



NEHEMIAH

pray plan build

Daily Worship Booklet

Week 3

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day and the people of God were filled with joy!

Friday - Nehemiah 2:17-20 – So they strengthened their hands.

Nehemiah's clear, concise corporate challenge, which focused correctly on God, was well received by the people. It didn't frighten them, it didn't overwhelm them; it resonated with them. Why? Because the need was self-evident. They all could see what needed to be done, and they just hadn't had the leadership to move them from seeing to doing. Now, God had provided that leadership. It was also because these men were men of God. Yes, they had lost their passion for seeing the walls rebuilt, but as one commentator writes, "They were not so accustomed to their situation that they took it for granted and decided that nothing could be changed." This speaks again to the leadership Nehemiah brought to the city in that he was able to lift them out of their partial slough of despond about the city and set before them a vision they could see the merits of and get behind. The result is the response, "Let us rise up and build." So, they strengthened their hands for the good work."

This statement, 'strengthening their hands for the good work', is interesting. Obviously, it does not mean they all began hand-strengthening exercises. It does communicate that they didn't get carried away in a collective wave of enthusiasm. That was not going to happen. These men were competent individuals, and many would have suffered various hardships, including exile for some of them. They were the type of people to jump up and down at the first sight of a plan. Nehemiah probably hadn't been the first to say – let's rebuild these walls. They had listened carefully to and weighed up what Nehemiah had said about God's hand being upon him, and the words the king had spoken to Nehemiah. Moreover, they had concluded that this was of God and would require their work. Nothing that is of God is easy. Taking possession of the promised land was not easy for God's people in the Old Testament. The task of speaking the gospel and seeing Christ build his Church in the New Testament was not easy; ask the people driven out by the persecution of Saul and then ask Paul (2 Corinthians 11:16-29). And then, look at the life of the Lord Jesus.

When clear leadership is given, with evidence of God's previous blessing, the people of God will invariably respond. Why? Because when God is leading a leader or leaders, those who are being led will smell the aroma of God in it, and God will lead them to respond. It has happened throughout the church's history, and it will continue until the Day that the Lord Jesus Christ returns. That is both wonderful and exciting, but it demands that work be done, not just by a few.

Q1. How did the officials in Jerusalem respond to what Nehemiah had said?

Q2. What is required to fulfil a vision that God lays before His people?

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**The book of Nehemiah focuses on the work involved in labouring to see
Christ build his church.**

Thursday - Nehemiah 2:17-20 – Nehemiah shares his vision.

At some point, after having researched the situation and deciding how he would take the task of rebuilding the walls and restoring the burnt gates, Nehemiah gathers the officials of the city to share his vision. It probably wouldn't have been too difficult to have done so. I cannot imagine there was a lot to get excited about in Jerusalem; life would have had its routines; the fact that Hanani's brother Nehemiah had come from Susa, where he was cupbearer to the king, would have been big news. He wanted everyone to come and hear about his plan for the city's reconstruction, which would have been made with genuine interest and anticipation. However, it's one thing to gather people; it's another to have something to say to them, and what a message Nehemiah delivered.

It was clear – Nehemiah knew what he wanted to say, and he said it. He identified the problem: Jerusalem lay in ruin, and the gates burned. He wasn't sharing with them something that was new or would have startled them. They all knew that what he was saying was true. They witnessed it every day for themselves.

It was a corporate challenge – He challenged the officials directly and corporately; by that, I mean he challenged them all to get involved. This wouldn't be a task just for the stonemasons and joiners in the city; everyone would be asked to invest themselves in meeting the task, and these city leaders needed to understand that that also meant them.

It was concise – Nehemiah did not waffle on about how he had reacted when the news of shame and trouble of the city was first shared with him by Hanani and the 'certain men'. He didn't go into details about his nighttime survey, what he had seen, and everything they would need to do. He concentrated on the key points, understanding that the details would be shared later at the appropriate time.

It was correct – What I mean by correct is that it focused on the goal and what God would do. They needed to address the city walls and burnt gates issue, so they would no longer be a laughingstock to the surrounding cities and nations. However, the most significant reason why what he says is correct is because his focus is on who God is and what He has done.

Those who have been given the privilege and the responsibility to lead the Church under Christ, her Head, must understand what she is; and must be doing and be able to communicate that clearly. They must speak concisely to all within her members, both communicant and covenant. Most importantly, they must always focus on God and His work for His glory.

Q1. What did Nehemiah do?

Q2. How did Nehemiah speak to the officials?

Monday – Nehemiah 2:11-16 – Research from a different perspective.

So, Nehemiah went out at night with a few men to survey the state of Jerusalem's walls for himself. It wasn't that he hadn't believed what his brother Hanani and the 'certain men' had told him at least six or seven months earlier; the fact that he was riding around the walls in the middle of the night was proof that he had. However, he needed to establish the facts for himself. While it is essential not to disregard the word of others, it is always prudent for a leader to do their own research and thinking. Two questions need to be asked: Why was he riding on an animal? We are not told what the animal was, but presumably, it was with a horse or a donkey. Secondly, why did he go during the night?

Taking the first question – why was he riding while those with him were on foot? Well, it may have been that he was showing his status, but Nehemiah doesn't strike me as a man given to demonstrations of power. Could it have been that it just made his journey a bit less tiring? There could be something in that; he'd have wanted to keep a fresh mind to assess what he was seeing, but it being the night, he would also have had to pay attention to where the horse was walking. Could there have been another reason? What would he have gained from being on an animal? Height, and with height comes perspective. It is amazing how raising one's sight line, even by five or six feet, can provide a different view. From where he was on the animal, Nehemiah could see and better assess the state of the walls. It is not that he made his way around the entire walls on the animal, for he tells us in verse 14 that he had to dismount because there was no room for the animal to pass.

Leadership requires a capacity and a desire to get above the situation and observe it from as many angles as possible. Some people have a God-given gift for that, but even those of us who do not have such a gift can gain a different perspective by looking at things through the counsel of God. Through time spent with God, the eye of the believer sees the world differently, not merely the world but also the church. For many in the church today, the issues facing the church can be addressed if we work to see the church grow bigger; that way, we will show the world that we are relevant. It is not a new phenomenon; historically, the same desired effect was pursued through church unions, where everything was watered down to the lowest level of biblical requirements. Today, it is being driven more by individuals. It's not that we want to develop the siege mentality that can come with being small and be proud of it; we certainly want to see the Lord bless us, but in His way, for His glory.

Why does Nehemiah do this at night? Well, we'll find that out tomorrow.

Q1. What did Nehemiah do, and why did he do it?

Q2. How did Nehemiah travel, and how would that have helped him?

Tuesday – Nehemiah 2:11-16 – At night - why?

So why did Nehemiah go out at night? Given the downsides of doing so, it is an important question, which would have included the simple danger of being out in Jerusalem at night, a diminished capacity to see what he was surveying, and the possibility of making mistakes due to tiredness. Each of these is significant, but combined they underscore the legitimacy of ‘Why do it at night?’ The simple answer is secrecy. Nehemiah didn’t want the city officials or people to know what he was doing. Why not? Because he needed time. Doing homework on a situation is one thing, but whatever is discovered must be carefully processed, which also takes time. Moreover, if it is a sensitive matter, as was the case here, as we shall see as we work our way through what subsequently transpires, then that processing needs to be done beyond the glare of those with a vested interest, whether for good or ill. So, Nehemiah goes out at night to gain the information he needs without prying eyes, and inquisitive and potentially distracting questions.

Secrecy in leadership is not wrong. It becomes wrong if what is being done in secret is wrong, but, in and of itself, not telling everyone everything that is being done is the proper and necessary thing to do at times. It is what God has done. He has revealed a phenomenal amount about His will, and what He has foreordained will take place. However, there is an equally phenomenal amount that God has not revealed to us. How does He square predestination with free will – because He does, but He has not revealed it to us yet? Jesus was also a secretive person. He didn’t always answer direct questions directly but frequently resorted to asking the questioner questions. On occasions, he told the disciples and others not to tell anyone about what they had seen or what had happened to them; for example, He commanded Peter, James, and John, “Tell no one of the vision (the transfiguration) until the Son of Man is raised from the dead” (Matthew 17:9). So, secrecy is not wrong, it is how you use it that matters.

So, it is all right for godly leaders not to share everything they are working on or thinking about. While every question may be legitimate, not every question must be answered when we think it should be; again, there are many questions we would like God to answer now, but some of them may not be answered for years, if ever, on this side of eternity.

What does it take to wait patiently for an answer? Trust. Of course, God is to be trusted for who He is, and church leaders are to be respected for their office, but they must gain trust through the decisions they make and the biblical leadership they exercise.

Q1. Why did Nehemiah go out to do his survey at night?

Q2. Is secrecy always wrong? When and why is it necessary?

Wednesday – Nehemiah 2:11-16 - Thorough work.

The word I get when I read what Nehemiah did during this night of surveying the ruined walls of Jerusalem is – ‘thorough’. There was nothing casual or haphazard about his approach. It is logical, methodical and meticulous. He started on the city’s southwest corner through the Valley Gate. He went along the southern wall to the Dung Gate, turned north along the Kidron Valley across the north wall, then down the east wall and re-entered the city via the Valley Gate. Nehemiah could have contented himself with surveying just the south wall from the Valley to the Dung Gate, where he had to dismount because the animal could not pass through. He could have surmised that he had all the information he needed. After all, a wall is a wall, and, if it is broken down, seeing the state of the collapse in one place will be as good as seeing it in another. Also, it is night, and he does want to maintain the secrecy of what he is doing, so why take the risk of being seen? He could even have taken that as ‘a sign’ that God did not need him to go any further. Nehemiah didn’t resort to any of these excuses to give up the task of meticulously surveying the wall to see exactly what he was up against regarding the reconstruction task. Why? Because this was about God’s glory!

Admittedly, some of us are more wired for detail than others, but none of us should use the excuse of ‘I am not a detail person’ for laziness when applying ourselves to a task, especially not when living and serving in the Bride. We need to guard with everything we have against allowing an attitude of, ‘well, it’s just the church’, meaning ‘I don’t have to give my best to it’ to take root and establish itself in our lives. An attitude which leads to the sentiment that ‘I don’t have to dress my best for worship’, ‘I don’t have to give my best to whatever opportunity I have been given to serve’, ‘I don’t have to give of my best financial return to the Lord’, ‘I don’t have to give of my best when it comes to loving God and His people’. It is not good. Paul writes to the believers in Philippi, and he says, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus gave His best; He gave nothing less than Himself to redeem us from a self-centred, lazy life. God has made us alive in Christ and given us a new nature to fulfil the work he has planned for us to do in advance. It’s not about having a bigger role. It is about doing the simple things to the best of our God-given ability – to the glory of our Father in heaven and not just to keep things ticking over.

Q1. How did Nehemiah take on the task of surveying the walls?

Q2. Why was he so diligent and thorough?