

## Nehemiah – Living your calling

January 20, 2019 CCC

### The Story

Pizza with the Pastor (What room?)

New Testament Next week – Student Takeover... bring a friend!

Videos – [Video Bonus - Text STORY to 474747](#)

This message begins with an assumption. YOU have a calling. You are extraordinary. You were created by God in the exact place, exact time, exact relationships and exact personality to do exactly what he has planned for you. He does not want you to bump along in life with the mundane, but he wants you to discover and LIVE his supernatural purposes. To live a life beyond belief! Sometimes this happens hand in hand with your career. Sometimes it happens outside of your career. But you were designed in advance for good works that he prepared in advance for you to do.

**Intro** – I love Nehemiah. It is one of my favorite Bible books because it is not just a story about restoring walls, it is a formula for living your calling. I did an eight week message series on Nehemiah a few years back that you can hear or see on our app... but today, you get the one week summary. Nine points – so we are going to have to go fast. Are you ready?

- 444 BC in the Persian empire. 26 years after Esther
- Artaxerxes – son of Xerxes, Stepson of Esther
- Cupbearer to the king – head of the secret service. drinks first so nobody poisons – “I guess Nehemiah didn’t die so I can eat. – actually a lot like the job Jim Ratte does for me...

As followers of Jesus, you have a secret identity. You are a double agent. You walk around like a teacher, coach, lawyer, sales person or cupbearer to the king... but actually you ARE an agent of the kingdom of God. Your boss thinks you work for them, but actually, you are employed by the king of the universe to be his representative. In the marketplace, you can influence all kinds of people who will never be touched by a pastor or someone in vocational ministry.

Here are 9 steps to live out that life... complete with 2 word phrases and emojis to match!

Nehemiah 1:3-4 – They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” When I heard these things, I sat down and wept.

Nehemiah heard something and he just HAD to do something about it! Pretty simple. No walls, no security. It has now been 93 years since Zerubbabel came back to the rubble... but they have never been able to get the city wall built. The people of Jerusalem were totally vulnerable to marauders and attackers. They could be defeated any day.

**Identify Brokenness – see the emojis? Identify... Brokenness!**

From the throneroom of Susa, Nehemiah sees the problem and weeps over Jerusalem. And in this moment, he realizes that he cannot stand to stay by the wayside and do nothing. His heart breaks too much.

In order to live your calling, you need to have something that bothers you. Something that drives a HOLY discontent inside of you. That makes you say "I HAVE to do something about that." It is your "Houston, we have a problem." Moment.

Same is true for all of us. We can't solve every dilemma, every crisis, every world issue. But we CAN identify ONE piece of brokenness that just messes with us and attack that. Your brokenness may be very close to home... protecting your kids in a rough divorce, digging out of debt. OR it may be something in the marketplace or the city... Today is sanctity of life Sunday and maybe your broken walls are around abortion and the taking of lives inside the womb. Tomorrow is MLK day – maybe your broken walls are around racism and the pain that causes our community. It is different for different people, but:

**Your mess is no match for God's mercy.**

Living your calling becomes real when you realize that there is a God who cares far more about the brokenness of this world. He knows your pain and wants to extend his power. So what does Nehemiah do?

Nehemiah 1:4-5 – **For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Then I said:**

**"Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,**

### **Seek God**

Note that Nehemiah's first move is to be deeply connected to God. The only way that a calling is fulfilled is if it is in the direction and power of the God of the universe. In our lives, we are not simply called to be agents of good, but agents of GOD. Our calling is not merely to be nice and not make waves, it is to align ourselves with the very purposes of God and accomplish his vision through the discontent that he has given us. So Nehemiah spends days in prayer – seeking God.

Seeking God does three things for you

- It turns discontent into vision
- It turns apathy to repentance
- It turns anxiety into confidence

Prayer is not primarily. Nehemiah comes out of his time in prayer with a God-ordained plan. Here is my question for you – Have you spent time in prayer to seek the God-ordained plan for his purposes he has called you to?

You will not solve the messes in your life or this world by self help, smarter thinking or straighter flying. You will not win kingdom gains in your own power... you will live your calling only by the power of God. So pray and he will change you.

Nehemiah plans his angle and goes in for the attack. He is only one guy, but he has the power of God to be effective. Because one person, plus God is a majority.

“If you think you are too small to be effective, you’ve never been to bed with a mosquito”

So Nehemiah becomes the mosquito in the sleeping bag of King Artaxerxes and asks the king to go fix the walls. When the king says he can go, Nehemiah has his next question ready because he’ll need to:

### **Mobilize Resources**

Nehemiah 2:7-9 I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? <sup>8</sup> And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?” And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. <sup>9</sup> So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

For Nehemiah, this is great strategy and good planning, but it is more. It springs from a confidence in what God is doing.

If it is GODS vision, It will be God’s PROVISION, cmon! If it is God’s vision, it will be God’s provision.

You don’t have enough to accomplish your calling? Good! God does! And he wants you and everyone else to know that it is HIS provision not that of the leader. Here is the crazy thing – God owns everything. So he has more than enough to provide for any vision you might have. Whether you are thinking about adopting a kid, providing for a refugee family or running a churchwide Beyond Belief initiative... God has the resources and can provide!

### **Inspect Details**

2:15a so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall.

On his third day there... he took a horse and a few officers and inspected the wall himself. Personally. Leaders who attack problems always get elbow deep in the details. They check things out for themselves. They ask the right questions. They know the problem firsthand, not just from afar.

### **Clarify Vision**

At this point, Nehemiah gathers all the key people together. 2:17-18 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” <sup>18</sup> I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

You will never solve a problem unless you have crystal clarity on what you are trying to accomplish! For Nehemiah – rebuild the wall. It takes away their disgrace, their vulnerability and enhances security. Along with clarity, Nehemiah brings things the people have not had before. The blessing of Artaxerxes, raw materials, and money. The gracious hand of God made evident. People join your vision as they watch the plan of God unfolding. Some early, some mid, some late... but it is hard to resist momentum when God is in it. And the more you see God, the better it is!

Nehemiah brought the people hope for a better future... just like Jesus.

**Assemble Allies – Avengers and Superfriends** – Batman, Aquaman... need them all, cuz what if you need dolphins to fight crime?

Once the people say yes, Nehemiah has an organizational plan – no doubt birthed in prayer. 3:1 **Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate.** (represents all of chapter 3, which is just a family by family position description on different sections of the wall)

- Everybody plays a role – work goes easy
- Placed in front of their house or workplace – motivated to build it right!

Nothing great happens in transformation unless multiple people are strategically put into play. As you live out your calling, you will find people who will join you, who will coach you, who will live with you. Working with people gives endurance and vitality.

Whenever I launch a ministry that God has put on me, I always launch with friends. There are a dozen people on the governing board to lead the church together. I assembled a leadership team for the Within Reach movement to reach the city with the gospel. I have a team working on the Men of God ministry launching next month. Because I know I will wear out. I can only do a few things well. I need community. So do you. Find the avengers who will work with you!

No project or task that is worth something EVER goes unopposed. That is why you have to:

### **Battle Enemies**

So these two local leaders – Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite – get mad. Why? They are local governors trying to build their power structure. And a fortified Jerusalem is a threat in a way that a wall-free Jerusalem is not.

4:1-3 **When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews,<sup>2</sup> and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?”**

**<sup>3</sup>Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!”**

So Sanballat and Tobiah use public ridicule in order to get the building off track. Actually, this moment is quite hilarious in light of current events! We have to build the wall for the sake of national security! NO, a wall is impossible! We have to build the wall. It will be too much cost! BUILD THE WALL. It will be totally ineffective! Build the wall!

Not only do they ridicule them in the military, in public and the media, but they write lying, subversive letters to the King to get Nehemiah kicked out. Now you have to know friends, that as we follow Jesus and try to live out our calling there will always be detractors!

One of our CCC members came up to me the other week and said they told a friend they attend Christ Community and the response was. “Oh, that’s the church that believes in the BIBLE!” as if that is just a backward, Neanderthal notion. Well yeah, we’re the church that believes the Bible. It truly is our source of authority from God. Even if the culture criticizes us, we believe in the Bible!

And we believe in God – the creator of heaven and earth. And we believe in Jesus, his only son. And we believe in the Holy Spirit who lives inside of believers. We believe that the cross is the solution to the problem of sin. We believe in the resurrection from the dead and life eternal in Jesus alone. We believe in the ordinances of communion and baptism. We believe in the local church as the body of Christ to change the world. It may not be popular, but it is who we are and there we will stand!

Football illustration – Championship games start today at 1:05 so, I'll watch my sermon so you are not still here at kickoff... But you better believe that when the saints are carrying the ball, the rams will do everything they can to drag them down to the ground. And when you and I, the saints of God are carrying the kingdom ball down the field you can just count on the fact that there will be people who want to drag you down...

People will come after you... culture is increasingly unfriendly if you follow Jesus. It may be real, it may be irrational, but it is OK in schools and in the media to bludgeon people of faith today. But we believe that SO much is at stake. We HAVE to represent Jesus. We HAVE to reach the lost. We HAVE to care for the poor!!!

And just like the New Orleans Saints will pop up and make another play every time they are tackled, so we, the people of God will never stop, will never give up, will never shake our convictions so that the purposes of God will be accomplished and we get that kingdom ball into the endzone.

### **Demolish Disunity**

5:1 **Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers...**

So you get partway through the project and discover a problem. Actually a few:

- Some Jewish people were charging ridiculous rates of interest for loans to their brothers
- This led to the confiscation of property
- This led to poverty and inadequate food distribution
- In some cases, to the enslavement of Jewish kids to pay off debt

Nehemiah pretty much blows a cork here. Stop that noise... he says. We just escaped slavery and abuse and now you are doing it to each other? Give back the property and the kids and make sure you share the food. Duh. We have a very important work here and if you let your secondary issues and selfishness get in the way, you will submarine the whole enterprise.

This is what it is like in the church. As a visionary moving the church in a particular direction, the toughest challenges are not the ones that come from the outside, they are the internal challengers who are disgruntled about secondary issues. I won't mention them publicly, but they are not issues of salvation, they are not about reaching the lost, they are not about sending missionaries or taking the best news ever to the least reached people. They are personal pet issues that are not clear in the Bible that somebody wants to make an emotional stand on. They create disunity and distract from the work of God! Friends, if you are a leader, get past these issues and demolish the disunity. If you are a complainer, for goodness sake, keep the main thing the main thing. Work with your leaders to get the job done and don't get sidetracked on details. The mission is too important, hell is too hot, eternity is too long and Jesus is too good for us to get distracted in the weeds of tertiary details!

So Nehemiah blasts through all of those barriers to build the wall and he gets the job done.

52 Days... done. Good leadership does that. It mobilizes people and resources. It elevates all of the people of Israel from insecurity to security... from vulnerability to safety. Everybody in Jerusalem wins because of this. And it is cause for a great celebration! Bring on Ezra. And bring on a multi-day party. Because the project is never about the project, it is about the LORD and his people.

### **Renew Hearts**

**8:3** He read aloud from daybreak until noon

Inside their newly safe city, they gather at the temple. And did you notice, they listen to the law (like Leviticus) from daybreak until noon. They read the Bible in order to compare their lives to it and begin living in alignment with the text. So Ezra preached it all morning. Oh! Those were the good old days of the 6 hour sermon!

There was weeping, and not because Ezra's sermon went so long! They realized that there was a gap between the law that was being taught and their lives. They realized that they were out of line with God. So they wept and turned back to God! God's word taught, repentance, prayer, obedience... all inside the security of the wall.

And this is the bottom line. It is all about the transformation of people by the power of God. God has this vision for transforming the world and it includes YOU. You were designed with specific gifts and context and resources and when you mix that with your passion to fix some brokenness YOWZA... you have a calling.

So where are you today? What is God's calling on you for this chapter? What are your obstacles and opportunities. Which sign defines where you are? How do you need to engage with God to press to the next level?

### **Start the music, stand the people**

**Identify Brokenness** – From heaven, God knew our rebellion, our abuse, our deception, our pain, our trauma and tragedy and it broke his heart. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, just like Nehemiah

**Seek God** – Father Son and Holy Spirit collaborated on a plan

**Mobilize Resources** – The greatest resource of salvation was not wood or money or armies, but Nehemiah himself with the authority of the King. So God's greatest resource was his son.

Nehemiah left the throneroom to go to a destroyed and desperate people... just like Jesus

### **Inspect Details**

Have you ever noticed that this too is just like Jesus? Aren't you glad that we don't serve a God who is distant and uncaring, but one who wore our flesh, knew our pains and even died our death. He is not aloof and far away, but he has inspected the details!

**Clarify Vision** – The Kingdom of God was Jesus main message and the most compelling vision ever!

**Assemble Allies** – Jesus gathered together 12 guys and a few women and he told them to make disciples, who make disciples who make disciples.

**Battle Enemies** - Jesus did this unlike anyone. He took on death and sin and evil and defeated them all at the cross, rising victoriously with power for you and me!

**Demolish Disunity** – Jesus has been in charge of a very diverse church for 2000 years. He has seen disunity and amazingly... because of his care, the church survives and grows to billions of people in diverse expressions.

**Renew Hearts** – Jesus’ dream is not just for a church that represents him, but that every member of that body is renewed with love and passion and power – that you experience him daily and change to look more like him. Will you join him by living out your calling to the n’t degree... with no reserves, no retreats and no regrets!?

You ARE in the Story. It did not just happen in 444 BC. It is happening today, unfolding in YOU. Live your calling and write the story alongside the great author of all things.