



Nehemiah 2:1-20

A Responsible Leader

When Nehemiah heard the news about the deplorable conditions in the city of Jerusalem, he wept, mourned, fasted and prayed. He waited four months on God to lead, direct and provide. But he was also a strong leader with great courage, godliness and wisdom.

BURDEN OF SOUL BEFORE GOD

Nehemiah carried the burden in secret for four months. It was so big that it broke through his ability to control the expression of it. "And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. So the king said to me, Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart. Then I was very much afraid" (Nehemiah 2:1-2, NASB 1995).

Nehemiah did not wear his emotions on his sleeves, but on this occasion the king sensed something was wrong. The king relied on him to keep him safe. Could Nehemiah's countenance be telling the king that he was involved in a plot to kill the king? Was he aware of some imminent danger? The cupbearer must always be above suspicion, keeping the king's trust at all times. Nehemiah's life would be in danger if the king became suspicious. Persian kings were always in danger of assassination. Was Nehemiah aware of some plot? What is the sad look on his face all about?

Court mores dictated cheerfulness, if only to dispel notions of disloyalty. It was always a serious matter in the presence of an oriental king.

What is your response to the burden you carry? Have you gone before the Lord alone asking Him to either remove the burden all together from your heart, or to so deepen it that it is impossible for you to do anything but respond with all your personal being until it is accomplished? I think that is how Nehemiah pleaded in prayer with the Lord God. He could not conceal the deep burden on his heart. The initiative was with God, not Nehemiah. God was the one who put the burden on Nehemiah and he could not escape it.

Allan Redpath said, If God was calling him to do this work in Jerusalem, then God was surely able to work a miracle and give him favor in the presence of the king. Nehemiah went on weeping and went on praying and went on fasting, until one day God opened the door. He didn't have to speak to the king at all; the king spoke to him (p. 30).

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Where do you sense God at work? In what sense is it God-sized? In what sense is it something only God can do?

If you do not have a heart that is burdened with an overwhelming sense of conviction you will never be fruitful in the service of the Lord. The need never constitutes the call, writes Redpath. Like Nehemiah, you will not be able to hide it.

WAITING ON GOD TO ANSWER IN HIS TIMING

The burden became so intense for Nehemiah that he could not keep it to himself any longer. It became obvious to the king that Nehemiah was burdened for something much larger than himself. When that happened God intervened and opened the king's heart.

God has those individuals that He has prepared to accomplish His eternal goals. God touched the king's heart. God burdened the pagan king Artaxerxes to provide the resources for the building of the wall in Jerusalem.

God gave Nehemiah the burden. When He had prepared Nehemiah to accept the burden, He opened the door.

God's specialty is the changing of a man's heart. God decides the direction a heart will go.

Nehemiah had the conviction he had been commissioned by the Master, and God shall supply his every need.

We spend too much time working before men and too little waiting before God. Waiting before God is hard work and not very many want to pay the price.

You have not really prayed until you wait on God.

Nehemiah was a man of God waiting for the Lord to indicate the right time. We often expect God to answer immediately. We get impatient with Him. God often delays His answers. He wants us to keep praying until His answer comes. The amazing thing His timing is always perfect. He never is too early or too late. His clock is always on time.

God opened the door to the king's heart.

"I said to the king, Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire? Then the king said to me, What would you request? So I prayed to the God of heaven (Nehemiah 2:3-4).

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES

I prayed to the God of heaven (v. 4). This was an instant silent prayer, without audible words, shot to the throne of God like a quick plea for help and a correct response to the king. It was an instant email to the throne of grace. Do you send up rapid heavenward pleas? They can also be in the form of praise.

No place is unsuitable; no time is out of season for prayer. God is everywhere and listens to every prayer. Nehemiah was in his place of work before the king and queen of Persia.

Learn to pray silently to the Lord at your desk at school, your station at work, or driving along the road in pleasure. Exercise your mind and heart before God. No one else needs to be aware of it. Audible words would have been unsuitable in the current circumstances of Nehemiah. He was not putting on a show before the king. He urgently needed God's help. His very life was at stake. Much of our sincerest prayers are groanings which cannot be uttered. It is the desire directed to God in faith in unuttered words.

God promises grace for everything that is within His will for you, but for nothing that is outside His will for you. ”

Have you learned to draw upon the grace of God for ministry?

Are you doing ministry because you know God has sent you? Have you been commissioned by the Master?

Redpath says, The costliest preparation of all is to look into the face of the Lord Jesus alone, with no applause and no public, and to say to Him, Lord Jesus Christ, in this task I seek only Thy glory and the blessing of souls (p. 39). That is the person God will bless.

Do you have a secret place in your soul where only you and God meet regularly? Do you have a special room where you commune with Him?

After arriving in Jerusalem Nehemiah waited three days before doing anything. He did nothing. I suspect that he tarried with God.

The God who called you is sufficient for your every need. If there is one yielded life in which Jesus Christ lives, and that life were ultimately lost, all the honor of God would be destroyed. The yielded, surrendered, committed, dedicated, consecrated life is as safe for time and eternity as God's faithfulness and God's Book, and God's promise (Redpath, p. 52).

Do not look at your own faith; look at God's faithfulness! Do not look around on circumstances; keep on looking at the resources of the infinite God! The critical thing is that our eyes are steadily focused upon Him.

S. D. Gordon said, Jesus never sends a man ahead alone. He blazes a clear way through every thicket and woods, and then softly calls, Follow me. Let's go on together, you and I. He has been everywhere that we are called to go. His feet have trodden down smooth a path through every experience that comes to us. He knows each road, and knows it well: the valley road of disappointment with its dark shadows; the steep path of temptation down through the rocky ravines and slippery gullies; the narrow path of pain, with the brambly thorn bushes so close on each side, with their slash and sting; the dizzy road along the heights of victory; the old beaten road of commonplace daily routine. *Everyday paths He has trodden and glorified, and will walk anew with each of us. The only safe way to travel is with Him alongside and in control.* ”

There is really one life that matters before God. It is the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, indwelling in each of us by His Spirit. Because we share that one life with Him, in a vital union, we share the one great purpose and

by His Spirit. Because we share that one life with Him, in a vital union, we share the one great purpose and one great work of redemption. You can stake eternity on the fact that God the Father is not going to fail His Son.

God has unknown provisions waiting for us.

Cameron Townsend went to a tiny Indian village in the mountains of Mexico to translate the Scriptures into their language. He taught them to dam up a stream and irrigate their crops because at that time it was impossible for foreigners to preach the gospel in Mexico. This in turn provided revenue for the village. He also taught them some cottage industries. Word of the improved village life got the new president of Mexico, Lazaro Cardenas who made a trip to the village. The president walked up to the foreign Bible translator and said, "You are the man I came to see." That surprise contact opened a wide door for the future work of Wycliffe Bible Translators for years to come.

God can work in our lives if we make ourselves available to Him. You can expect God to work, often in ways that you would never anticipate.

"Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God," was the motto of the father of the modern missionary movement, William Carey.

Based upon the great faithfulness of God Nehemiah made a plea to the king.

NEHEMIAH'S PLEA TO THE KING

"I said to the king, 'If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it. Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, 'How long will your journey be, and when will you return?' So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. And I said to the king, 'If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go. And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me'" (Nehemiah 2:5-8).

Nehemiah was tactful in his presentation to the king (v. 5). It is with cunning wisdom that he presents his personal grief about the city of his fathers. It is a matter of shame and personal pride over the place of his father's sepulchers. He is careful not to arouse any political suspicions. He avoids using the word "Jerusalem" by asking permission to go to Judah.

Nehemiah was also asking King Artaxerxes to reverse his own policy he had made earlier that stopped the work on the rebuilding of the walls. A strong Jerusalem would be a threat to the near by city-states. The rulers of the Trans-Euphrates region had petitioned Artaxerxes to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:1-16).

In the previous fifteen years prior to Nehemiah's arrival there had been a serious rebellion in Egypt and the province Beyond the River. No doubt King Artaxerxes needed a stable friendly Judah and would be open to his loyal Jewish subordinate's leadership as a sympathetic governor.

The king gave Nehemiah diplomatic status as he traveled.

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With problems brewing in Syria, king Artaxerxes had a trusted man to protect his interests as governor in Judah.

Nehemiah presents a thorough plan to the king (vv. 6-8). He had done his homework thoroughly during the four months he spent praying. He was praying and planning and waiting on God.

He had the ability to plan and organize. He was planning the whole time he was praying for God to move Artaxerxes. Going out in faith does not mean you go without any plans. "I gave a definite time . . . "

- He gave a definite time to go to Jerusalem.
- He obtained letters of permission to travel through the neighboring provinces along the way (v. 7).
- He got travel permits and visas.
- He got permission to use the king's timber (v. 8a).
- The king provided protection (v. 9b).
- Nehemiah arrived in Judah with the full authority of the throne of Persia behind him.

Note carefully who got the glory. "And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me" (v. 8b). Nehemiah could stand back and declare with all of his heart, "I saw God do it! This is God's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes."

God even provided through the king for the surprises. "Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen" (Nehemiah 2:9).

That is the best kind of encouragement a person can ever receive.

When we attempt to do great things for God we may proceed with full confidence that the power of God is empowering us.

Faith is not a substitute for careful planning. God expects careful thinking and planning on our part.

Nehemiah's midnight ride around the walls helped him to formulate a specific plan of action.

NEHEMIAH SURVEYED THE WALL

"So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and its gates which were consumed by fire. Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work" (Nehemiah 2:11-16).

Nehemiah seized the critical moment and entered the open door God set before him.

He saw with his own eyes the extent of the problem. The destruction was great.

He was inspecting the ruined walls. The word indicates he was probing around, i.e. looking into the problem very carefully. He was gathering up his facts, organizing his mind and making preparations. He did not set out to build walls ill prepared.

Nehemiah gathered the necessary information to formulate a wise plan to construct a new wall with the gates. The people were discouraged. It had been nearly ninety years since the first attempt at rebuilding the wall. It took fifteen years to rebuild the temple, and a second group of exiles had failed in their attempt to rebuild the wall fifteen years earlier under Ezra. Nehemiah would also have to motivate the workers.

Does the Lord ever search you? I want Him to hold you and me in His searching gaze and investigate our lives fully. We will never see the blessing of God upon our ministry until we ask Him to show the worst part of our wall. Have you ever done that? What is the condition of your wall? How are your gates today?

There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Be prepared when the time to speak comes.

PRESENTATION TO LOCAL LEADERS

Nehemiah got other resources involved in the project. He could not do the work alone so he assembled the town council together and made his appeal to the rulers, priests, nobles and working people.

He first did the survey and planning, organized his presentation to the leaders.

He appealed to their pride. "You can see the ruins around you."

There was no discussion of the matter under these circumstances. The need was clear to all. Nehemiah proceeded from his convictions that the project was of God.

Now is the time for us to get involved. It is time for us to do something.

God had moved Nehemiah; He had moved the pagan king to get involved, and now He was moving the people to begin the rebuilding of the wall.

I saw God do it!

Get in the habit of writing down on a list with the dates those occasions and events in your life when God intervenes in your life. I call mine "I Saw God Do It!" When you have a bad day you can turn to it and remind yourself of how God has intervened in your life or how He has used you to bring glory to His name. You can use this in your prayer life as you praise Him for these great and mighty things.

The presentation (v. 17)

That we may no longer be a reproach is the appeal to the leaders.

"I told them of the hand of my God had graciously provided for me, that God has so graciously arranged my

"I told them of the hand of my God that had graciously provided for me, that God has so graciously arranged my journey to Jerusalem, and the words the king had spoken to me with respect to the building of the wall. "

The response of the people (v. 18)

The assembly got excited at the word of encouragement and exclaimed with enthusiasm, "Let us arise and build. "

The God of heaven will give us success. We His servants will start rebuilding. . . (v. 20).

Nehemiah identified himself with the people and their need, "we," "us," "we." It was a sincere emphasis on a sense of belongingness. We build this together.

You know what is next in the building program. Everytime the Lord says, "Rise and build," the Devil says, "Let's stop it. "

THE ENEMY (2:10, 19-20)

The person who answers God's call will face all of the wrath of Satan and his friends.

Nehemiah had no axe to grind, no selfish motives or ambitions, no desire for personal gain or glory. He was a man at God's disposal. As soon as a man says, "Let's rise and build," the enemy of God will gather all of its forces against him.

Every good work will meet opposition and contempt, even by religious people. Such opposition is best met by trust in the LORD who builds.

Opposition despised the things of God.

The man who makes himself available to God will draw the enemy to himself. Satan will oppose you. He will do his best to tear you down, or destroy your testimony.

The enemy stood outside of the covenant of God (v. 20b). It still does.

Earlier Zerubbabel had rejected the cooperation of the Samaritans in the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4:3). An enmity set in between the Jews and Samaritans that continued until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Roman general Titus.

The enemy of Nehemiah "mocked us and despised us" (v. 20). They mocked and ridiculed. They began by threatening and slandering and then charges of rebellion and disloyalty. If that does not work they will go on to more overt behavior.

The enemy of self-complacency was also in Jerusalem. They had been there for a hundred years. They were no threat to the devil. But Nehemiah was the man with the burden. He was the man with the vision. He was the man God had called and equipped. He had declared war against all their complacency.

The enemy of Nehemiah is a good reminder of whom Satan works against us today. He is a usurper. He had tricked us. He has bedeviled us and led us astray. He has confused, manipulated and misled us. We have been deceived.

deceived.

The outward circumstances may change from time to time and place-to-place across the centuries, however it is ultimately located in the heavenly places. The names may change but the real antagonists of God's people is always the same (Eph. 6:12).

I like the keen words of Redpath, There is no concern in the mind of Satan about the church at all until he sees a selfless Christian seeking only the glory of God. . . . Does your service for God cause Satan to worry at all? How much overtime has the devil to do in hell because of your church? . . . Have you concern for any reputation but the Master's? Then, and only then, is Satan angry (p. 38).

However, opposition was the affirmation that Nehemiah was doing the will of God.

The French ridiculed Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1941. Churchill said, When I warned the French that Britain would fight on alone whatever they did, their generals told their prime minister and his divided cabinet, If three weeks England will have their neck rung like a chicken. Some chicken; some chicken. ”

In defiance Churchill said to Hitler: We will have no truce or parley with you or the grisly gang who work your wicked will. You do your worst –and we will do our best. ”

The old fearless leader shouted, Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival. ”

Churchill was Nehemiah's kind of leader. He shouted to his people during the most terrible part of the war:

I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.

What is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory –victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror; victory however long and hard the road may be; for without there is no survival.

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end . . . we shall never surrender . . . ”

Nehemiah realized that a city without a wall was doomed. There could be no survival without her walls.

Focused commitment (v. 20)

Nehemiah did not get side tracked. His mind was stayed upon the LORD God. We need to keep our focus on Christ and He will give us victory.

It is a spiritual war we are engaged in, just as it was for Nehemiah. The only solution is to pick up our spiritual armor and fight (Eph. 6:13-20).

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

What made Nehemiah successful with the king?

1. God was the author of the plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. God put it in the mind and heart of Nehemiah (1:11; 2:12). It was not man inspired; this was something God chose to do.
2. Nehemiah was loyal to the king. There was no hypocrisy when he said, May the king live forever! He

2. Nehemiah was loyal to the king. There was no hypocrisy when he said, *May the king live forever!* He genuinely had the king's interest at heart (v. 3).
3. Nehemiah used tact before the king (v. 3). He did not create any suspicions.
4. Nehemiah was humble. He was not aggressive before the king. He was honest, open, genuine and transparent when it was appropriate. *I was very afraid.* He was sad because the city of his father's was in ruins.
5. There were no surprises. Nehemiah did not catch the king off guard. He waited for the perfect timing and planned for it.
6. Nehemiah prayed and planned in dependence on the LORD. There was careful goal setting. He stated his goal to the king with supportive details.

Nehemiah planned for success. He surveyed the situation, gathered his data, thought it through and implemented his plan in detail.

Timing was critical for Nehemiah as with all plans to work successfully.

He identified with the people (v. 17). *You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be a reproach.* ”

Let's build together is the only way to do God's work.

Opposition to the Kingdom of God is a spiritual thing. We can fight spiritual battles only with spiritual armor. We are engaged in a spiritual warfare. *The hand of my God was upon me.* ”

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Series: Studies in Nehemiah

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