

Resolution Solution

Start Here

January 26, 2020

Good morning everyone.

“If I could change the world” – what a great way to conclude this final week of our series, *Resolution Solution*, because that’s what we’ve been talking about since the beginning of this month.

We’ve been talking about the fact that, whether or not we make a formal resolution every January 1st, or we just think about how we’d like things to be different in the next 12 months ...

... the question we typically ask ourselves is ...

“What should I do about *me*? How do I make *me* better?”

- How do I get slimmer?
- How do I get stronger?
- How do I get out of debt?
- How do I make sure I'm putting enough into my retirement?

And those are all worthy goals but there is a bigger and better question; a question that goes beyond just improving *us*.

And *that* question is ...

**“What should I do about *what's around me*?
How can I make *the world better*?”**

.. because you and I really *do* have the potential to make the world – or at least *a small piece of the world* – a better place.

However, because this is not the kind of question that we typically ask ourselves, we also talked about two *additional* questions that help to bring a little clarity.

The first one was “what breaks your heart?”

What do you see in our culture, in our community, in our city, in our state, in the people around you or the situation around you that’s more than just a discouraging news item or a sad story? What burdens you so much that you just can’t let go of it?

What breaks your heart?

That’s a good place to start when trying to figure out what you should do about what’s around you.

The second question that we said was helpful isn’t nearly as emotion-driven. It’s more futuristic.

“At the end of your life, what would you like people to line up and thank you for?”

If all of the people you have come into contact with over the years came by your house in your final days and stopped in to say, “I am really thankful that you did <this> or did <that>” ...

What would “this” or “that” be? What would you like people to line up and thank you for at the end of your life?

Now, throughout this series, we’ve seen that these questions aren’t just hypothetical. They’re not something that’s good-to-think-about for a few minutes when you’re sitting in church.

That’s because Jesus of Nazareth once said, in essence ...

And by the way, remember that ...

- The only reason we care what He said
- And the only reason we even *know* what He said
- And the only reason anyone thought it was *worth preserving* what He said ...

... is because they saw Him crucified by the Romans, and then three days later they saw Him alive again, and then six weeks later they saw Him move into another dimension that we call Heaven ...

That guy, Jesus of Nazareth, once said, in essence, that ...

“Whosoever devotes themselves *to* themselves, will have nothing *but* themselves to show for themselves.”

In other words, if you get to the end of your life and you’ve maintained the perfect weight, and the

perfect schedule, and the perfect financial picture ... *but you never did anything for anybody else ...*

You will have leveraged your whole life for nothing but *you*. And Jesus says that is a total loss.

Fortunately, when Jesus said that, He also gave the antidote – the cure for a wasted life.

He said, “But if you devote yourself to *more* than yourself, you’ll have *more* than yourself to show for yourself.”

“You’ll get to the end of your life,” Jesus said, “and maybe people won’t literally line up and thank you but *you’ll* know and *God* will know that you made a difference. And *that will matter.*”

Now, last week, we took a little bit of a detour from those questions because I felt like I needed to address a problem that seems to affect many Christians [including myself].

Many Christians hear what Jesus said about devoting themselves to something more than themselves and so they say, "Jesus said it, so it must be true. So ... I'm going to devote myself *to God.*"

- "I'm going to devote my best energy into being a moral person; a holy person, a spiritual person.
- I'm going to devote myself to being a religious person.
- I'm going to be close to God.
- I'm going to worship God.
- I'm going to know God's Word [the Bible]."

And make no mistake: those are all really great things and if you're a Christian you most certainly

should do them.

But, as we saw last week, Jesus wants more from His followers than that. Jesus wants more because devotion to God – and this is Christianity at its heart; this is what makes our faith unique compared to all others ...

Devotion to God is authenticated by love for others.

And not just “the feeling” kind of love but “the action” kind of love [agape love in the Greek language] that says “what should I do – what *can* I do – about what’s around me?”

Because you can’t love God and not also care about the people and the world around you. It’s just impossible, because God loves those people and that world.

So, that's what we've been talking about to this point – and if you're new with us or you missed any of those messages you can check them out in the media section of our website or the NHCC app.

Now, as I wrote in my weekly email/blog post last Friday, I've heard quite a bit of feedback on this series.

Many folks have said to me, "this is exactly what I've needed to hear and I appreciate you teaching it because I know what breaks my heart. I know what needs to be done about what's around me. And I just needed someone to give me permission to go do it."

But others have said, "I get what you're saying, Rick."

And just to be clear, it's not me who is saying these things. I'm just passing on what Jesus said.

He's the one who said that when it's all about you and all about me, in the end we lose.

People have said, "I *get* that ... but this series is kind of frustrating because I don't know what breaks my heart and I don't know how I could impact the world so that people might actually be thankful I was here.

Or "this is frustrating because I *do* know what breaks my heart but I have no idea where to begin."

Or, "Look, I'm already up to my eyeballs with work and school and children and family and other responsibilities, and now you want us all to search our hearts for things that break it? It just feels like you're piling on to the pressure I already feel."

If that's you – if you've been thinking or feeling any of those things, I get it because none of this is easy.

But I think what I'm going to tell you today is going to help you.

Back to Jerusalem

So, let's get into it by going back to where we started this whole thing – which was the story of a guy by the name of Nehemiah that is recorded for us in the Old Testament book that bears his name.¹

I won't repeat everything we said about him in the first week of this series, other than to say that ...

- Nehemiah was a man who asked the better question we've been talking about: "what should I do not about *me*, but what's around me?"

¹ Thanks to Clay Scroggins and Dyland and Tes Janig for their inspiration in much of what follows.

- Because Nehemiah was a man whose heart was broken about what had happened to his people, the Jews.

Hundreds of thousands of them had been living in exile in Babylon for many, many years but when Babylon was overthrown in the 5th century BC, they were told they can go back to their homeland and to Jerusalem, their capital city.

But no one wants to go back because the wall of the city is broken down, the Temple has been destroyed, and everything is a mess.

Quite frankly, they'd rather stay in exile where everything is orderly and organized and it's what they have known for so long than to go back to a place where they would be a people in disgrace.

And when Nehemiah hears about how it is in Jerusalem and sees this dynamic among the people

hesitant to return, he realizes that what must be done is to rebuild the wall around the city ...

... because, in those days, a city's walls meant more than the strength and security it provided for people [people would know that "this is a safe place to live and work."] It also gave them a sense of community and a sense of definition.

On top of that, for this particular group of people, the Jews, the walls around Jerusalem were part of the iconic display of the glory of God. And the fact that it was in ruins was a severe disincentive to its resettlement.

And that broke Nehemiah's heart.

And so, after gaining the support and permission of the King of Persia [who had overthrown the Babylonians], Nehemiah goes back to Jerusalem to try and organize and motivate the people to rebuild the wall.

And after assessing and evaluating the condition of the wall, he calls together everyone who has been living there and everyone who has returned with him.

And he says to them ...

*"You see the trouble we are in:
Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its
gates have been burned with
fire."*

And I don't think Nehemiah was trying to be Captain Obvious here. I think maybe the people had gotten so used to it and so accepting of it that they just didn't see it anymore. Sometimes that happens, right? We get so used to the ruined and burned stuff in and around us that we think it's normal.

But it's not, so Nehemiah was trying to say, "Hey, you can't look away from this any longer. This is

our reality.”

So let’s do something about it.

“Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” Nehemiah 2:17 [NIV]

And to show them that he was serious and not just giving them a pep talk ...

Nehemiah writes that ...

*I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.
Nehemiah 2:18 [NIV]*

... which is a callback to the very beginning of the story when Nehemiah took his first step of action because of his heartbrokenness.

And when the people heard that ...

*They replied, "Let us start rebuilding."
So they began this good work.
Nehemiah 2:18 [NIV]*

They said, "we're with you, Nehemiah. Let's get started." And they rolled up their sleeves ready for good work.

Now, if you're reading the book of Nehemiah – which you should do sometime because it's such a great account of an incredible historical event and one of the very few documents preserved from antiquity [and it's not very long] ...

If you're reading Nehemiah, you'll notice that the first two chapters are filled with emotion and drama and travel and action – it would make for a great movie, actually.

Nehemiah is moved to risk his life and his position in the king's royal court so he can go and rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. And everyone's pumped and

they organize to go back with him and everyone's all in on rebuilding the wall ...

But then you get to Nehemiah chapter three and you run into one of those parts that the Bible is famous [or infamous] for: a long hard-to-pronounce list of names of people who were part of building the wall, family after family, name after name of "so and so laid this many bricks" and where they built and how they did it and what they did.

But if you dig into it a bit, it's clear that there are two groups of people.

- First, there are the people who've been living in Jerusalem and they're totally disheartened.
- And then, there are all these other people who've come back from exile to help rebuild the city and the wall as well as people from

the surrounding towns.

And when you read the list of who did what, it's apparent that those coming from the outside are assigned very specific projects – repairing certain gates and doors and other critical areas. Nehemiah says, “ok, you guys work on the Fish Gate, you guys take the Sheep Gate, you all handle the Water Gate, and you guys, sorry you get the Dung Gate.”

Seriously. It's in there.

But then, it seems like there are some people who are living in the city – people who came back earlier and had started the resettlement – that aren't sure what to do. They're thinking, “We really do like what's going on. We like that the walls are coming up everywhere. We like that something is being done about this heartbreaking situation, but what should *we* do?”

Does that question sound familiar?

Here's the answer.

In verse 28 of chapter three, we read that ...

*Above the Horse Gate, the priests made
repairs ...*

Where? Read it with me please.

... each in front of his own house.

Nehemiah 3:28 [NIV]

And I can imagine how that might have come about. I can imagine that the priests who were already living there in Jerusalem looking around at everyone else and thinking, "well, I'm a priest. I'm not sure exactly what I can do."

I can imagine Nehemiah walking through the city and them coming out of their houses and saying, "Nehemiah, everyone else has a job here, what should we do?" and Nehemiah saying, "you know, it'd

be great if you could just attend to what's right in front of you. Why don't you work on the part of the wall just in front of you, right over there?"

And that's what they do.

In fact, the pattern continues down the line.

Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house.

Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shekariah, the guard at the East Gate, made repairs.
Nehemiah 3:29 [NIV]

Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section.

Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs opposite his living quarters. Nehemiah 3:30 [NIV]

Sounds like that guy didn't even have a house. Maybe he was renting an apartment or something. But even he worked on the wall in front of his building.

See what's going on here?

When the people did not know what to do ... when they were unsure ... they just built what was right in front of them.

Where to Begin

So, again, another question for you.

And you knew this was coming right? This is a

series with *a lot* of questions. And here it is, the next question.

What's right in front of you?

What's right in front of you?

- If you don't know what breaks your heart ...
- If you don't know what you could do to make the world a better place that anyone would ever be thankful for ...

Ask yourself "what wall needs to be rebuilt – what problems, what needs – are right in front of me?"

And then, *start there.*

Start there on just that one little section.

See, one of the problems with what we've been talking about in this series is that whenever we

hear “change the world” we tend to think “change *the whole* world” or “change the world somewhere *over there*.”

I mean, almost everybody on Twitter and Instagram and Facebook wants to change the world, right? But it’s usually “out there” somewhere else.

On top of that, in today’s world with instant access to everyone’s social media “personal highlight reels,” we can become so caught up with ...

- What everyone else is building
- What everyone else is doing
- The roles that they’re playing
- The impact that they’re making on society
- The noise that they’re making in their community.

We become so caught up with *what they’re doing*

that we become dissatisfied with what *we might be able to do*.

And when that happens, we overlook and minimize and neglect the portion of the torn-down wall that's right in front of us.

So don't be too concerned what everyone else is doing. You're not in the same season of life. You don't have the same gifts and talents. All you can do is just build what's right in front of you.

So do that.

For instance, if you're a student and you're thinking "I'm still in school, but I actually want to make an impact on the world. I want to be a leader. I want to be a difference maker." And you have big dreams.

Your task is *build what is right in front of you*.

- You have dozens and dozens of other students around you every day.
- You have teachers and leaders and coaches and other people that you interact with every day.

Build *that* wall. Build what's right in front of you. Make their world a better place in some way.

- Show up on time.
- Be respectful.
- Be honorable.
- Be courteous.
- Be responsible.
- Be grateful.

Build what is right in front of you.

And I promise that if you build what is right in front of you, God will give you more opportunities to have an impact than you ever dreamed of.

Or maybe you're in business and you want to make an impact on the marketplace. You want to be like a businessman or woman that people come to for advice and coaching and leadership.

That's great. That's incredible. Dream ... but start building what's right in front of you right now.

- Treat your employees with respect and dignity.
- See yourself as the chief servant not just the chief.
- Go the extra mile willingly and with joy.
- Do good and be generous with your profits.

Build what's right in front of you and I promise you God will give you more influence than you can imagine.

Or maybe you're a mom trying to navigate the early stages of babies [and as I watch two of our three daughters do that right now, I'm reminded just how crazy that phase of life is].

You're trying to figure that out and do that well but, truth be known, you have big dreams for your life. You want to do more than change diapers day in and out. And that's great, that's wonderful. Dream big.

But right now, today, build what's right in front of you: *your own children*.

I'll never forget when our two oldest daughters were babies – and this is many years ago, obviously – and we were *literally working on the wall* of the youth building at our church in New Jersey. It was an “all church workday” and we showed up to help.

Jetta had Marilyn in the stroller and she was crying [Marilyn, not Jetta]. And she had Katie in one arm and a paint brush in the other. And it was super frustrating because Katie wasn't happy either and paint was going everywhere.

And the pastor's wife, Lola, walked over to her and said, "honey, you'll have many more opportunities to paint buildings but you won't get to be mom like you are now for very long. So go home. Go home."

And Jetta did. It was one of the wisest pieces of advice we ever got as parents. It totally changed our perspective and our priorities in that season of life.

I mean, we all want to change *the* world, we all want to impact "over there" – but more often than not, we need to start with what's right in front of us.

The Key to Discovery

And sometimes, when you do that ...

**When you build what's in front of you,
sometimes you end up discovering what it is
that breaks your heart.**

You discover what you can do that might actually make a few other people grateful that you took up space on the planet.

In fact, that's what happened to me. If you had asked me when I was in my 20s, "Rick, what breaks your heart? What could you do that might actually help a few people beyond your own little circle?"

I would have said "I have absolutely no idea."

In fact, if you would have said, "I know what you'll do. One day, you're going to start a church and be its pastor for 25-plus years," I would have said

you're crazy because, at the time, everyone else would have thought that was crazy, too. No one would have said, "now, Rick McGinniss, there's pastor material for ya."

What happened was – and I wouldn't have phrased it this way at the time – what happened was I just started building the wall that was right in front of me.

For instance, when Jetta and I were first married, we joined a church in Arlington, TX and we started going to a "young married" Sunday School class. But no one did anything together – there was no relational connection. So, one Sunday we brought it up, that we felt like that dimension was missing.

And everyone said, "you right, we've been thinking the same thing. How about you guys be in charge of that?"

And we said, "OK. Never done it before but it doesn't sound too hard." And we just started organizing ways for people to get together and build relationships.

It wasn't very much at all. It was just a little section of the wall that was right in front of us.

Several years later, after I graduated and we moved to New Jersey so I could work as a software engineer for Bell Labs, one day I got a phone call from a guy at the church we were part of. He said, "we need a young couple to be the Sunday School directors for our youth group, and we thought you and Jetta might be good at that."

I said, "What's involved in it?"

I'll never forget what he said. He said, "As little or as much as you want to make of it. We've never really had anybody do it before, but we're getting a lot of teenagers in the church and we need to do

something.”

I remember going outside to cut the grass right after that and praying, “Lord, what do you want us to do about this?”

And He said, “just do for them what was done for you as a teenager in the church where you became a Christian.”

And I thought, “Oh, I can do *that*.” And we did. And we saw God use us in ways we never would have imagined to impact middle school and high school students. But, if you would have asked me, “is that what breaks your heart?” I would have said, “no, I’m just working on what’s right in front of me.”

Four years later, after I resigned my job so I could move to Kansas City to attend Midwestern Seminary, I was hired at Park Hill Baptist to be the part-time youth pastor. And while I was there, working with those kids – some of whom actually

helped to start this church and are part of it today with *their* kids – I discovered what it was that broke my heart.

It wasn't the kids. They were just the wall that was in front of me. It was *their parents* – in particular the ones who didn't come to church and didn't know Jesus.

And I started looking around and noticing our neighbors who didn't go to church and didn't know Jesus. And I began to ask "why" because Jesus and the church had been so foundational and transformational in *our* lives.

- Why would *anyone* not want to be part of it?
- Why would anyone not want to know and follow Jesus?
- How is it possible that so many people – our next door neighbors, even – are missing out

on this?

I'll never forget the day when it hit me that "someone needs to start a church that people *who don't go to church* would love to attend and be part of." And I decided that *I would do anything* to be part of a church like that.

- I would be the youth pastor if that's what they needed.
- I'd be the music director if that's what they needed.
- I'd be the business administrator if that's what they needed.
- I'd be the janitor if that's what was needed.
- I'd go back to computers and make tons of money so I could donate big time to make it happen.

- I would even learn to love country music if that's what they needed [and I did]...

... because it just broke my heart that so many people my age didn't connect with what my church – a great church – and so many others like it was doing. It's like we were speaking two different languages.

And I thought, "someone needs to do something about that. And I'll help."

But then, through a series of events I never expected or even desired, God said, "that someone is *you*. You're going to be the Nehemiah in this situation. You're going to invite other people to help you build a much bigger wall than you've ever dreamed of building."

Now, friends, I tell you that story with some hesitation because I don't want you to get the

impression that I'm somehow more special than anyone else. Even though what I do for a living these days is unique, *I'm not unique and my story isn't unique.* This is just how God works.

As the Apostle Paul once put it:

[God] is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us. To Him be the glory ... Ephesians 3:20 [NASB]

If you focus on what's right in front of you; if you build what's right in front of you, God will almost always open the doors for something bigger.

And you may be surprised what it turns out to be. I sure am.

So, again, let me ask you:

What's in front of you? What's in front of you?

- What's in front of you when you go back home today?
- What's in front of you when you wake up tomorrow morning?
- What's in front of you when you encounter the people God has already put around you?

Application

Now, some of you are thinking, "Rick, I know what's in front of me and it's hard. It's a hard section of the wall. And it breaks my heart. But honestly, I'm getting tired. I'm getting discouraged. I'm starting to wish I could work on another section because it looks a little easier or it seems more exciting."

If that's where you are, I want to encourage you to hang in there. Keep building anyway.

A little bit later in the story of Nehemiah, he tells us that there were three guys who ...

- Constantly tried to discourage him
- Constantly went behind his back to stir up trouble with the people he was leading
- Constantly accused him of trying to make a name for himself

And one day they tried to get him to come down off of the wall because they wanted to talk about all the issues they had with him.

And I just love his response because this is the response you need to make and I need to make when we're discouraged.

Nehemiah says ...

“I sent messengers to them, saying,

“I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” Nehemiah 6:3 [NASB]

Nehemiah tells us that they actually tried to get him to come down four times in this manner, and he answered them in the same way each time.

“I am doing a great work and I’m not stopping it to mess with you clowns. Are you kidding me? Get lost.”

Nehemiah knew that he was doing something great. And if you’re working on the wall God put right in front of you, you’re doing something great, too!

So don’t be dissuaded by criticism whether from external voices or internal voices. Don’t be

discouraged because it is hard. You are doing something great. And that rarely comes easy.

Now, some of you are thinking, “well, Rick, I appreciate your effort to try and help me answer the question of ‘what should I do about what’s around me’ by giving me *even more* questions ... but, honestly, I’m not even sure of what’s in front of me or that I can do anything about it.”

If that’s where you are today, I invite you to come and help us build the part of the wall that *we’re* building here at North Heartland. Because much like the wall mattered for the well-being of the city of Jerusalem, this church matters for the well-being of the Northland.

Jesus once put it like this.

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.” *Matthew 5:14 [NLT]*

*"No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house."
Matthew 5:15 [NLT]*

*"In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."
Matthew 5:16 [NLT]*

What do you do when you don't know what breaks your heart? What do you do when you do know what breaks your heart, but you don't know what to do?

You just build the wall that's in front of you.

What do you do when you don't know what that is?

You help build the wall that's shining the light all over the earth, the local church ... this local church.

Come help us build what's right in front of us because we have a community that needs lighting up.

There are still so many people in this community who need what Jesus and what the church offers but they don't even know it. They don't even know we're here or, if they do, they don't know what we're about. They don't know that we're a church that people *who don't go to church* actually love to attend and love to be part of.

And that breaks our heart. That's why we started and why we still do what we do after 25 years.

So, come help us flip the switch and turn the light

on. Help us build what God has put right in front of us. Help us build a place of true community for people; where people find the life that is truly life and healing takes place as we encounter Jesus and the truth and grace He has for us.

There's a place for you if you want to help us build. There's a place for you on our wall.

- You can help us impact the next generation by serving in Adventureland or Student Ministry.
- You can help us communicate with excellence by serving on our tech team.
- You can help us make people feel welcome by becoming part of our hospitality team.
- You can help us create community by hosting a small group or leading a small group.

- You can help us add value to our neighborhood by becoming part of the green team that keeps our property beautiful.

There are so many places on the wall that we need help. There are so many ways to get involved in building our part of the wall and you can stop by the info center or go online to our website or app if you want to know how to get involved.

And over the next few months, we're going to be talking about how all of us can play a part in building the future of NHCC. If this is your church, you'll be receiving an invitation to come to a meeting to hear about it.

But, before all of that, there is a huge way that all of us can be involved right now.

Next Sunday, something really big is going to happen that hasn't happened for so years. And it's going to impact everyone in our community.

What is it?

The Chiefs are playing in the Super Bowl!

And we're going to make the most of that here at NHCC because as part of that great day, we'll be having our annual Football Sunday service.

If you've never been to a Football Sunday service, in addition to worship, we're going to have ...

- Some football fun and games – be here on time or you'll miss it!
- A cool music video highlighting the Chiefs' amazing season
- A very special surprise "Chiefs gift" for everyone in attendance
- As well as an outstanding video produced by

Spectrum Sports featuring the Chiefs and 49ers plus several other NFL players and their wives.

Check it out.

It's quite inspirational to hear guys you see on TV every week talking about how knowing and following Jesus has impacted their lives. Even if you're not a football fan, their stories are incredibly powerful and well worth hearing.

So next Sunday is going to be a great time for all of us. But the real reason we do Football Sunday is because it's a GREAT time to invite someone who doesn't go to church. It's about them not about us.

So who is in right front of you this week? Who's right in front of you who doesn't go to church but who is also crazy about the Chiefs?

Will you help us turn the light on for them? Will you help us build the wall we're building for people like them?

Conclusion

Ok, I've gone on longer than I was supposed to, so let's wrap this up.

I don't know what your resolutions were this year if any. I don't know if you decided to remake your body or remake your house or remake your finances. I mean, there's so many awesome resolutions you can make.

If one of your resolutions was to go to the gym, then go. It'll make you healthier and your life better and you'll probably be a happier person.

But there's more to life than just self-improvement.

For if you devote yourself *to* yourself, you will have nothing *but* yourself to show for yourself. But if you devote yourself to *more* than yourself, you'll have *more* than yourself to show for yourself.

Let's pray.

<PRAYER>

Feature Song – Motion of Mercy (4)

CLOSING COMMENTS (2)

1. Clay / Caroline reception tomorrow 6-7 in the Well.

Endnotes