Everyone Has A Place To Make A Difference
Nehemiah 2:17

We live in a culture that tells us the ultimate goal of life is comfort. We are conditioned to avoid commitment, to bypass duty, and to protect our peace at all costs. If something feels heavy, our immediate instinct is to cast it off or hand it over to someone else. Today, we are looking at a man who had every reason to stay comfortable. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes in the palace of the capital of Susa. He held a position of high prestige, immense wealth, and physical security. He had made it, yet God was about to disrupt his comfort with a heavy, holy weight.

"*Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile and also about Jerusalem. 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.*'" Nehemiah 1:2-3

Nehemiah leads the third part of a 3-wave restoration of Jerusalem. Historically here is what is going on.

- The first wave was led by Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. He had overseen the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of public worship. That is the first half of the book of Ezra.

- The second wave was led by Ezra in 458 B.C. Ezra reacquainted the Israelites with the Word of God. He literally read the Word over the people after they'd returned to Jerusalem, explained the meaning of it to them, and called them to obey it.

- The third wave was led by Nehemiah in 445 BC. He led in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem—walls that would give the city security, cohesion, restore order, and allow economic life to flourish again.

God's Plan Of Restoration Involves Spiritual Awakening (Zerubbabel And Ezra), Social Reform (Esther), And Economic Flourishing (Nehemiah).

True kingdom service begins with a divine burden. Our question is: When God places a burden on your heart, will you run from it, or will you say yes to the call? Nehemiah was a leader who had a vision of what needed to be done and the gift of moving others to share the vision and work together to see it done God has called you to use the gifts He has given you to make a difference in the lives of other people and to glorify God in all that you do.

What do you do when you see something that breaks your heart?

Nehemiah has a concern for his people and his homeland. In 586 BC, about 140 years prior to the writing of Nehemiah, the Babylonians attacked the Jewish people under the rule of the evil king Nebuchadnezzar and totally destroyed their city, their culture, and their very way of life.

Solomon's temple was destroyed. Every building was in rubble. The gates to the city which represented their protection were burned. Everyone that they knew was now without a job and without any hope. The Babylonians took the Jewish people captive and held them in bondage for 70 years. Jerusalem's city walls were broken down, and Israel wasn't a nation anymore, as they were scattered throughout the world. Years earlier, there were two migrations back to the land of Israel led by Zerubbabel and then Ezra. They had rebuilt the temple and begun a renewal of worship. However, a great deal of work still needed to be done, as the walls of the capital city lay in ruins, leaving it an easy target for looters.

The Jewish people felt demoralized and completely hopeless. They felt like their life was over. Decades later, about 50,000 Jews moved back to Jerusalem to rebuild it. They were going to rebuild the city that they loved to make a better future. They couldn't make any progress and found themselves stalled. It seemed like everything resulted in a dead end.

Nehemiah's concern over the condition of Jerusalem consumed him. It broke his heart. Thoughts of what was, as opposed to what could be, brought tears to his eyes. This was not just a casual concern…it was a vision in the making. He also didn't allow his daily responsibilities to distract him from the burden that had gripped his heart.

- A Divine Burden Disrupts Our Comfort. (Nehemiah 1:1–4)

"*When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*" Nehemiah 1:4

"The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." Nehemiah 1:3

Upon hearing this, Nehemiah wept, fasted, and prayed for days. He did not view the crisis as someone else's problem, but allowed his heart to break for what broke God's heart. A divine burden acts as a holy wake-up call, giving us clear eyes to see vulnerabilities around us—whether in marriages, neighborhoods, or communities needing the Gospel.

1. **God Uses A Surrendered Life.**

"The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it." Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time." Nehemiah 2:4-6

One reformer who worked alongside these men around 474 BC was Queen Esther. Esther served as Queen in Persia. Esther had been married to King Artaxerxes' father Ahasuerus. King Artaxerxes is mentioned in Nehemiah 1 and 2. Many scholars suggest that the queen listed in Nehemiah 2:6 was Esther. It certainly would have been possible that she was still alive, even after her husband had died, and she was still sitting on the throne.

"*And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) 'For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return?' So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.*" Nehemiah 2:6

Scholars say that since Nehemiah mentions the presence of the queen it suggests that she had some kind of special significance to him because she was a fellow Jew. Queen Esther had stood up in the government to protest a racial genocide being planned against her people. Nehemiah details how the wall of the city was rebuilt. Rebuilding broken places starts with a surrendered heart and a simple "yes" to a holy burden, much like Nehemiah's.

- No one can rebuild a broken community alone.

"*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*.'" Nehemiah 2:17

The "*Send me so I can rebuild the walls*" in Nehemiah 2:5 becomes "*Let <u>us</u> arise and build. So <u>they</u> put their hands to the good work*." Nehemiah 2:18

The key verse to the book of Nehemiah and the beginning of the miracle of restoration of this broken community is in Nehemiah 2:18 "*so they began the good work*." God used Nehemiah and God used the people in a dramatic way. He longs to use us in the same way. Later in Nehemiah 6:3, he will call the work of restoration "*a great work*" telling his critics, "*I am doing a great work and I cannot come down from it.*"

God didn't design the work of the Kingdom to be a solo sport. Nehemiah's strategy wasn't relying on a few elites. He assigned everyday families to build the sections of the wall right in front of their own houses (Nehemiah 3).
True restoration happens when ordinary people—teachers, parents, workers, and neighbors—shoulder the responsibility together. Every person has a part to play, a brick to lay, and a gap to stand in.

Nehemiah Chapter 3, a chapter that many people skip over because it reads like a telephone book full of ancient, unpronounceable names, lists dozens of builders, gates, and sections of a wall. But if you pay close attention, a beautiful rhythm emerges. Throughout these 32 verses, a single phrase is repeated over and over again like a steady heartbeat: "Next to them…" or "After him…"

This chapter is a celebration of what happens when ordinary people step into the gaps and lock arms to rebuild a broken community. It teaches us that true kingdom impact is never a solo performance. It is a shared partnership. Nehemiah 3:6-32 lists a diverse combination of workers! These were people of different professions, not professional builders. They were not trained for this kind of work. It would have seemed they had an easy excuse to not do anything, but they jumped in and did the work. The most important ability in the work of God is *availability*. The one with few gifts and little talent who has passion and drive to see God's work done, will accomplish far more than a gifted and talented person who doesn't have the passion and drive to do the LORD's work.

Priests
Levites
Goldsmiths (vs. 8)
Perfume makers (vs. 8)
Rulers (vs. 9,12,14-19)
Ordinary citizens (vs. 13)
One man with his daughters even did their own section! (vs. 11b)
Temple servants (vs. 26)
Guards (vs. 29b)
Merchants (vs. 32)
Numerous neighbors from nearby towns and cities pitched in as well!

Different kinds of tradesmen were willing to build for God what they were not trained to do.

With the great number of different people working on the walls, it was imperative that they all work with the same mind – or the wall would not be uniform and would not be a strong defense. Each section was a little different because different people worked on each section.

Nehemiah had the people go to different places. Each section ran about 168 yards long. They had to finish about 3-4 yards of wall a day allowing for Sabbath days off.

Nehemiah lists a diverse group of people who worked on the wall. They rebuilt the walls and their community because each person used their gift and did their part. It pleased God to see His people working together in one accord, with one heart, and with one mind.

Think about that! You had theologians, artists, fragrance-makers, teenage girls, and retail business owners all getting their hands dirty in the mortar. Nehemiah 3 shows us that the corporate executive is standing "next to" the stay-at-home parent. The artist is standing "next to" the contractor. No matter your background, your profession, or your skill set, you have a vital brick to lay in the house of God.

The wall got built because, as Nehemiah 4 says, *"the people had a mind to work."* Nehemiah4:6

But more than that, they had a heart to work *together*. Look at the people sitting to your left and to your right. They are the "next to them" in your life. We are not competitors. We are coworkers. We are not consumers watching a show. We are builders restoring a community. Let's drop our isolation, pick up our tools, and stand shoulder to shoulder.

"*Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur son of Imri built next to them. The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. Meremoth*

son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs. The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.
The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah—Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth—places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section. Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him. Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters." Nehemiah 3:1-12

God's plan of restoration involves spiritual awakening, social reform, and economic flourishing. God's plan for bringing renewal is about more than what I do through the pulpit. It unfolds through you in the community.

The first time the phrase "*filled with the Spirit*" is used in the Bible is in Exodus 31: "*The LORD said to Moses, 'See, I have called by name Bezalel… and I have filled him with the Spirit of God...'*" To do what? To preach? To write worship songs? No. "*...I have filled him with the Spirit of God with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft*."

This reinforces our first observation that God's plan of restoration involves spiritual awakening, social reform, and economic flourishing.

- God's Plan Of Restoration Involves Everyone.

Saying "Yes" Means Making Yourself Available. (Nehemiah 1:11)

Nehemiah did not pray for someone else to step up. He offered himself as the answer, risking his comfort and position to help rebuild. God looks for everyday people willing to step into the gap and offer their time, resources, and availability. When you read the list in chapter 3, what stands out is the repetition of the words "*next to them*."

Next to Eliashib were the sons of Hassenaah, and next to them Meremoth, and next to him were Shallum and his daughters. They were all working on different parts of the wall, and most of them were repairing the section right out in front of their own houses. Commentators tell us Nehemiah's point in presenting the list this way is to show us that everyone was involved.

Scholars say the way the work happens in Nehemiah is the culmination of a progression we've seen building throughout the Old Testament. At the beginning, God brought His plan into being through select individuals. Spiritual superheroes like Moses, Joshua, Samson, or Deborah did all the work—but here, at the tail end of the Old Testament (Nehemiah is the last chronological book in the Old Testament), we're seeing God start to use everyone in Israel to bring about His Kingdom.

One of the things that is significant about Nehemiah 3 is what it doesn't say. It doesn't say, "Nehemiah did this and then Nehemiah did that," but, rather, "this person over here you've never heard of did this, and this lady over there did that, and this guy's daughters were working on this." Everyone had a role in restoring Jerusalem.

This diffusion of the work continued on in the New Testament. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit fell on the church, Peter said that this was a fulfillment of the promise that in the last days God's Spirit would be poured out on "all flesh" and "*your sons and daughters will prophesy*." "Your sons and daughters" means ordinary people—every Christian would prophesy. In the Old Testament, it was only special, select individuals who prophesied—people with names like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Habakkuk. But now, Peter says, the Spirit of prophecy is given to all believers. Everyone has a spot on the wall, a place they are divinely empowered for mission.

2. **Our Yes Changes Someone's Life.**

In Nehemiah 3 the phrase "*Made repairs*" is used 40 times. The Hebrew word is *chazaq*, and means strengthening, encouraging, and making something better. In Ephesians 4:12, God says the purpose of the church is "*for the equipping of the saints,*" and the meaning of *equipping* is to "prepare, strengthen, and make something able to be used." We come together as Christians to strengthen one another, to make us strong and able to be used by God to serve as the church in the community.

"On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God. Standing on the stairs of the Levites were Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani. They cried out with loud voices to the Lord their God. And the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah—said: "Stand up and praise the Lord your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you." Nehemiah 9:1-6

"*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God; as each one has received a special gift, a spiritual gift*." 1 Peter 4:10

What in the world are we supposed to get out of a list of names like that?

Have you experienced a list of names like this in your Bible reading plan? I talk to people all the time who are excited about reading through the Bible! Everything is going great, and then you hit a list of names like this one—and it's like when you were a kid and you were running into the ocean at full speed and you hit the water and it's like you're suddenly trying to run through wet cement.

Tim Keller says, "Leading the return from the exile you have male and female, lay and clergy. You have people working for spiritual maturity, economic flourishing, and better public policy. God uses THEM ALL in His restoration project. God is interested in all three, and God calls His people to all three.

The spiritual always comes first—Zerubbabel and Ezra came first. Tony Evans says this is what made the Civil Rights Movement so effective and enduring in our country. Dr. Evans says the Civil Rights Movement wasn't perfect by a long shot, but movement leaders often prayed before they marched and they put God and His vision of the world at the center of everything, which gave their movement not only a transcendent purpose, but also an enduring permanence. Tony Evans also reminds that the leaders in the movement didn't stop with the spiritual. They went on to call for social change. Wherever the Gospel is preached, social reforms always follow, and then that's followed by economic flourishing.

There's an economist named Barry Asmus who co-wrote a book with theologian Wayne Grudem called *The Poverty of Nations* in which they demonstrate that societies that adopt a Christian worldview, human and economic flourishing is consistently the result. He concludes that it is because they demonstrate the Christian worldview which is an expression of God's design, so it shouldn't surprise us that people flourish as they operate according to that design. It's like reading the Owner's Manual and operating the machine according to it.

British Historian Tom Holland is not a professed believer, but he says, "Look through the best parts of Western history, and you'll find Christianity at the center of our best social reforms. The abolition of slavery, the rise of women's right to vote, child labor laws; universities, hospitals, the social welfare and social security safety nets—

those leading the way in these things were Christians. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, every hospital in sub-Saharan Africa was started by Christian missions."

New York Times journalist Nicolas Kristoff, who is an atheist, writes a lot about ending human rights abuses around the world. He said, "Wherever you go in the world studying social reform, you can't get over the fact that just about EVERYWHERE reforms are happening Christians are at the center of them. Hospitals, non-profits, empowerment programs in poor neighborhoods … over and over, it was Christians driving the work. He said it made him angry, because he was trying to convince secular people to care for the poor, but he had to admit that Christians had a centuries-long head start on him.

Just because you're not called to work in the church—doesn't mean you don't have a role in building a part of Jerusalem's wall and in manifesting Christ's kingdom. The Gospel will send many people into places of social reform and economic progress. Secular jobs. Medicine. Education. Helping people buy their first home. One of those will be the focus of your divinely-placed burden, your Nehemiah dream.

Not all of us will be called to lead in the church, but that doesn't mean God doesn't have a place for you on that wall, manifesting His kingdom. The number one predictor of any Christian movement in history is how many young men and women they are raising up into ministry.

YOU have a role. In the Kingdom of God, there's no such thing as a passive consumer. God didn't save you so He could sanitize you and set you on a sanctified shelf. He saved you to send you into service. A Christian who has not embraced his or her role in the mission has not fully become a disciple of Jesus yet. Charles Spurgeon said, "When it comes to Jesus' Kingdom, you're either a missionary or an impostor. A missionary or a mission field. There's no 3rd option!"

The call to get involved in the mission of God is not a secondary call you receive from Jesus where He appears to you like He did to Moses at a burning bush and says to you, "Now, I want you to start serving Me." No, the call to get involved in the mission was included in the call to follow Jesus. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus said, "*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" This means when you accepted the call to follow Jesus, you accepted the call to mission. There's no such thing as a person following Jesus who is not engaged in the mission. Engaging in the mission is what it means to follow Jesus!

The question is no longer if you are called, only where and how. Every one of us is responsible to study how God designed us; to think about what gifts He's given us, what experiences He's led us through—how He's written our story and then discern from that what He wants you to do with that in His kingdom. The question is no longer if you're called, only where and how.

We all have to have a Nehemiah 2:12 moment, "*And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem.*"

Pray, "Lord, Show me what I can do! Here am I, Lord, send me!"

Missionary Jim Elliot famously said, "You don't need to sit around waiting on a VOICE when you've already been given a VERSE."

Every believer should ask God how his or her talents and gifts can best be used in bringing Christ's kingdom to earth. We should go from passive willingness to serve in God's mission to an active quest to figure out what divine desires God has put in our hearts and what special gifts He has put in our hands. The question is no longer IF you're called; it's only where and how.

What's your role?

Sometimes we just grow accustomed to the brokenness around us.

Some people mentioned in this chapter had been living in Jerusalem for 50 years before Nehemiah led them to start rebuilding. They'd gotten used to the broken-down walls and piles of rubble. They had grown accustomed to the brokenness in the people around them. They walked past broken and hopeless places every day and didn't even think about them. Maybe we've gotten used to broken-down walls in our city.

There is so much brokenness around us. AT MOST, the max number of people involved in any significant way in church in our county is about 55% And that's being really, really generous with what it means to be involved. I mean, drive down your street at 9:30 and see how many people aren't going to church! But even if it's a full 55%, that means at least 45% of the population remains completely unreached. That's about 70,000 people in our community that aren't Christians.

I don't want us to ever get used to that. Are you okay with that number of people going into a Christless eternity? When we push you to invite people to Easter, it is because literally 70,000 of our neighbors are lost and need Jesus. Parts of our city are spiritual rubble.

People always ask me, "When is enough, enough?" And I say, "When there's not 70,000 lost people still in our community, that's when!" We're not trying to grow a megachurch. We're trying to reach a city. People say, "Well, you're all about numbers." And we absolutely are. The numbers of people saved, numbers of marriages restored, and numbers of addicts delivered. Which of these people do you want us to stop reaching?

We're a little inconvenienced by the parking lot jam or how crowded the lobby feels sometimes, but you know who loves a growing church? The parent of the prodigal son who has just started to come back to church because he got involved with our student program, or that wife who has been praying for her husband for years, and he has just started to come to our church. They're grateful that our church created room for "ONE MORE." Everyone has a role, and there's plenty to do.

Did you notice verse 5, "*And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord*." Nehemiah 3:5

What you should learn from that is this, God takes note of those who do not serve. In every movement, every church, including this one, there is a group of people who don't get their hands dirty, who enjoy the show but don't want to help build the wall.

In Nehemiah 3, a lot of these people were doing work that was clearly outside of their skill set. Verse 8 talks about perfume makers. They were not made for outdoor physical labor. They were going into the fragrance industry, and yet, in this chapter, they weren't making scented candles. Help was needed on the wall. Sometimes we have to walk away from our perfume making and work on the broken part of the wall right in front of us.

- In God's Plan Of Restoration, He Rarely Uses Experts.

If you look at the list Nehemiah gives in chapter 3, another thing that stands out is that none of the people Nehemiah listed were… BUILDERS! There were priests, goldsmiths, perfume makers, someone's teenage daughters, administrative bureaucrats, and paper pushers—but not a single professional architect, carpenter, or bricklayer was named. The walls of the city that have been fought over more than any other wall in history was built by a bunch of people with no construction experience!

God builds His greatest things through ordinary people. That's a theme that runs cover-to-cover through your Bible. He chooses a couple of sterile geriatrics in their 80's to birth His nation in the world. He built His church, not with 12 scholars, or 12 accomplished governmental leaders, or 12 rich guys—He built it with 12 fishermen and blue-collar workers.

In 1 Corinthians 1:27, Paul says: "*God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; what is low and despised in the world to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God*."

Adrian Rogers giving an amazing illustration of this. He asked them one Sunday morning to stand if they fit certain accolades: valedictorian, academic scholarship, All-American athlete, homecoming court, student body president. He basically went through a bunch of "who's who" type of acknowledgments. When he got done, about a fifth of the congregation was standing. He had everybody clap, and then he said, "For those of you standing, I've got good news and bad news. The good news is, 'God can use you, TOO… the bad news is you're not His first choice. The people seated next to you are."

So stop saying, "God, I'm not trained; I can't do anything to help." God says, "Well, then you're the one I'm looking for, because it's not about what you can build for Me, but what I am building through you. In fact, I'd prefer you not be all that talented because then you'd try to take all the credit and probably be convinced your ideas are as good as mine. You'll just clog up the line. I want to use people who plainly recognize that the power comes from Me."

God Restores His City Through Instruments Of Grace.

Keep in mind the people you are reading about in this list were the sons and daughters of the people who had been exiled in Babylon because of their sin. They had a checkered past, to say the least. Their families had been so faithless and unbelieving God had kicked them out of the Promised Land. Maybe you can relate. Maybe you have a sordid past, or maybe you come from a messed-up family, or maybe you are simply aware of what goes on between your ears throughout the week and wonder, "How could God ever use someone like me?" Broken. Needy. Prone to wander. Maybe you're divorced. You just got fired in disgrace. You're a newly released prisoner. Or still recovering from some mistake that has left you wounded. I've got good news for you, friend: God builds His church through bad, broken, messed-up people—in fact, He builds His church ONLY through bad, broken, messed-up people, BECAUSE that's the only kind of people there are.

God has a plan for your life! He wants to use you! Look at that person next to you. He wants to use that person. Is that hard to believe? That person next to you is AMAZING! He wants to use them to do something with ETERNAL significance. In fact, look over and tell them they're special. All it takes is simple, ordinary obedience, yielding yourself to the Holy Spirit to say, "Here am I, Lord, SEND ME."

You have to see Nehemiah's book from the perspective of the whole Bible. You see, this book is not primarily about a man named Nehemiah putting up some brick and mortar on a piece of real estate in the Middle East. It's not even primarily about you and your dreams. No, the book of Nehemiah is ultimately about a greater Nehemiah who would build a truly eternal city, a city of salvation. And there's a strong hint of that in Nehemiah 2:20. Some outsiders—some foreigners—come to Nehemiah and say, "What are you doing?" "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*.'"

The wording of this is striking. "You, foreigners, you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem." That's the exact opposite of what God had promised about Jerusalem. He promised Jerusalem would one day be a blessing to every people group in the world and that foreigners from every nation would come to it and find their salvation in it. You see, this Jerusalem that Nehemiah is building is clearly not the Jerusalem God had in mind—at least not the ultimate version of it. The architect of the real Jerusalem, the real Temple, would be born into a manger 400 years later. The truer and greater Nehemiah would not turn away foreigners. He would say to them, "*Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*." Matthew 11:28

The Jerusalem that Nehemiah built was one he fought to keep closed to outsiders. The Jerusalem Jesus built is one He died to open up. Nehemiah built walls to keep the impure out of Jerusalem. Jesus tore them down so that whosoever will may come—the blind, the lame, the impure, the defiled, all find their refuge in Him. You see, the truth is: the verdict on all of our lives is but Jesus built a "city" with foundations that can never be shaken and a temple where we could be saved by grace.

This is the Gospel: you can never be righteous enough, pure enough, or good enough to earn God's favor. No, Jesus offers you His righteousness as a gift—a gift entirely of grace—purchased for you at the cross. It's called "gift-

righteousness," meaning it's not righteousness you earn for yourself by being good enough. It's righteousness God gives you as a gift, purchased for you by the blood of Jesus Christ.

And after you receive that gift-righteousness, it's followed by gift power—not power that comes from your talents and your wisdom, but power that comes from yielding yourself to the Spirit. All this is available to all those who will simply receive it as a gift of grace, not a reward for personal awesomeness.

Are you ready to receive Christ's righteousness, if you never have, and then to receive Christ's power and purpose for your life? It's time for you to stop building your own city and give yourself to Jesus to be used by Him to build His eternal city.

Every person is called into full-time Christian service. My full-time Christian service I've been called into is to be a Pastor. Your full-time Christian service that you've been called into may be to be a carpenter. But it is full-time Christian service. Who owns that company? You say, my boss owns it. NO. God owns it. "*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof*." Psalm 24:1

God owns the owner of your company, and God owns your company. Everything in this world is the Lord's.
See your job as partnership with God.

"*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving*." Colossians 3:23-24

Whatever you do:

Somebody's got to build the automobiles. Somebody's got to type the letters. Somebody has to run the grocery stores. When the Bible wants to describe wickedness, the Bible uses Babylon as a symbolic name for wickedness.

"*This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.*'" Jeremiah 29:4-8

God put them in Babylon. Maybe God put you in Babylon. What is your city? That's your Babylon. Seek the peace of that city. Do good. Participate. You are a partner with Almighty God.

- See Your Job As A Place Of Service To Yourself And Others.

God uses our yes to influence other people. Nehemiah's actions had tremendous impact on other people. Our capacity to make impact is unbelievable. In Chapter 10 they vow to follow God's commands because of his yes. Other people are discipled and led. Their family and their faith was impacted. Your obedience affects other people's faith.

Nehemiah traded the palace for rubble. He traded prestige for critics and opposition. In chapter 11 when the walls rebuilt they moved from the countryside to inside the city the security and stability was on the walls they weren't isolated.

Serving is a response to God's goodness and grace. (Chapter 9) "You are a faithful God abounding in love."

3. **Saying Yes Is A Response To God's Love And Grace.**

It's not a duty It's not to earn His favor or avoid His wrath. It's a response to His grace for them to serve. God blesses joy and gratitude.

In chapter 12 they have the dedication, and the sound of joy was heard far away. Joy travels farther than you think.

“And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.” Nehemiah 12:43

“Don't grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time, you will reap a harvest if you do not give up.” Galatians 6:9

The conclusion of the project is celebrated in Nehemiah 4:15, “*So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days*.” Nehemiah 4:15

The city was rebuilt as a result of a leadership miracle with the favor of God through the hands of ordinary people. Nehemiah was just an ordinary guy whose heart was broken by the plight of his people. He knelt down to pray, and he stood up to act. All through the story he sought God faithfully. He made his plans carefully. He inspired people passionately. He pushed back the critics, and he kept his eyes on the prize. Whenever the enemies tried to distract him, he said no to anything that was lesser, because he was saying yes to his greater work. Wherever you are in the process right now, our God is with you. He will never leave you. He will never forsake you. He is empowering you. Embrace the work that is in front of you as a divine assignment from God.