

life groups

NorthStar Church

Build It Pt 2

Nehemiah

Pastor Scott Cagle

July 8 & 9, 2017

Main Point

God calls us to seek Him as we seek to live out His vision for our church. Each of us is called to influence others in some way. We are all called to make a kingdom impact in our own unique way.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What goals or aspirations have you set for you or your family for this year?

What steps are you taking to meet those goals? What challenges do you expect to face?

It's one thing to have dreams or aspirations of great things; it's another thing to have and implement a plan for meeting those goals. Often, when we set out to achieve new things, we come across many obstacles: some of which we anticipated, others we did not.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read Nehemiah 2:11-16.

What did Nehemiah gain from his undercover mission to inspect the walls of Jerusalem? Why do you think Nehemiah said nothing to those who would be doing the work until he had inspected the walls himself?

How would this endeavor have benefited Nehemiah's vision casting? What is the takeaway for us if we as individuals or a church have a vision to communicate to others?

Nehemiah came in and inspected what reality was. Given Nehemiah's commitment to prayer, we can imagine him talking with God as he surveyed the situation. He wanted to see with his eyes and hear with his ears exactly what God was calling him to do. Once he knew what reality was, he cast a vision for what the future could look like. Nehemiah probably believed that those who would be doing the work would want to know he had thought through everything carefully. Nehemiah had done so, but his final inspection of the walls provided him further important information to finalize his plans. He was about to face the biggest leadership challenge of his life.

Have a volunteer read Nehemiah 2:17-18.

How did Nehemiah find his purpose and calling to rebuild Jerusalem (vv. 17-18)?

What points did Nehemiah make publicly to rally the people to rebuild? Which one do you find most convincing?

What are the key points of Nehemiah's message (both his words and the way he lived) that stand out to you? What would a similar message to our world sound and look like?

Nehemiah enlisted the necessary support by use of the term we. By doing so, he identified with and made himself part of those he wished to enlist in the project. The work required a team effort—something that would honor God and bring blessing to all the Israelites in the city, not merely to Nehemiah. God's leader mentioned the trouble in which the people found themselves. Without adequate protection and security, they were highly vulnerable to enemy attack. Nehemiah painted the vivid picture of Jerusalem in ruins along with its burned gates, thus appealing to the people's senses of loyalty and obligation toward the city of their ancestors. He encouraged them to help rebuild Jerusalem's wall. Only then would Jerusalem's citizens no longer be a disgrace.

What can we learn from Nehemiah about the importance of building teamwork as we approach God's work? Because he heard from God, Nehemiah could speak for God. Because he heard from God, his vision was clear, compelling, and included everyone. His vision was right on, and so was his method for reaching his vision. He wasn't trusting his own leadership or the skills of the people. He was trusting God alone. However, any vision of God is going to come with some opposition. It's not always as easy as it seems to live the vision God has given to you. Even Nehemiah experienced opposition to his God-centered vision.

Have a volunteer read Nehemiah 2:19-20.

Nehemiah completed an inspection of Jerusalem's broken-down walls and encouraged the city's leadership and other workers to follow him in rebuilding them (see 2:11-18). However, Nehemiah's enemies did not share his enthusiasm. Sanballat, whom an extra-biblical inscription says was the governor of Samaria, did not appreciate the Jews' plans. He likely feared Nehemiah's rebuilding of Jerusalem would interfere with his own power and economic interests.

What charge did Nehemiah's detractors bring against him? Was this charge valid? Why, or why not?

How did Nehemiah respond to his opposition (v. 20)? What fact did he leave out, even though it would have likely swayed the opinion of his accusers?

The opposition accused Nehemiah of rebelling against the king, but Nehemiah surprisingly didn't mention the king's approval of his work when he responded to them. Instead, his reply voiced his confidence in the God of heaven. The Lord had laid Jerusalem on Nehemiah's heart. When he had prayed earlier (see 1:5-11), God in His timing had given Nehemiah an opportunity to speak to the king (see 2:1-8). In light of God's clear guidance so far, Nehemiah was confident God would grant him and the Judeans success.

What is a contemporary example of those who would attempt to intimidate or criticize us with false accusations in our service to God? How can our confidence in God help us to stand firm against these false accusations?

Have a volunteer(s) read Nehemiah 3:1-32.

The walls served as a visual reminder to God's people that they had been restored back to Him. As a Christian today, where do you look for the reminder of your restoration and your security? Read Romans 5:5-11 for insight.

What was the people's response to Nehemiah's challenge? What does this reveal about the vision he cast?

How many professional groups or classes of the Jewish community participated in Nehemiah's work? What is the lesson for us as a church?

This chapter also contains important teachings for Christians today. One reason the work progressed was that everyone took part, from rulers and temple personnel to merchants and citizens with their families. Even the people from the villages who lived a distance from Jerusalem also helped. They felt part of the community, even though they personally received fewer direct benefits. Even their enemies were amazed at the results. In

order not only to survive but also to be effective in the midst of opposition from a hostile secular culture, the church must exhibit a cooperative spirit.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Scott listed for us five Biblical qualities of great Kingdom leaders. Discuss the following points from his sermon. Talk about what came to your mind when you heard it, any questions it brought to your mind, and any insights God might have given you through this Word.

Not afraid to ask for help (2:7-8)

Strategic and selective with whom and when they share the vision (2:11-12, 16)

Take time to get buy in and ownership of the people you lead (2:17-18)

Recruit workers in areas that are dear to their hearts (3:10, 23, 28-30)

Learn how to celebrate milestone victories along the way (4:6)

What is it that God is leading you to build?

How will you begin today to apply these Biblical qualities into your life?

Pray

Thank God for our church family. Ask Him to continue to bless our church and make its members more like Jesus. Ask God to give us a heart to love and serve the community around us and one another.

Commentary

Nehemiah 2:11-20

2:11-12. Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem; after staying there three days he set out during the night with a few men. A three-day rest after a long journey seems to have been traditional among the Jews (Ezra 8:32).

Sanballat and Tobiah probably had allies in Jerusalem, and Nehemiah was aware that he was probably being watched. The Jews had powerful opponents, and his plans for rebuilding Jerusalem were not universally embraced. Though the general scheme for reconstruction was known, because of imperial mandate and the entourage that accompanied him, Nehemiah's plan for rebuilding the fortifications was still a secret. He confided in his journal: I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.

He made a late-night tour of the wall with a few carefully chosen men in order to assess the job that lay before him. But Nehemiah retained a bold confidence because God had given him the passion to complete the work. Since he had only been in the city for three days, it is likely that his companions were either relatives or the same men who had met with him in Susa and informed him about conditions in Judea. The small scouting party made its way quietly around the broken walls of Jerusalem.

2:13. Nehemiah and his small party, under cover of darkness, went out of the city through the Valley Gate.

This gate was located in the western wall and provided access to the Tyropoean Valley below. They apparently made their way along the wall in a counter-clockwise direction, in the direction of the Jackal Well until they reached the Dung Gate, so named because people passed through it to dump garbage and refuse into the valley. This wooden gate, which had been destroyed by fire, was situated at the southern end of Jerusalem. All along the way Nehemiah inspected every portion of the wall.

2:14-15. Nehemiah then... moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool. The Fountain Gate presumably led to a water spring. From this point Nehemiah was forced to make a slight detour away from the wall toward the King's Pool because of the rubble or the steepness of the hill. From there he proceeded on foot because there was not enough room for my mount to get through. He continued on foot, inspecting the

eastern side of the wall as he made his way along the Kidron Valley. He either turned back and retraced his way or turned away from the valley and reentered through the Valley Gate, thus completing the circumference of the wall.

2:16. Nehemiah again emphasized that the project was entirely on his instigation, because the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing. The officials may have been Persians who accompanied him, or perhaps they were part of the regional political establishment in the area. It seemed inappropriate to Nehemiah to discuss his plans with Persian authorities since he had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work. Nehemiah sensed his first obligation was with the Jewish community. Priests represented the religious and social life of the community; nobles were family or clan heads; officials represented local political leaders; and “others” was an all-inclusive term for those who would later put their backs to the task.

2:17-18. Nehemiah was able to discern the proper time to present the building project, and he knew how to motivate the leaders and the people. He used four incentives: (1) He identified with the people; he spoke of “the trouble we are in.” (2) He stressed the seriousness of the situation. A leader must be realistic and honestly assess the facts. People will have confidence in such a leader. (3) Nehemiah was committed to taking definite action. (4) He used his personal testimony of God’s grace to assure them of God’s favor on the project (v. 18). A Christian leader must encourage trust in God by leading in faith as well as in action.

If we analyze the social processes in Nehemiah, we can see that chaps. 1–2 describe the “innovation process.” When Nehemiah was in Susa and heard of the situation in Jerusalem, his anguish over the deplorable condition of God’s people and his desire for God’s glory resulted in a spiritual experience that gave him a new vision of what God desired for His people in Judah. He set about to transform his vision into social reality. Part of that task was sharing his vision with the community and motivating the people to work together to change the situation.

As another sign of God’s “gracious hand” at work, the leaders and people responded to Nehemiah. He came to them with compassion, realism, conviction, and faith; thus God used him to communicate his own vision and motivate the people to begin the “good work.”

2:19. “Geshem” was a powerful chieftain of Qedar in northwest Arabia. He was somewhat under the control of the Persians but had great freedom to govern over a confederation of Arab tribes that included Edom and the southern part of Judah.

2:20. For the sake of the workers, Nehemiah’s response to this first oppositional strategy was important. His answer had three parts: (1) He did not speak of his authority or the king’s but of his trust in “the God of heaven.” (2) Nehemiah advised his people to ignore the ridicule and threats and simply work. (3) He refused to compromise. He denied his opponents a share in the work, the land, or the worship of the Jewish community. Nehemiah 3:1-32

With the conclusion of chapter 2, the first-person narrative of Nehemiah ends and does not resume until 4:1. Chapter 3, possibly written by someone other than Nehemiah, is a third-person account of the completion of the construction and the installation of the doors. Yet 6:1 and 7:1 explicitly state that the doors in the gates had not yet been hung. This chapter may have been an official archive that was kept in the temple and was incorporated into the book of Nehemiah, at a later date and out of sequence, because of its detailed description of the reconstruction.

3:1. Only here in this chapter is the dedication of the gate or the walls mentioned, a significant event because Eliashib the high priest led it. This marked the beginning of the endeavor and emphasized the priests’ dependence on God for the successful completion of the project.

3:4-5. In verses 1-3 the workers are described as “building” the wall and gates while in most of the chapter the builders made repairs. This may suggest that the wall in the northern section near the Sheep Gate was so devastated that they had to start from scratch.

3:12. The work crew of Shallum son of Hallohesh was unique. Possibly he had no sons, but his family still joined in the work through the labor of his daughters.

3:15. This verse details reconstruction of the southeast corner of the city. The Pool of Shelah is probably the same as the King’s Pool (see 2:14).

3:16. The text continues to describe construction from south to north along the eastern side of the city. The fact that the descriptions are not of gates and prominent places along the wall but locations within the city may be indirect evidence that Nehemiah abandoned the eighth-century wall lower down the valley and established a new wall closer to the summit (2:14).

3:19. The Angle may refer to a prominent place where the wall changed direction. However, the term appears again (vv. 24-25) in what would seem to be another location. Possibly the “Angle” was a natural feature such as a hillside or escarpment.

3:26-27. The term Ophel means “swelling” and is used here to describe a hill. It can refer to the entire southeastern hill of the ancient City of David or, as in this verse, to the area where the palace and the temple were situated. The Water Gate presumably provided access to the spring of Gihon. It was by the “Water Gate” that Nehemiah later gathered the people for a public reading of the Torah (8:1).

3:28. The prophet Jeremiah’s reference to the Horse Gate (see Jer. 31:40) might suggest it was a gate on the eastern wall of the city, but the “Horses Gate” mentioned in 2 Chronicles 23:15 was the gate at the entrance to the palace/temple complex within the city.

3:29. The East Gate was not in the outer city wall but led into the temple complex (see Ezek. 40:6). Shemaiah repaired the section of the wall near where he served.

3:31. The Inspection Gate (or the “Muster Gate” or the “Parade Gate”) was probably on the northeast corner of the city wall. It may be identical to the Benjamin Gate where the prophet Jeremiah was arrested (see Jer. 37:13).