the work in the historical record of Israel. Not only that - in the Eternal Word of God.

Encouragement and Recognition of effort is a very biblical thing. It is not something that is meant to merely stir the vain tendencies of prideful people, it is something that we have learned throughout time to make sure that our efforts are being used to their greatest impact.

a. Encouragement must be sincere -

Don't ever tell someone they did a good job if they didn't. It hurts the entire organization. People make real decisions about the future based on feedback, they deserve honesty.

Proverbs 29:5 (ESV) ⁵ A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.

Balanced Encouragement:

By the way, one of the ways you can discern if someone is giving you legitimate feedback is whether or not it is balanced.

- If someone always tells you that you are awesome - they are flattering you and lying to you.
- If someone always gives you negative criticism they oppose you for some reason and probably don't have your best interest at heart.

- If someone knows you well, and has earned the right to criticize and encourage and they balance the two of them. Their advice should be taken seriously for better or worse.

We know Nehemiah was sincere because

Nehemiah 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.

He totally called those guys out - they would not work, they were too good to work, and for eternity it is written down in the word of God.

Did you know one of the greatest killers of momentum is when a leader tolerates poor performance in a team member. It tells the rest of the team - this is acceptable.

b. Encouragement has Degrees -

There are different ways to encourage and inspire and each comes with a degree of success. You need to know what they are.

- **Private Verbal Affirmation** - This is just a simple, “at a boy”, “good job” etc.
- **Private Written Affirmation** - This is a note, a card, and email. It’s just between the two of you, but you have but your thoughts in ink.
- **Public Verbal Affirmation** - That is saying something about your spouse in front of their peers. This takes the encouragement to an entire new level.
- **Public Written Affirmation** - This is the highest level of compliment. This is eliminating any possibility of deniability. This is a well worded, thought, unexpected, post to social media, or in a mass email.
- Can you imagine how the men and women mentioned in this letter felt when their kids and grandkids read their name in the very Word of God?

ILLUSTRATION: There is a 4 lane highway named after my uncle - the Gordon Terry Parkway. Anytime I give directions I do so relative to the Gordon Terry Parkway. He influenced the music industry - he was friends with Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash. We honor that in our home.

Can you imagine if someone in your family was in the bible....??? Yeah, your Uncle Gordon is cool... of course we have great grandad Simon Peter....

- By the way - what **effect** do you think that had on those kids and grandkids?

I would encourage each of you to **earn a Phd in Encouragement** - When you really Master the Art, you have the power to influence entire generations of people.

I hope that each of you come to church looking to encourage.

ILLUSTRATION: There are dozens of high profile, highly successful Pastor's who attribute their success to a man named Billy Hornsby.

The story goes that when Billy was in eighth grade a math teacher yelled at him, ***"Hornsby, you will never amount to anything."*** Billy later said that something inside of him died at that moment, and he stopped trying to be anything or anyone.

When Billy was 19 and with a wife and daughter to support, he applied for a job at a large corporation in Baton Rouge, La. Part of the application process was taking an aptitude test. When a man from the company's human resource department called and asked Billy to come in to talk about his score, Billy said, "Look, just tell me I failed it, and I'll move on. Why waste your time and my time?"

But the man convinced him to come in anyway. When Billy met with him he once again blurted out, "I know I failed the test, so please just let me move on." The man looked at Billy and said, "Not only did you not fail the test, but you scored higher on the test than any one of the hundreds of people that have ever taken this test." And then he pointed his finger at Billy and said, "Hornsby, you know, if you apply yourself, you just might turn into something special."

Billy said that was the moment his whole life changed back around. From that point on, the math teacher's "curse" left him, and he went on to accomplish great things in life and for the kingdom of God.