



<b>Series:</b> Nehemiah, Healthy Walls	<b>Reference:</b> Nehemiah 11	<b>Title:</b> Moving Closer	<b>Date:</b> 7.23.17
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
The Israelites are doing a lot of the right things, however, they historically haven't fully grasped the message of Grace extended by God through Abraham. If they just go through the motions, this renewal will end with them in the same state as before or worse. But if they experience heart change and true reliance on God by grace through faith, deep life change will happen. God is inviting them closer to their positional reality of Grace in Nehemiah 11.			

## Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

### UPG Prayer of the Day...

The Mushunguli of Somalia are a people of group of 31,000. Descendants of fugitive slaves who escaped from Somali masters in northeast Tanzania around 1840. Many migrated to Somalia in search of security from the slave-trade. Mainstream Somalis look down upon them because of their slave origins. Traditionally, the Mushunguli were farmers. There are fewer than 2% Christian among them.

### Sermon...

Let's begin with a question to get our thoughts flowing as we pray...what's something you were taught at a young age, didn't listen to then, but wish you had? (PRAY)

My wife home-schooled our kids. She's a trained teacher, was disciplined, scheduled, followed a curriculum, and as a result my kids were prepared for high school. There's a trend out now called 'un-schooling' though, different than what we did with our kids.

Un-schooling is when you don't follow a curriculum, allowing your child to learn just by living life. Which might work if the parent were a trained knowledgeable teacher taking advantage of every opportunity to teach & push their children with set goals in mind. However, many parents aren't teachers, let alone that diligent. They don't recognize teachable moments, or know how to guide. As a result they have children at 12 years of age unable to read, write, or do math, or at the least, they're limited in certain subjects.

That tells us consistent training, good teaching & proper modeling is important. It provides a foundation for living well even if the foundation isn't recognized by the student at that time. Even a good teacher can't teach if a child won't follow or refuses to learn, but it somehow roots in at some level anyway. All those things which were told to me by my parents, teachers & spiritual guides I'm recognizing as true now. And we end up saying to ourselves, "Wish I'd listened when I was a kid!"

We've been in Nehemiah & today find ourselves in chapter 11. What happens to Israel on a physical level often reflects what's happening to us on a spiritual level. We've seen how they rebuilt the gates & walls of Jerusalem, and how that reflects our need to do the same spiritually. God's a builder. In the New Testament he's building a city; *The New Jerusalem - He moves from a Garden in the Creation Account to the city of the New*

*Jerusalem in Revelation.* Not a city of bricks & mortar, rather a spiritual city made up of people – Listen to what 1 Peter says about us & Jesus:

*4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*

*7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” 8 and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”*

*They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

*Nehemiah had built Jerusalem back up, and now in chapter 11 he holds a voluntary draft in order to inhabit this newly rebuilt city. Voluntary Draft sounds like an oxymoron, but you will see what I mean as we look more closely at Nehemiah 11.*

*Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. The people commended all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem. These are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem (now some Israelites, priests, Levites, temple servants and descendants of Solomon’s servants lived in the towns of Judah, each on his own property in the various towns, while other people from both Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem): {Neh 11:1-4a NIV}*

Jerusalem was the center of the nation, and as governor, Nehemiah issues an edict: “One out of every ten people living in the suburbs must move to Jerusalem.” Sort of like when we started Six:Eight, we all moved to within a 3 mile radius of Ardmore. Nehemiah went through the towns & numbered the people, counting them off by tens. Then they cast lots. Whatever number came up that person was expected to move his family into Jerusalem - so in that sense it was a draft. But it was voluntary as well, since when a man was chosen to move into Jerusalem he was permitted also to decline. Because God wanted volunteers. So a man could be chosen, but could decide against moving. Then the lot would be cast again & another name chosen. Sooner or later someone would be found who consented freely to go.

The rest of this chapter outlines how he put various people in charge of certain things to build this city up spiritually & protect it. Nehemiah doesn’t rest on his laurels, but realizes there must be a structure set which allows for consistent & good teaching for



God's hand to move; I think he realized there must be a good foundation set or stagnation would occur again.

A few of those positions were: 822 of them “carried on work for the temple,” {Neh 11:12b NIV}. The ones who ministered to the spiritual life of the people. Then there was another group of 242 who were set aside as “heads of families,” {Neh 11:13b NIV}. They counseled families, working out problems, dealing with difficulties. Then we have 128 “brave warriors,” {Neh 11:14b NIV}. They protected the city.

Then we had the 284 Levites which fall into two groups: The first were those “who had charge of the outside work of the house of God,” {Neh 11:16b NIV}. Men & women who were responsible to take care of buildings & minister to the poor & needy. Then we had the musicians; an important teaching/worship ministry, not entertainment.

Then we have more positions listed: In Verse 19 there are 172 “gatekeepers” {Neh 11:19 NIV}, Greeters who watch the doors looking out for people & serving them as they come in. In Verses 20-24 we have “temple servants” {Neh 11:21 NIV}, “chief officers” {Neh 11:22 NIV}, “singers” {Neh 11:23-24}, the one who was “the king’s agent in all affairs relating to the people,” {Neh 11:24 NIV} or the trouble-shooter, in other words.

When we parallel this with the church today, we find we have the same needs & positions; groups of men & women who help us to understand our position in Christ. Those who counsel. Those who are prayer warriors. Greeters, worship leaders, preachers, teachers, etc.

Verses 25-36 list the names of many cities of the tribes of Judah & Benjamin. These cities were widely scattered around Jerusalem, and all are mentioned as towns to which the capital could look for support in times of trouble. Likewise the Body of Christ is scattered around the world today, yet related as one body. We're not in competition with other churches. We're deriving support from them & they from us.

God's still building today. In giving your life to Jesus you become a citizen of the New Jerusalem. Positionally, in Christ, you take up residence there. But you're also asked to take up the labor of the Kingdom; to work according to God's gifting in you; but it's voluntary, which is why the verses in Ephesians 2:8-10 are in the order they are:

*8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Works don't come first, we're not saved because we're good, or do great things. God establishes the relationship with us via a covenant promise only he can uphold. And in that new life he gives us spiritual gifts, but doesn't force us to use them. We're invited into a life of kingdom building. Using our gifts is where the abundant life is found; in obedience to Him. Kind of like the lot got caste & fell on us - we can choose to move in



next door to the Holy of Holies enjoying a closeness & intimacy with Christ as we work hand in hand at the kingdom. Or we can stay outside the city walls. Still a part of the family, but not as close to the father as we could be - always wondering what they're doing on the other side of the wall.

In past chapters we've seen how God had been building up to this point. Even then he wasn't just building a fortified city, but the lives of the people within & surrounding it. They were confessing, praising God & listening intently to his Word once more. We've seen all that, but this process had been going on long before Nehemiah. God had been building throughout history, teaching his people constantly, laying the foundation. He was building by revealing himself to his people & the world. At times, his children were responsive students. At others, they were belligerent & unresponsive. And, when Nehemiah shows up in Jerusalem what he had was a group of un-schooled children. People who knew they were ethnic Jews, maybe had learned a little, but had largely neglected their relationship to God - they hadn't studied the supplied curriculum.

At certain points in history, Jews held only onto their ethnic identity, but had forgone, or misunderstood, their spiritual identity with God. But, before we get too critical, we can easily say we often do the same. We misunderstand, or don't live out of our position with Christ - Jack Miller called it living as a *Spiritual Orphan*, as if we don't have a father in heaven. We seek to rest in our outward identity as 'Christians', but not live out of our position & calling - sort of like being chosen & invited to live right next door to the Holy of Holies, but saying, "Nah, I'm good here in the suburbs." And when we do that we can become one or many of a number of things; judgmental, arrogant, closed off, depressed, shamed, we can chase after the wind, or harbor secret sin.

We see this in Romans 2:17-3:8, where Paul argues the Jew can't rest on his ethnic identity; and likewise we can't rest just on our *outward Christian identity*. That just by the fact a Jew is physically circumcised into the family of Israel, doesn't necessarily make him rightly related with God. That even though they'd been entrusted with the 'very words of God', that didn't mean they knew him in a heart-changing manner. He says circumcision (the outward identifying mark of Jewishness) only has value if it's circumcision of the heart - they must come to the conviction of their need for divine grace; by the fact that God's law, although the standard to shoot for, was unattainable without a divine act of Grace. That although God calls them to a higher life in the Law, their relationship with him wasn't based on how well they performed, but only on his promise to them. But that promise should always produce a desire in his people to reflect his name well in issues of love, justice, mercy & community life.

They often forgot, the Law came 430 years after the Covenant Promise to Abraham. Grace preceded law. Genesis 15 outlines that promise (explain). And, now we've seen the people commit themselves to remembering God & to live in accordance with the Law, but maybe still not their position of God's promise over them. They're still learning their dependance on him as they build this city & take up positions to build their community back up to spiritual health. So, what they're doing is a good thing, although it eventually



must reach the heart, not just naive promises & outward actions. There must be a divine movement in the heart to produce real change.

John chapter 3 addresses this when Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night & says you must be from God by all the things I see in you. Jesus replied Nicodemus must be born again of the Spirit, that he's a teacher of the Law, and should understand the Law should drive him to a dependence on God's Grace. And then spiritual rebirth happens, and a gratitude is born in your heart which produces fruit (good works) in your life.

Let's think on this for a minute, but let's go back farther in history, remembering there were others tilling that ground long before Nehemiah was called. In verse 12:1a it talks a bit about this. *These were the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel... {Neh 12:1a NIV}*

Zerubbabel led the first return from captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem in 538 B.C., almost 100 years earlier than Nehemiah. Then Ezra 80 years later. Nehemiah's looking back at these men who led that procession. Ezra & Zerubbabel came along earlier & rebuilt the Temple before Nehemiah ever got there. If Zerubbabel had been there with Nehemiah, I am sure he could have felt a little like, *"We have been saying this all these years! Why didn't you people respond to us like you have with Nehemiah!?"*

The lesson learned is...the ground tilling's worth it. Like Paul speaks of in 1 Co 9... *24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

Even though this rebuilding took a lot of work & time for Nehemiah & others before him, eventually we notice God's moving even in the drudgery of ground tilling, although maybe not that evident in the moment-by-moment. My son Tanner may grumble learning his math now, but when he turns 25 adding & subtracting will come as second nature! I can extol Six:Eight as a pastor, pointing us to Jesus & call us to live out of Grace, provide opportunity, teach & hope to have people make Jesus the center of their World-View, which would produce life-change, but without a movement of the Spirit to convict you it won't happen (that's beyond me) - but eventually when it does, all that teaching will take root in life - like we're sitting in a marinade.

Although we're learning about Nehemiah & this spiritual movement of Israel, the American Church seems a little stuck in Zerubabel's time. In many ways the modern church is like an adopted, un-schooled child; we grew up in a 'Christian' home, but a home which un-schooled with walls & gates which have been broken down for years. We go to church & hear a rousing sermon which doesn't challenge, but makes us *feel good*, and leave still masters of our own lives. We play 'Christian' outwardly, but inwardly



we're still masters of our own fate. And as a result, purity & holiness are lost, shame & depression take root, secret sins are nurtured, etc. We have a lot of unlearning & relearning to do which will take time as we wait to see God move.

I ride a motorcycle. And used to have a dirt-bike, a Yamaha YZ250...when I maintained my bike, it would start right up & run well. I had to change the oil, grease the chain, keep the spark plugs clean, etc. I bought some gas for it at one point. And much of the gas we buy now has ethanol in it. You can't let ethanol sit in the engine too long. It disintegrates & the bike won't run. Ethanol is a derivative of corn; organic, so it rots. So, one day my bike died. I couldn't figure out the problem until my lawn mower died as well, and the shop told me it was the gas. Logic told me it was the same with the bike. Me & a friend did some routine maintenance, changed out the gas, and it started right up.

Maybe the Israelites were like this during Zerubbabel & Nehemiah's time. They had done something, but not enough, they'd not kept things fresh, they'd stagnated. They weren't feeding their souls with fresh fuel. And, as a result the spiritual life just sort of died. The real power in my YZ was the fire inside the engine. I am designed to operate in Christ; I have a body that runs & is gifted, but if I don't feed that internal spiritual life, it's like biodegradable gas sitting in my engine. I must feed that with the gas of the Word which will produce a fire of the Holy Spirit in me. I have to give my life something to run on. And now, we see these Israelites sort of like an unmaintained engine, they're working on it, kick starting it, and it runs a few minutes then dies again - much like us today. We have so many competing messages, we listen a little, but then the other messages take over.

We're in a spiritual battle. But I can't blame anyone, God or even Satan for my defeat. Because, like everything it comes back to my heart - it calls me to the questions, "Is Jesus the center of all things for me? Is my life ordered to live for & build his kingdom due to his grace? Or, is Jesus just a theory which will change & morph for me when I see something else in life I want? Do I really see this vision of our local church as God given & devoted to working towards it, even if it means sacrifice, pain & personal expense?"

If Jesus is just a theory to me, then how does my life work? A theory morphs to accommodate what I want as my reality. If Jesus tells me something I don't want to hear, I rework what he says. If Jesus calls me to something uncomfortable, I reinterpret the message. But if Jesus is the center of my world-view, meaning he's enthroned on my life, then I listen & follow. What he says, I do. What he calls me to, I follow; not out of a desire to get in good with Him or you. But rather, out of gratitude for Grace - out of my passive righteousness in Christ. Passive, because I can do nothing to get it or even lose it - it just is. But active faith in that I participate with God due to my salvation, not for it.

Christianity's set in a historical record. Other religious philosophies are simply the musings of men meditating upon various aspects of life. Many of them are a record of visions & dreams of dubious origin. But Scripture's the historical record of God building up his people. It's not a record of philosophies, or of the inventions of men. It's made up of historic facts. God grounds these great events in the history of the world itself. That's



why frequently, as here in this passage, we're reminded our faith rests upon historical records of God's pursuit of his people by means of Grace.

*Which statement best describes your faith-life?*

- *I'm an un-schooled child in need of re-instruction*
- *I feel schooled, but for some reason don't live it*
- *I'm schooled & find joy in living out of grace as best I can*
- *What the heck are you talking about Pastor Jason!?! Cut your hair & maybe I would listen better!*

*What can you do to change, or strengthen, your spiritual state?*

**Community Group Leader Questions:**

1. Look again at the last 2 questions in the sermon with the statements that follow the first question, discuss these.
2. How do we truly live out of our position of Grace in Christ? And if we're not, and we cannot conjure depth ourselves, what's the first step we should be taking?
  1. Would it be acknowledgment of God's faithfulness and provision of grace followed by a deep confession of our wrongful attitudes & hiding from him in sin or pride?
  2. Take a look at the following page which breaks down the Lord's Prayer as a response to our situations.
  3. Read through this, discuss it, and pray through it together in some way. As a large group, or in pairs.
3. If your name was chosen in the lottery to move close to the Temple, being in essence closer to God's presence, would you have taken it? Do you want to move closer to his presence now?
4. Read 1 Co 9:24-27 & Hebrews 21:1 and discuss what these verses mean to us in our spiritual formation



*Praying the Lord's Prayer*

<b><i>Petition</i></b>	<b><i>Priority</i></b>
Our father in heaven	<b><u><i>This is the Kingdom priority of the gospel and son-ship.</i></u></b> Before all else we are the legitimate children of God and the rightful heirs of his kingdom.
Hallowed be your name	<b><u><i>This is the Kingdom priority of worship.</i></u></b> He is the Lord. He is to be revered and obeyed and worshipped before all and in all we do.
Your Kingdom come	<b><u><i>This is the Kingdom priority of Evangelism.</i></u></b> His kingdom is the already/not yet. We hope for the future, but see the kingdom break into our reality now transforming lives and bringing salvation.
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...	<b><u><i>This is the Kingdom priority of mercy and social justice.</i></u></b> With expectation of what the Spirit can do, we engage in ministry, walking in the works of Jesus in our community, seeing healing and deliverance.
Give us this day our daily bread	<b><u><i>This is the Kingdom priority of contentment and generosity.</i></u></b> He is our sustenance, and apart from him we can do nothing.
Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors	<b><u><i>This is the Kingdom priority of redemptive community.</i></u></b> Only as we bear one another's burdens will we fulfill the law of Christ and discover the joy of our common life.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil	<b><u><i>This is the Kingdom priority of spiritual warfare.</i></u></b> The Christian life is warfare. The enemy will only be defended against, or defeated, when the Gospel and the mission are connected in prayer.
Yours is the kingdom, power, and glory forever	<b><u><i>This is the Kingdom priority of God's sovereignty.</i></u></b> From beginning to end, all of life and our entire ministry are not about us, they are about God. We must be God-centered.