

Re-Vision - Part 2 - Let God work

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BIG IDEA - Let God do His work

scripture focus - Nehemiah 2:1-3 NLT

“Early the following spring, **in the month of Nisan**, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. So the king asked me, “Why are you looking so sad? You don’t look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled.” Then I was terrified, but I replied, “Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”

Big problems require BIG faith and big plans.

All the greatest stories in the Bible not only have these big, dramatic problems. They all seem to require BIG faith to even see a possible solution.

Noah had a big flood that required big faith to build a really big boat. You can see a life size [model of it in Kentucky](#).

David had big giant that required big faith to go at him with a stone.

As we’ve seen **Nehemiah & Israel had big problem** in that they had a whole lot of nothing – everything was demo’d.

Ah, but even faith has a catch to it, we can believe, but we’ve got to let God work. Sometimes God requires us to make the first move and other times He wants us to wait for Him to do His thing.

In Nehemiah’s case, he had to wait on God to go first.

Remember, we left the story when Nehemiah asked God for favor and told us he was the King’s Cupbearer.

Before we start into chapter two of Nehemiah’s memoir, I want you to see something in Nehemiah 1:1

Nehemiah 1:1 "In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was at the fortress of Susa."

Nehemiah gives us dates! **Hanani visits in Nov/Dec, the month of Kislev in the Jewish calendar. Keep that in mind.**

Nehemiah 2:1-3 NLT

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Q: Who has ever prayed and asked God for something? **Who has ever impatiently waited for God to answer that prayer?**

Nehemiah begins chapter two writing, "In the month of Nissan,

When is that? **It's the first month of the Jewish year.** It's like our January, New Year's Day. **Did you know that Nissan is thought to be the "miracles month?"**

- **1 Nisan** (c. 3761 BCE) – Creation of the Universe
- **1 Nisan** The day the floodwaters receded from the earth
- **17 Nisan** (c. 24th century BCE) – Noah's Ark came to rest on mountains of Ararat
- **15 Nisan** (c. 1456 BCE) – The Exodus from Egypt
- **10 Nisan** (c. 1416 BCE) – The Israelites cross the Jordan River into Canaan
- **28 Nisan** (c. 1415 BCE) – Battle of Jericho by Joshua
- **Nisan 14** (c. 30 AD) - Christ's Death.
- **Nisan 17** (c. 30 AD) - Christ's Resurrection.

Yeah, but when is it in our Gregorian calendar? It's March or April.

One day, out of the blue, in March-April, Nehemiah sees movement in his answer to prayer. He asked for favor, but he saw NOTHING for anywhere between 4 to 6 months. **That's approximately 120 to 180 days of WAITING.**

1. God is at work - His plans and timing are perfect

Nehemiah asks God for help then holds out for the answer SEVERAL months later!

We have no idea what was going through Nehemiah's head for those months, but it is **safe to say - NOTHING SIGNIFICANT HAPPENED.**

It was months of normalcy. It was weeks of wondering if there would be a sign or signal - something to tell him God was at work answering his prayer.

Q: You know what Nehemiah DIDN'T do? Something to try to solve it himself. Anything. Nada. Zilch.

Nehemiah did absolutely nothing to force a solution while waiting for God to answer his prayer! Do you know how hard it is to do NOTHING to fix the problem yourself while you wait on God? Be honest.

Right. Most of us get tired of waiting and we talk ourselves into doing something because nothing seems to have changed and nothing seems to be happening and **it's the worst feeling in the world** to be helpless and not in control.

Look at the last verse in Chapter one, then look at the first verse in chapter two (this memoir had no chapter breaks or numbered verses originally) **What do you see? Read between the lines, well chapters in this case, MONTHS had passed and you know what Nehemiah saw during that time? Right - nothing out of the ordinary!!!**

2. Use the time to prepare - don't waste it on worry

Except he did pray and dreamed of what he might need. He didn't work on the problem, but he did work on a possible plan.

Nehemiah asked and he waited.

Then one day, months later, something happened. It seemed like just another regular day. Can I pause and let you know something - this is how we live our lives - just another day. We have no reason to think this day, this moment will be any different than yesterday or the last moment we recall.

But with God, that thought, that attitude is NEVER true! **It may NOT be like any other day you have ever seen in your entire life. Something so grand, so exciting so mind blowing can happen on any day or even within any specific moment of each day!**

The opposite is also true. something so awful, so horrendous, so overwhelming could also take place any day or any moment of any day. **However, God holds**

everything in His hand whether it's the highest heights of celebration or the lowest depth of despair. God is always there and He is faithful no matter what you experience.

For Nehemiah it was just a moment of what looked like any other day, he writes, "I was serving the king his wine." Then he tells on himself, and we see how things have been going for him over the past several months, "**I had never before appeared sad in his presence.**"

Let's talk about this idea of "emotional vibes" in the presence of a King, a leader or a company CEO for that matter.

Yes, it's a known fact that royalty did not care to be burdened by any extra emotions that came into their presence. And, if you've led a company or a country you know that a leader carry's an extraordinary amount of weight for and with the people, the constituency or company which they serve. As a CEO, just the number of dependent families and how well the company going is a lot of responsibility. Plus, can they keep pace by raising their employees to a living wage? **No one wants to take on the cares and concerns of others, let alone hundreds or thousands of them.**

The fact that the cup bearer was extremely close and intimate to the King, let's us know that this King cared about those in his court.

Q: Can you blame Artaxerxes for not wanting MORE negative vibes or Nehemiah for being sad?

And at first it didn't look like things were going well. **The king initiates the conversation and asks Nehemiah a question.** This is a "**stop you in your tracks**", **make you want to lie kind of moment** when the king asks, "Why are you looking so sad?"

Why am I making this so dramatically detailed? Because we miss the human and reality of emotional distress in between the lines of words we read instead **I want to slow down to truly relate to what is happening in the story!** It's not just TRUTH, it's truth in the context of our on human experiences!

If we miss the human element, we can easily over-spiritualize the character's response and not see the true lesson that can be learned.

God was at work the whole time and Nehemiah knew nothing about it!

3. Let godly character guide your words

No matter the circumstances, Nehemiah faced the **intersection of faith & opportunity**.

Q: Why is opportunity usually disguised as a problem?

Q: What did that intersection look like? What do you think might have been swirling through his head? What would be going through your mind at that moment?

Time froze. Nehemiah's brain pushed cortisol through his bloodstream, preparing his whole body for fight or flight. All these months and now he is going to make a decision in seconds that will effect his entire future.

No one stops and has time to think! Nehemiah could only access one thing quickly. It was something that God had been working with him on, daily training him as he prayed, fasted and meditated on God's word, which was likely just a couple of books of the Law.

In that moment, **Nehemiah reached for a character quality.** A kind of "spiritual muscle memory." **A circuit loop in his soul that had been practiced and honed for just this kind of situation.**

Nehemiah **reached for HONESTY over a LIE.**

He wrote, **I was terrified, but I replied...**

4. Take ownership of the pain and the problem

First, he coats his words with honor and respect and says, "Long live the king!

Then he says, **"How can I not be sad?" My city, my people are in ruins.**

And in that moment, Nehemiah wasn't talking like a slave to a master, nor a servant to a King, he communicated as a leader and used the code language of a King, "My city, my people."

After you've spoken, just quit talking. Kings, rulers, presidents and leaders think ten steps ahead while you are making your case, so when you made - just stop! Any further and you'll be undoing everything you've worked so hard to Pitch!

The pregnant pause between Nehemiah laying it all out there and the King's response must have felt like eternity!

Artaxerxes answered with an amazing question! **“Well, how can I help you?”**

5. Be ready with plan

Nehemiah's first response just gets me, **“With a prayer to the God of heaven...”** The king didn't know this, but **Nehemiah's next words were spoken after a quick prayer to God.** “Oh God.” “Jesus.” “God, here we go.”

Nehemiah 2:4-8 NLT

“The king asked, “Well, how can I help you?” With a prayer to the God of heaven, I replied, “If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, **send me to Judah** to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.” The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked, “How long will you be gone? When will you return?” After I told him how long I would be gone, **the king agreed to my request. I also said to the king,** “If it please the king, let me have letters addressed to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, instructing them to let me travel safely through their territories on my way to Judah. And please give me a letter addressed to Asaph, the manager of the king's forest, instructing him to give me timber. I will need it to make beams for the gates of the Temple fortress, for the city walls, and for a house for myself.” And the king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me.”

Another reach down into a godly character quality, with humility and honor... “it this pleases you.”

SEND ME

History and circumstances tell us that Artaxerxes needed to the land and people of Judah happy because the land was a buffer zone to his own kingdom. He wanted allies not more enemies. But he also needed someone in the city that he could trust, he could rely on to keep peace and let him know of any developments that would threaten his own people. Nehemiah would be perfect for this job.

But Nehemiah and we know that this was God's plan all along and that God was working to accomplish His will through Artaxerxes.

Of course, Nehemiah didn't write this in his memoir, but he wasn't just praying and mourning during those several months of waiting - he was also planning. I love it when a plan comes together!* Don't you just love it when a good plan comes together?

Again, as a leader-to-leader conversation, Nehemiah was brief and to the point. First, he asked to go himself – SEND ME. Then he asked **Artaxerxes** for a lot more:

- letters addressed to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, instructing them to let me travel safely through their territories on my way to Judah.
- letter addressed to Asaph, the manager of the king's forest, instructing him to give me timber.
- to make beams for the
 - gates of the Temple fortress,
 - for the city walls, and
 - for a house for myself.

Two letters of authorization and supplies (including transportation).

And **the king granted these requests**, because the **gracious hand of God was on me**.

Observations

Let me review some observations:

- **God is at work** - His plans and timing are perfect
- **Use the time to prepare** - don't waste it on worry
- **Let godly character guide your words** - when faith and opportunity intersect the Holy Spirit is right there with you. (**Mark 13:11** - But when you are arrested and stand trial, **don't worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you at that time, for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit.** **Romans 8:26** - And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.)
- **Take ownership of the pain and the problem** - **My city, My people**
- **Be ready with plan** - Frontend effort, prepare as though it's already happening.

ME

Where are we going as church. What does God have for us as a gathering of Christ followers on Candlewood, in the city of Lakewood?

We are following the pattern that Nehemiah wrote about. We covered it last week.

We would:

1. **see reality,**
2. **grieve the loss,**
3. **do something about it**
4. **recognize our part of the problem.**
5. **And together, in the months ahead, asking for God's help and favor.**

But while we wait, I want us to remember:

1. **God is at work**
2. **Use the time to prepare**
3. **Let godly character and wisdom guide us**
4. **Take ownership - Our city, Our people**
5. **Be ready with plan**

The Lego bricks you were asked to sign and place in a wall will be a reminder, an object lesson for us as we commit together to rebuild, restore and revision for God.

NOTES

Hanani visits in Nov/Dec and Nehemiah goes into deep mourning and prays,

“Please **grant me success** today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me.” Four to six months later things happen fast!

Scriptures

Nehemiah 2:1-3 NLT

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Questions

Q: Have you ever prayed and asked God for something and then impatiently waited for God to answer that prayer? Talk about that experience.

Q: What DIDN'T Nehemiah do? Have you tried to force God's hand or timing to solve a problem? How did it go?

Q: Can you blame Artaxerxes for not wanting MORE negative vibes? What are some unrealistic expectations we put on leaders?

Q: Can you blame Nehemiah for being sad? Should we be dismissing sadness as though it is wrong to feel deeply about real problems?

Q: How hard is it to focus on faith when faced with intense emotions and fear coursing through our veins?

Q: How many of us are willing to go and planning for an opportunity that God presents disguised as a problem?

COMMENTARY REFERENCES

Faithlife Study Bible

King Artaxerxes The ruler of the Persian Empire from 464–424 bc.

"Artaxerxes I, third son of Xerxes and Amestris, ruler of the Persian Empire from 464–424 bc. Plutarch notes that Artaxerxes was the **"most remarkable" of all the kings of Persia for a "gentle and noble spirit"** (Artaxerxes 1.1). "Artaxerxes" is the Greek form of the Old Persian artakhshassa, meaning "having a kingdom of justice." It was not unusual for a ruler to adopt a new name upon coming to the throne; first-century ad Jewish historian Josephus records that Artaxerxes I's name before his accession was Cyrus (Josephus, Antiquities 11.6). **According to the Greek writer Plutarch, Artaxerxes I was nicknamed "long-armed" because his right arm was longer than his left** (Plutarch, Artaxerxes 1.1). There were two other Persian kings identified by this name: Artaxerxes II (404–358 bc), and Artaxerxes III (359–338 bc)."

Nehemiah 2:2 (FSB): Why is your face sad Nehemiah's activities of the past few months—mourning, fasting, and praying—began to affect him physically. Compare note on v. 1.

I was very much afraid Nehemiah may have feared the loss of his livelihood, since court etiquette required those in the king's presence to have a cheerful countenance. It is also possible that Nehemiah was nervous because he knew that if his request were refused he might not get another opportunity

NOTE: What is often overlooked is that Nehemiah returned to Babylon!

Nehemiah 2:6 (FSB): **and I set for him an appointed time** The specific time is not given here, but it is later mentioned that **Nehemiah returned to Susa after 12 years in Jerusalem** (Neh 5:14; 13:6).

The New Bible Commentary

Nehemiah 2:1–10: It is a fine **illustration of the balance between confidence in the sovereignty of God, with prayer as its proper response, and human responsibility, with its counterpart in thoughtful planning.**

Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible

"I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king—Xenophon has particularly remarked about the polished and graceful manner in which the cupbearers of the Median, and consequently the Persian, monarchs performed their duty of presenting the wine to their royal master. Having washed the cup in the king's presence and poured into their left hand a little of the wine, which they drank in his presence, they then handed the cup to him, not grasped, but lightly held with the tips of their thumb and fingers. This description has received some curious illustrations from the monuments of Assyria and Persia, on which the cupbearers are frequently represented in the act of handing wine to the king."

"It was deemed highly unbecoming to appear in the royal presence with any weeds or signs of sorrow (Es 4:2); and hence it was no wonder that the king was struck with the dejected air of his cupbearer, while that attendant, on his part, felt his agitation increased by his deep anxiety about the issue of the conversation so abruptly begun."

* "I love it when a plan comes together." It was used frequently throughout the show, "A Team," 1983 to 1986 by the team's leader, Colonel John "Hannibal" Smith, played by actor George Peppard.