



Series: Nehemiah, Healthy Walls	Reference: Nehemiah 2:1-20	Title: Let's Start!	Date: 5.7.17
Website Writeup:			
In Nehemiah 2 we see Nehemiah as a man of Burden, Credibility, Prayer & Faithful Action. God has laid a foundation for this great work ahead of him, and Nehemiah in trust walks through the open doors God provides despite opposition & threat. What can we learn from a man like this in our own church context?			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

UPG Prayer of the Day...

Najdi Arabs of Saudi Arabia: Almost 100% Muslim. The greatest barrier to reaching the Najdi Arab in Saudi Arabia, is the country itself. Saudi Arabia is often referred to as *the Land of the Two Holy Mosques*, which are located in Medina & Mecca; the two most holy places of Islam. The public practice of any religion other than Islam is forbidden, this includes the possession of any non-Islamic religious materials. It's completely closed to Christian witness.

Sermon...

Last week we started a study in Nehemiah. We drew comparisons of the walls & gates of the Temple being in ruin to the healthy boundaries, or we could say, the much needed relational walls & gates of our own lives sometimes being in ruin. We saw how Nehemiah took certain steps when he heard the news from Jerusalem that its walls were broken down to repair them. And likewise, how we can do the same in order to flourish in our calling to reach the nations & just live life well.

He took five steps which we also can take: [1] Take Stock of your situation & Pray. [2] Recognize the character of God. [3] Confess Personal & Corporate Sin. [4] Remind Yourself of God's Promises. And [5] Ask for Specific Help.

And this week we'll see Nehemiah as a man of *Burden, Credibility, Prayer & Action*. We likewise, need to be the same in the corporate call God has placed on us. So, the question becomes, *are we as responsive to God's call as Nehemiah was?*

Let's get right into the text....*In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; 2so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart."*

Nehemiah was a man burdened, deeply responsive to God's call. He saw the need & it touched his heart. He heard the walls & gates were in disrepair & the people were in trouble & disgrace. Remember, Nehemiah enjoyed a very powerful & comfortable position. Although being cupbearer to the King came with risk, he was a deeply trusted servant enjoying many benefits. To give that up for others was noble.



Someone may say, you don't need to do anything about the needs you see, it's not your burden; who cares about these people in the Eastern Main Line? However, would that be God's heart? God's burdened for lost people, injustice & poverty. Many times at Six:Eight we've seen people identify a need in our community & take on the burden of seeing it addressed which is leadership, driven by the heart of God. That's happened more than once here & it's exciting to think it'll continue.

The Temple walls & gates had been in disrepair for years; no one had taken the mantle of leadership to rebuild until Nehemiah. They'd been beaten down by opposition. Likewise, we've taken on the burden of the Kingdom in this part of the Main Line. Six:Eight identifies needs, it burdens us, and we pray, and continue to do so taking action to reach the disillusioned, skeptic & curious. We've taken the burden of following Jesus, living as Jesus did & manifesting Jesus; our purpose, vision & mission.

Nehemiah took four months, patient to pray & fast, having faith God would answer those heartfelt prayers. Hebrews 6:10-12 says: *10God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

Nehemiah exhibits willingness to sacrifice, burdened for the community; he commits a selfless act. Holding onto the promises & character of God, that God's forgiving & restorative. He models Philippians 2:5-11 for us as a visual image of Christ laying down his life for others. His is a patient prayer...many of us want God to be a slot machine where we insert our prayer, pull the handle & out comes an answer. Many times God's timing is slow; what we may think is the right answer may not be - because we always have the answer in mind already before we even utter them; we don't simply listen.

As a church a few times we've had to struggle over the decision of moving to another location. We weighed options & prayed. Hoping for quick answers, we know what we'd like. But it doesn't always work like that - we think we have all the right answers, we think that things will turn out badly if they don't turn out our way, because we don't look forward in faith. If God leads a certain way & calls us to give up something we're comfortable with, what plans does he have on the other side we can't see? Maybe staying put would be easier, but it wouldn't advance God's plans. God doesn't call us to something for which he's not willing to pay. Our vision & mission won't take just a year or two, it will be an ongoing sacrifice of prayer & burden in constant reliance on the Holy Spirit to build the kingdom of God in this community. In our community groups we will sometimes have to fight against familiarity, things will feel rote; we're challenged to see with eyes of faith the larger picture of what God is doing through our ongoing diligent efforts.

Nehemiah may've liked to stay in a cushy position, but he's driven by a heart of burden & responsibility - this call will take up 12 years of his life! The burden's so heavy, it's noticeable in his countenance - which is a no-no in his position. You'd not think to



burden your boss with personal issues, and the cupbearer would never think to burden the king with his. But the king's emotional acuity is the answer to Nehemiah's prayer - the king picks up on his sad demeanor.

One good spiritual practice is to keep a prayer journal & to see how God answers your prayers in time - and to notice how those answers are many times so far flung from what you would've done or expected at the time, but so much better for you in the long run. Brian Dressler learned that this week!

Nehemiah continues: I was very much afraid, 3but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" 4The king said to me, "What is it you want?"

Nehemiah had reason to be afraid as cupbearer to this king since Judea had been a problem province for Artaxerxes. Being seen as having any grievance against the king he could lose not only his position, but his life - he wouldn't be thought of as having the king's best interest in mind. But God never calls us to a burden which doesn't entail risk. In the Vineyard we spell faith, R.I.S.K. It's a part of faith-life which we often try & avoid. His heartfelt burden drives him to embrace the risk & step forward when the king addresses him. We must remember Nehemiah's risking all for the call of God. But he's also wise. He doesn't use the name Jerusalem, since it may invoke negative feelings from the king. Instead he uses *the city where my fathers are buried*, which personalizes the situation & draws on the king's sympathy. Remember the years of faithful service Nehemiah's shown which play into the king's positive response.

Remember, whatever position you find yourself in, whether you are building houses, collecting garbage, operating on people, providing financial services, or serving in the church, if you do it faithfully when the time comes you have credibility to have your requests considered in a positive light by those who can move your agenda forward. *Everything's spiritual.* Character brings credibility. He's worthy to be listened to. No king would listen to someone who didn't show up for work & engage his duties. He'd built credibility over a long life of faithfulness in duty. To praise my son, Aidan just won an award at Temple's Film Festival. One of his professors was there praising him concerning his relational ability to work well with people as a director. She talked of his diligence & hard work. I wrote to Aidan afterwards that he's developed into a great witness & his character will pay off over time as he diligently pursues God.

While in Indonesia we worked hard to create a ministry called *Cinta Baca* - which meant *the Love of Reading*. Small community centers we'd open in village areas providing job training, day care, computer skills, a library & so on. This was always bathed in prayer & driven by a deep burden for Muslims to know Jesus. Radical Muslims would often wait until after we'd expended all our resources before they would come against it. Wise on their part, since they were trying to bleed us dry of resources. The problem with their strategy was that the local people would see results & experience blessings from *Cinta Baca* for a while first - credibility had been built. When radical

Muslims would threaten to burn it down & hurt workers, Muslim villagers would stand in the way - village leadership would say, "These people have done more for us in a year than you've ever done, why would we allow you to burn this down!?" Credibility.

He continues: 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 fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it."

As a man burdened he's a man reliant. The burdened pray. Although he's prayed & fasted for four months, no prayer is too much. In the midst of a conversation he shoots an arrow up to God, reminding us of I Thessalonians 5:17-18: *Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.*

And in light of the apparent risk, he takes action asking to go to "the city in Judah" again wisely neglecting to mention the term 'Jerusalem'... *6Then 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.*

As we said last week, it's no mistake Nehemiah finds himself in the position of cupbearer. Many of us wouldn't choose to be in the position in life we are. It's very American to think that we make our own future; we strive to massage life to our own end, but in hindsight we see God's been in control. Maybe we struggle to be somewhere else, or at some other stage, but in hindsight we can always look back & see God's hand on the situation. One mark of maturity is to see our current situation, although it may look grim & say, 'God has me here for some reason' acting out of reliance & faith in it. God's behind the scenes working. One of the best prayers we can utter is, "My life is yours, do with me as you will!" And let's notice, it's not only Nehemiah, but the Queen as well, whom God has placed here.

Ray Stedman, another pastor, in a sermon on this passage says this: *'Some Bible scholars think this queen might well have been Queen Esther. She was a Jewess and would be very interested in restoring the site of Jerusalem. Other scholars feel that Esther's reign came before this time, though Esther may have been the mother-in-law of the queen who is mentioned here. Whatever position you may take on that, there is at least a high likelihood that Esther had some influence upon this queen and, through her, upon king Artaxerxes.'*

So, what's God doing at Six:Eight as we've entered this season in a new location? Some of us felt uneasy about that, but we must always remember, we're not powerful enough in our own right to screw God's kingdom up. Sometimes following God's call is simply praying & then walking through open doors in front of you; overcoming your fears of making some grave mistake - risk. God's behind us, opening & closing doors, putting people of power in our path to further his purposes. We've developed great relationships & credibility with the leadership in our community - we'll continue to do so if we can be like Hebrews 6, diligently faithful to see God work, which takes constant risk.

So we've seen Nehemiah's a man of burden, credibility & prayer - **now he continues to take action.** *7I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? 8And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests.*

9So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. 10When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

Nehemiah doesn't hold back in his request, he recognizes God's hand & stands on credibility. His requests are large; his calling is large. His confidence is large; his God is large. But remember the years of preparation it's taken to get here. This didn't happen in a day, or even the four months of prayer, God had placed the Queen there to move it forward, and Nehemiah in this place for years of service & the credibility he's gained enables him to move forward.

Six:Eight has great dreams. Visions of growing this church, planting others, reaching neighbors locally & cross-culturally in the world. We're gaining credibility. Diligence & patience in faith is required as we continue in burden, prayer & faithful action. The day will come when we'll make bold requests before community leaders to see our dreams fulfilled. Personally, you may feel stuck, not going anywhere, but through your diligent faithfulness God's laying foundation for something great in the future.

Great calls often come with great opposition. Nehemiah has opposition in these men who represent longterm enemies of Israel who don't want them to move forward. We likewise have had opposition, set-backs & perceived failures - but these don't deter us. We continue in faith & diligence for the sake of God's Kingdom! Only 12% or less of the northeast attend church, there are people vehemently opposed to the Church. Those who stand in the way just because they can - but God's purposes can't be thwarted, especially when his people show themselves burdened, credible, faithful & people of action who die to self for the sake of Christ. Good witnesses. People of character.

He continues: 11I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days 12I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. 13By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.

14Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; 15so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate.



16The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

17Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." 18I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me.

Nehemiah as a leader wisely doesn't say a word. Leaders know when you enter a situation you keep your cards close to your chest not revealing all plans. Every situation has power-brokers, players & details you need to understand before you reveal these things. Nehemiah assesses the situation & players before he reveals his purposes. Then at just the right time he opens them to the right people & he appeals to their sense of personal pride & role. He calls them to task & sheds light on God's hand in the situation.

A long time ago we too evaluated the situation in this community. We decided through prayer & due to our burden that there needed to be a church in this area like Six:Eight. We're still seeing what needs to be done, assessing & getting to know people. And as we grow we will continually be called to task - but we can't do that without all of us saying, "I am willing to rebuild!"; and that's what they did...

They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. 19But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" 20I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."

So, the people of God answer the call & begin this 'good work' which we've begun to do here in the Eastern Main Line. But, like we've said, it will not come without ridicule, opposition & even lies. You'll notice, Nehemiah has all the appropriate letters from the king, all the permission in the world, the backing of those in charge, but right away there's a false accusation leveled at them that they're rebelling against the king. Nehemiah has nothing to do with the lie, he states his confidence is in God, and points out that they will have no share in it due to their opposition.

In his call we see that Nehemiah is a man of burden, credibility, prayer & action - will we be the same in ours? Will we set aside all the other things that fight for our attention & give ourselves over to the burden of this call? Will we actually be burdened enough to be driven to our knees in reliance? Will we be willing to die to self over & over again committing to doing what needs to be done to see Six:Eights vision realized in this community? Will we own the call of God to reach the Nations (30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World)? I leave you today with those questions & thoughts to ponder.



Questions for Community Group Leaders

1. In v4 the king asked Nehemiah, what is it you want? We know that Nehemiah's desire coincided with God's. What Nehemiah wanted was what God wanted...can you say the same? Are God's desires yours? Why not?
2. Are you **BURDENED**?
 1. What touches your heart? Do you care about anything, or nothing at all? Or, only that which concerns you personally?
 2. Are you burdened only about popular issues when it's popular to be so? Or, does the state of *the lost* in the world & all their struggles weigh on you consistently?
 3. Are you diverted from God's overall consistent call by issues & platforms which sound good, but are a flash in the pan?
 4. Does the state of the Unreached People Groups in the world tug at your heart?
3. Do you have **CREDIBILITY**?
 1. Would people identify you as someone to be relied on, who's honest, hardworking, and follows through?
 2. Do you see purpose in doing a good job as it pertains to your witness?
 3. Are you patient when things just seem dry & mundane having faith that God is actually doing something?
4. Are you **PRAYERFUL**?
 1. Does the call of God on our church & your life drive you to reliance on God in prayer?
 2. Are you comfortable letting the past be in the past, and looking forward in faith knowing God is doing something great?
5. Are you a person of **ACTION**?
 1. What are you doing about the call of God on our Church, and your life personally?
 2. Do you build faith into others discipling them towards Jesus? If not, what stands in your way? Is it fear & insecurity? What did Nehemiah do with his fear (see v2b)? Does God's call burden you so much that you drive through fear?
 3. Do you pray for the Unreached People Groups of the world?
 4. Do you pray about those we are influencing through our Kingdom Opportunities?
 5. Are you building walls just to keep people out, or healthy walls & gates to give others access to your heart in healthy ways?