Hand Me Another Brick

Aaron Beard
Trussville
Jan 15, 2012

Lessons From The Book Of Nehemiah

Introduction:

A. Each new year brings a lot of introspection. We look behind and what was and we dream about what might be.

1. As we look back we see our successes and are satisfied, but we also see the areas where we failed and are disappointed with ourselves. From our self evaluations we look ahead to this year and make some resolutions, whether officially or not, about things we want to achieve or change about our lives.
2. This morning take a moment for some spiritual introspection. What did last year hold for you? How did you do in your spiritual growth, your service to God, your service to others, your battles against sin?
3. Now, what would you like to change about yourself spiritually with this year? What would you like to see yourself accomplishing? This time next year you will be looking back… will we see success or failure?
4. We don't just need to do this as individuals… we also need to do this in thinking about this local church.

B. For this reason, and for some others, I believe it's a good time for us to return to the book of Nehemiah and be inspired by the example he left and those who worked alongside him:

1. It's one of the most powerfully motivating books in the Bible. It shows us the great things that people of God can accomplish, even in the face of great adversity. Throughout the book we see timeless principles for how we can be a builder not only in our lives, but also in the kingdom of God.
2. Background – Sin, destruction, captivity… Walls left in ruins, people left in reproach. It was time to build!
3. Nehemiah decides to get involved, he motivates the people, and together they say, "Hand me another brick!" Their attitude should be one we adopt as we look at the walls of our lives! **(Neh 2:17-18)**

Builder Principles From Nehemiah

A. We Must Be Builders Who Care:

1. To better appreciate how Nehemiah responds, let's take a closer look at his situation **(Neh. 1:1, 11)**
   a. There have been two waves of returns from captivity – Zerubbabel led the first group to rebuild the temple. Ezra led the second group to restore worship. Nehemiah will lead the third group back, but at this moment he doesn't know that. He is still in captivity and is serving in the capital city of Persia in the king's palace as the king's cup bearer.
   b. A cup bearer wasn't just a butler or a waiter. He tasted all the king's food and wine before the king got it. So if the food's poisoned… bye-bye Nehemiah! He was one the king trusted.
   c. Historians say cup bearers weren't viewed as slaves by their kings, but held a much closer and intimate relationship. They often served as advisors. He was an important man!
   d. While Nehemiah has been in captivity, much work has gone on in Israel. They have a temple and have begun worshipping God in it again. Life is returning to normal. But there was one problem… There were no walls. Walls provided security and kept the bad guys away.
2. One day Nehemiah receives news about Jerusalem leaves his heart broken and his spirit crushed **(1:2-4)**
   a. Even though he had arisen to a high position that afforded him many comforts, he didn't succumb to "promotion erosion" and get lost in pride… He still cared and still loved selflessly.
   b. When his brother comes back from Jerusalem, notice that Nehemiah asks him what's going on… He doesn't wait to hear the news. He is genuinely concerned. ➔ Not a preoccupied mind!

c. He heard two things that greatly disturbed him: (1) The walls were destroyed and so the people were not protected from attacks (2) The people were in great distress and reproach which means that they were being harassed by others and it was destroying the people's hearts.

d. Nehemiah's care is seen in how he is overcome by the news – What do you do when you get really bad news? You sit down, you cry, you cover your head with your hands, etc. This is what Nehemiah is doing… He sits down, he mourns for MANY days, and he fasts (likely for days)

3. As the story of Nehemiah and the people continue in this book, we see Nehemiah's care & thoughtfulness continually displayed and it made an impact on those around him:
   a. There are three guys I call "The Three Stinkbugs" – Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem – when they get word that Nehemiah was coming to Jerusalem they were upset because they knew he was coming to seek the welfare of the people there **(Nehemiah 2:10)**
   b. His passion was contagious. People could see he cared and it caused them to care **(Neh 2:17-18)**
   c. As the people work it is apparent that he moves alongside them working with them **(Nehemiah 3)**
   d. When people were afraid of being attacked, he armed them all with weapons and made battle plans . This eased their minds so they could focus on what needed done **(Neh. 4:15-18)**
   e. When people were suffering due to low income and interest from loans, Nehemiah got personally involved to help them and refrained from luxuries he had a right to **(Neh. 5)**
   f. Nehemiah stood up against error and sin in a dramatic and passionate way. He didn't just care about people, he cared about God's laws and righteousness. He wouldn't ignore it! **(Neh. 13)**
4. Nehemiah wasn't a super Jew. He wasn't a prophet of God. He wasn't a worker of miracles. He wasn't an Elijah, Elisha, or even a Moses. He was a normal dude. His power came from the fact that he cared!
5. Application: As we see the walls of our own spiritual lives, the walls of our relationships with others, the walls of this church… do we see problems? When we see our walls broken, do we become broken? Are we too preoccupied to see the problems others are struggling with? **(2 Cor. 11:38; Rev. 3:16)**

B. We Must Be Builders From The Knees Up:

1. One ways Nehemiah showed he cared was in immediately hitting his knees in prayer **(Neh. 1:4, 11)**
   a. While in the next verses we read of a prayer of Nehemiah, we should not think of him praying once about this matter. It says he "continued fasting and praying" – It was an ongoing thing.
   b. Evidently this goes on for months before Nehemiah takes action. He is a very prayerful man!
   c. When we read "fasting & prayer" together, we can understand this isn't just a prayer raised out of habit or a sense of duty, but an intense & focused prayer where you put all you have in it
   d. Nehemiah believes in prayer… he believes in the power of prayer and it's obvious he prays knowing God listens and cares. The way he prays immediately shows it was a habit in his life
2. I am sure there was more that Nehemiah prayed over these days, but at least one of his prayers is recorded for us here and it shows us so much about his character and his prayerful spirit **(Neh. 1:5-11)**
   a. He praises God and recognizes God's faithfulness – It would be easy to blame God in this situation and I'm sure some Jews did, but Nehemiah readily recognizes that their plight wasn't God's problem. God had kept His side of the covenant. God had even given more grace & mercy!
   b. Nehemiah takes personal responsibility for the problem – Notice the abundance of personal pronouns here. Now these Jews had been in captivity for 70 years. Nehemiah was likely either born in captivity or very young when he went there. Either way, he wasn't old enough to truly be part of the original problem. But he was still a Jew and joins himself with them in confession of their sins which brought this all on. Nehemiah doesn't cast blame!

c. He embraces the promises of God and lays claim to them – Why is Nehemiah praying God's words back to God? He's not saying God had forgotten his promises but is confessing his faith in them. It was based on these promises that Nehemiah had hope and would take action.

d. When Nehemiah finishes his prayer, he takes personal responsibility for the solution as well. It's as if he is saying, "God, I know you need someone to step up… I'll be your man!"

3. Just like Nehemiah's care, prayer takes a central role in his work throughout this rebuilding effort… Most of these prayers are short simple "in the moment" prayers:

a. He'd prayed for months, but when the king gave him the opportunity to present his request, he went to God in prayer one last time. It was no doubt short, but it was heartfelt! **(2:4-5)**

b. When he and the people were being taunted, he prayed for protection and justice **(4:4-5)**

c. When "the three stinkbugs" started causing problems in Jerusalem, Nehemiah fought back with prayer. He basically said this is what they did, but we prayed! **(4:9)**

d. When people tried to frighten him through false accusations, he prayed for strength **(6:9)**

e. Later on he prayed for God's vengeance against those who tried to defile the priesthood **(13:29)**

f. On several occasions Nehemiah prayed for God to remember him and the work he was doing. This was basically a prayer for God's blessing, protection, and reward **(5:9, 13:14; 22, 31)**

4. God's spiritual brick masons know that no work is good without using the mortar of prayer. If we are going to be builders, we have to first be a people of prayer. Prayer won't be an occasional exercise, but a way of life for us. Everything we do we will do by prayer knowing its power! **(1 Thess. 5:16-18)**

- There are four things that prayer will do for us. Prayer makes me wait for God, increasing my patience. Prayer clears my vision so I can see things as they really are. Prayer quiets my heart replacing anxiety with peace. Prayer activates my faith, putting my trust into action. **(Philippians 4:6-7)** [Taken from Swindoll's book, "Hand Me Another Brick," page 28]

C. We Must Be Builders Who Arise To Action:

1. Nehemiah's concern and prayers were great, but he matched those with a willingness to get personally involved… Nehemiah arose to action and made something happen **(Nehemiah 1:11)**

a. Remember in Nehemiah's prayer we saw him taking personal responsibility for the problem, confessing their sinfulness, as well as personal responsibility for the solution, praying for success as he was going before the king. Nehemiah did not say on his knees!

b. Was Nehemiah expressing doubt in the power of God by taking responsibility for the solution? Some think, "I'll just pray & leave it in God's hands" – Why didn't Nehemiah think that way?

c. He wasn't showing doubt in what God could do, in fact, he was expressing even greater faith in what God would do by volunteering to be the man through whom God would do it!

d. Nehemiah understood an important point: God often carries out His will through men & women who willingly & faithfully give themselves as vessels for His service.

2. During all of this time that Nehemiah was praying, fasting, and weeping… He must have also been meditating, planning, and preparing himself for the work ahead **(2:4-8)**

a. Imagine if Nehemiah had been praying and yet expecting God to do all the work Himself, without any involvement from Nehemiah. What would Nehemiah have been doing during those three months? Praying and waiting for God to just blow his mind with something.

b. We know that's not what Nehemiah was doing, because when the opportunity arose, Nehemiah was ready. How was he ready? He had been preparing himself for this day!

c. There's no indication that God told Nehemiah what God's plans were and how it would all work it… Nehemiah had to just assume God would use someone and prayed for God to use him!

d. He was ready for the king to give him the opportunity to ask to go, he had already figured out all the information he needed, he had already planned out the tools and materials, he had already planned out what he would need to do. Nehemiah was active while he was praying!

3. In all of this, Nehemiah shows he understood there were two parts to such work **(Nehemiah 2:17-18)**
   a. He consistently spoke of this being God's work and gave all the glory for His accomplishments to God. He directed people to understand that God's hand was behind this work.
   b. But he also realized God worked through the people. The people, not even just Nehemiah, had to care enough about the walls to do something about it. The walls would not be rebuilt and the gates restored without God's help but it also wouldn't be done without their work!
   c. Put this into a mathematical equation: God's hands + their hands = incredible accomplishments!
4. The rest of Nehemiah illustrates how Nehemiah was a man of action! **(Nehemiah 5:16)**
   a. His motivation was contagious, but it wouldn't have been contagious if he hadn't been working! His words of encouragement would have been nothing more than hot air!
   b. His "diary" of the work around the walls is action packed. It's far from boring because you read about one thing they do after the next. Nehemiah prayed and then did something about it!
   c. Nehemiah illustrates something important for us: A praying man is an active man!
      1) Now some of you may be limited by disabilities, age, and other issues and you pray, but you can't get up and do something about it yourself… Keep fighting by prayer!
      2) But for most of us, we can get up and do something. We can be God's vessel. We are fooling ourselves if we pray about a matter, but refuse to get involved in the solution, and think something is going to change. Maybe God is waiting on you!
      3) **Illustration:** Praying for a church to grow. You never invite anyone. You never talk to others about Christ. You aren't real supportive in your attendance yourself. When there's opportunities to get the word out there, you don't pitch it. But you pray?
5. God's builders today are people who pray with action! They arise & strengthen their hands for the work ahead. They see themselves as God's vessels in this world! **(Col. 4:2-4; 1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Pet 1:5, 10)**
   a. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying prayers aren't effective, but we should not expect God to do great things among us if we aren't willing to let Him use us to accomplish it! In other words, if we don't care enough to get involved and take action, why should we expect God to?
   b. There are three types of people: Those who don't know what's happening, those who watch what's happening, and those who making things happen. Catalyst or Coach Potato?
   c. Have you ever seen a builder with clean hands and clean clothes? No! The same is true spiritually. People say, "I wish…" but don't want to get involved. Stop saying, "I wish" cause you don't!
   d. Have you been praying about something in your life and nothing is happening? Have you been praying about something concerning this church and nothing is happening? Have you been praying about others and nothing is happening? Could it be because you aren't happening?

D. We Must Be Builders Who Lay Everything On The Line:

1. To help us appreciate what Nehemiah did, let's remember the nature of his work in the Persian Empire and what that meant for him personally **(Nehemiah 1:11)**:
   a. As cupbearer, Nehemiah was a very important man! He was responsible for making sure the king's food and drink were not poisoned. He literally stood between the king and his death!
   b. So he was a very trusted man by the king. As one of the king's most trusted men, Nehemiah also would have been like an adviser to the king. His position was one of great power & influence
   c. But don't let any of this fool you. His position was also a difficult one that was filled with risk!

1) It was difficult because the kings of the Medo-Persian Empire were difficult people to deal with. There was a saying: "Don't try to change it. It's like the law of the Medes and the Persians" ➔ A law or decision was final. They were stubborn and proud men!

2) The risk wasn't just the danger of poisoning, but the danger of not being pleasing to the king. If someone was in the presence of the king and upset him or was noticeably sad, that person was put to death.

3) The kings in that day often acted on a whim. The people that wound up getting hurt most were those closest to them & the army. Nehemiah's position was a volatile one!

d. To help us appreciate the risk involved, remember Esther. She is serving in the same empire, some think it's the same king. That king had specifically chosen her from a large group of beautiful women to be his wife. Even though she was the queen, she still was somewhat apprehensive and understanding about the risk she ran if she went before the king **(Esther 4:16-17)**

2. As Nehemiah is serving the king, there comes a day when a great opportunity arises; however, Nehemiah is still filled with fear about what could transpire **(Nehemiah 2:1-3)**

a. For three to four months Nehemiah had been going before the king and he kept his emotions hidden. The king didn't know he was a man with a burdened heart, until now. What changed this day? Was it a holy? Was it an anniversary of a loved one's death? We don't know, but what we do know is that Nehemiah was no longer able to hold it in. He was sad!

b. When Artaxerxes notices Nehemiah's heart-broken state, he asks Nehemiah what was wrong and Nehemiah become afraid. He's not just scared… He's VERY MUCH afraid. This was intense!

c. Three possibilities: (1) Afraid because of how the king would respond to his request (2) Afraid because of the work ahead (3) Afraid because of the king's statement to him ➔ I see the latter. It could be that the king scolds Nehemiah at first for being sad in his presence and now Nehemiah was going to be even more afraid to present his request to the king.

d. One of the things I love about Nehemiah is my ability to relate to him. He is one of us. He had prayed about this moment. He had planned for this moment. He had dreamed of this moment. But none of that changed the fact that he was scared in this moment!

3. While Nehemiah's heart is full of fear, he combats that fear with faith and takes personal sacrifice and risk for the sake of the Lord's cause. He puts his whole life on the line! **(Nehemiah 2:4-5)**

a. Nehemiah's willingness to get involved was going to cost him. Potentially it could cost him everything. He might lose his job, get demoted, get exiled, or even lose his own head! This was a cost he had already counted and was willing to pay to serve God!

b. Think about some other things Nehemiah laid on the line when he chose to go ➔ A place of power and prominence among men, a place of wealth and ease, his personal comfort zone, friends and possibly family, his way of life, his own dreams, and so much more.

c. He made the sacrifice and took the risk for what was still very much an unknown. Why? There was work of God that needed to be done and somebody needed to do it!

d. How did Nehemiah get the courage to give it all up? Faith in God and strong prayer life!

4. Risk and sacrifice continued to characterize the life and work of Nehemiah throughout this book. He faced opposition, endured personal attacks, gave up pleasures, put in countless hours, did things he wasn't necessarily comfortable with, etc. Nehemiah really made God's work his life. He lost himself in it.

5. God's spiritual builders have always been, and always will be, a people who are willing to lay everything on the line. They are people of sacrifice and risk **(Luke 14:25-30)**

a. Satan knows what we value. He knows if there is anything we will put before the walls in our lives, this church, & our relationships with others. Satan will exploit those things to keep our walls in ruin! He'll make us choose between those things & our walls. Can we make the sacrifice?

b. Real progress will always come with a risk as well… Seeing the risk will make us afraid. While being afraid is a natural response, we cannot allow that fear to control us. Faith must take over!

c. We won't always be called to lay everything on the line, but are we willing to? The only way we can be willing to do it, is if we have already given everything over to Jesus!

d. What if we faced losing or life or giving up our faith? Could we lay it all on the line? Perhaps we feel that we can't know for sure unless we really faced that situation. But the closer we come to being at that point in our lives, the more active and strong our faith will be! How do you hold back a builder who is willing to die for the work he is doing? **(Revelation 12:11)**

E. We must be builders who have specific plans for success:

1. When the Artaxerxes questioned Nehemiah, it says, "Nehemiah set for him a time." Nehemiah knew exactly how long he needed to do the work of rebuilding the walls! **(Nehemiah 2:6)**
   a. Remember, when we saw Nehemiah praying how he wasn't just praying… He was also planning & preparing. He didn't just step into this work on a whim, Nehemiah was a man with a plan!
   b. When the king ask Nehemiah this question, he wasn't taken off guard and say, "Hmm… I don't know… I guess I hadn't thought about it before. What do you think?" His thoughtfulness showed the king his seriousness about his request. It also showed his pure motives.
   c. He didn't just have a plan, but he had thought of everything. He had envisioned this conversation with the king, he had imagined what all the king might ask, and he was prepared! This proved to be crucial… The king approved it when he heard that Nehemiah set a time!
   d. From this point on, we see in Nehemiah a man on mission who refused to allow anything to shift his focus away from the work ahead. Surely, as Nehemiah faced challenges and setbacks he thought, "I've got to get this thing moving to be able to return to the king when I promised."
   e. This incident speaks volumes on Nehemiah's character. The Gentile idolatrous king trusted and valued this Jewish child of God so much that he didn't want him to stay gone. The king wanted Nehemiah to return and would be anxiously waiting for him to come back!
2. Nehemiah didn't just have a plan for time, but Nehemiah had a plan for all of the practical details necessary for successfully completing this difficult restoration process! **(Nehemiah 2:7-9)**
   a. He knew restoration wouldn't be cheap, so he asks for help with getting the timber he'd need
   b. He knew access would be a problem so he asks for official letters that showed the king's backing
   c. The king knew safety would be an issue, so he sent a military force with Nehemiah to protect him
   d. Notice how that throughout this Nehemiah's purposeful approach to the king was not without real graciousness. In other words, he was direct yet kind. He said, "If it please the king…" and the response he got was, "The king was pleased too…" ➔ That's not a coincidence!
3. Finally Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem. What does he do first? It's not grabbing a hammer or picking up stones. He spends three days surveying and carefully planning the work! **(Nehemiah 2:11-16)**
   a. He's there for three days and most people probably thought he was doing nothing. But he was doing some of his most important work… Creating a plan that everyone could follow!
   b. Why arise in the middle of the night? Ever hear the phrase, "Too many cooks spoil the pot?" It is not that Nehemiah is a know it all, but he does know one thing… Too many opinions and ideas at this point in the work could be disastrous. It'd probably never get started!

c. **Illustration:** Business meeting where work is discussed. Next month, same discussion with more ideas. The next month even more discussion. Eventually someone forgets to bring it up and the plan dies. Why? The problem probably wasn't the idea but the way it was approached!

d. When Nehemiah finally opens his mouth he is saying, "Here's the plan and here's your place in the plan." Now what needs to be done? The people just need to get to work!

4. To be successful spiritual builders, like Nehemiah we have to be purposeful about planning **(Eph. 5:14-16)**

a. Some people say, "Take a leap of faith!" Some talk and act like its more faithful to just decide you are going to do something and jump into it, without planning. As if planning takes faith out of the picture. Nehemiah shows us that the opposite is true! An active faith will plan.

b. Too often, works are entered into without envisioning how it will be accomplished. Sadly, some do this because they enter into it without assuming it will be successful.

c. Our plans need to be practical. In other words, big things are accomplished through little steps. Baby steps really. For instance: A person wants to win the war against their anger, so they say, "I'm gonna quit getting angry." But they never plan out with daily practical steps how.

F. They were motivated builders with a mind to work:

1. Nehemiah is now in Jerusalem, he has surveyed the work and created a plan, so his next step is to motivate the people for the work ahead **(Nehemiah 2:17-20)**

a. Nehemiah knew the work was good and needed, but Nehemiah could not accomplish it alone. It was his vision, but he had to make his dream become their dream too

b. How does he motivate the people? He causes them to identify themselves with the problem and the solution. Remember, this is something we saw Nehemiah doing in his prayer in chapter one. Notice his use of the pronouns "we" and "us" – Makes it personal for each one!

c. Not only does Nehemiah cause them to identify themselves with the work, but he identifies himself with them. He's not an outsider, but an insider. He's not there to cast blame saying, "Look at YOUR mess… Look at the work YOU have to do." He is personally involved & vested!

d. Nehemiah motivated them by pointing out their condition and the work ahead. He didn't cheapen the work by his approach. They had to be truly motivated by what mattered because of the nature of the work ahead and the challenges they would have to get through!

e. Nehemiah not only put the work in front of them, but showed them God's hand in it all. They weren't just doing this because they needed it. Ultimately, this was about God's work!

f. What a response he got from the people! The spoke with a unified voice their motivation and commitment to the work ahead. They then prepared themselves personally to get busy!

2. Nehemiah has the same infectious spirit of faith David displayed in facing Goliath **(I Samuel 17:29 - NKJV)**

a. All of the men of Israel, the trained fighters, ran at the presence and taunting of Goliath

b. David removed the armor Saul had given him and goes out to meet this giant… He's young, he has no armor, he has no official training, & he has just a sling and some stones

c. What motivated David? Hear his words: "Is there not a cause in Israel?" If you looked at the army of Israel you would think there wasn't anything to fight for anymore! But David knew there was a cause, he cared about the cause, and stood up for the cause… It was God's cause!

3. From this point on in Nehemiah's record we read of the people acting with incredible zeal, focus, and determination in their work… The people had a mind to work! **(Nehemiah 4:6; 6:15-16)**

a. Despite the steady barrage of verbal assaults, they kept working. Despite false rumors about Nehemiah, they kept working. Despite the threat of war, they kept working.

b. Because of their "mind to work" they accomplished this incredible task in only 52 days! Keep in mind this is a restoration and rebuilding job… difficult work under difficult circumstances!

4. God's builders today are just like these people… Motivated people with a mind to work! **(Romans 12:3-8)**
   a. Just like David and just like Nehemiah, we have a cause! We have a cause that is worth fighting for, working for, sacrificing for, standing up for, and living for… we have the cause of Christ!
   b. **POEM:** Everybody, Anybody, Somebody, and Nobody ➔ Where are we at in this poem?
   c. Think about the local church – In a local church you have probably 90% of people who want to see the church grow. Out of that 90% you usually have 10% who will volunteer to get involved in doing what it takes to grow. What about that other 80% of people? Have no mind to work! They want work to get done, as long as it is someone else who is doing it!
   d. Another idea we get from this is that good leadership means nothing without a group of driven and determined people behind them. And good leadership understand this, appreciate the people, and work to motivate the people they lead to get things done.

G. Nehemiah Was A Builder Who Actively Encouraged Others:

1. We really began to see the encouraging factor at work in Nehemiah last time, as we saw him motivating the people to be passionate about the work and get involved **(Nehemiah 2:17-18)**
   a. Nehemiah was an incredible leader and his leadership characteristics really shine in these verses, but Nehemiah knew that good leadership alone was not going to accomplish the work. It was going to take the hands & strength of all the people working together.
   b. Notice how Nehemiah says, "Let us build the wall… Let us rise up and build…" – What is he doing? He's telling the people that he is going to work right alongside them.
   c. Some leaders stand behind those they lead and bark orders, expecting everyone to fall in line. Other leaders stand alongside those they are leading and give words of direction, but also lead by example. It's so encouraging to see leaders get their hands dirty… That's Nehemiah!
   d. Nehemiah also encourages the people here by bring them to face their true reality… They had to come to terms with their real condition. But Nehemiah further encourages them by moving their focus away from their shambled state to a rebuilt future.
2. One of the practical ways he encouraged the people was by getting to personally know each one **(Neh. 3)**
   a. As Nehemiah chronicles the work, he calls out these builders by name **(vs. 1-4)** ➔ I don't know if these people knew he was recording their names or not. He names about 75 people. He had probably not met these people before, but he knows them now and remembers their names.
   b. As Nehemiah goes around the wall, he gets to know each builder individually. He gives little details about their personal lives here and there. For instance, we learn the occupation of some of these workers. They weren't brick masons by trade and Nehemiah understood this. These people were stepping outside of their comfort zone and he appreciated it **(vs. 8-9)**
   c. Nehemiah takes specific notice of the kind of work these people were doing… He remembers some for the diligence of their work and others for the lousy way they worked **(vs. 5, 20)**
   d. During all of this Nehemiah is learning where people live, what family they are a part of, and more.
   e. How come he was able to get to know them so well? Because he was moving around the wall working alongside them. He was a fellow brick mason, working side by side. Can you see Nehemiah working alongside people carrying conversations to learn about them? **(Neh. 5:16)**
3. This encouragement factor is a thread that runs throughout the work of Nehemiah… He is constantly motivating, building, admonishing, and supporting those who are working on the wall:
   a. When people God discouraged, Nehemiah was always focusing them on God and praying.

b. When people faced financial hardship, Nehemiah encouraged by making personal sacrifices.

c. When the law was read and the people started repenting, Nehemiah encouraged the revival.

d. When drastic measures were called for, Nehemiah took difficult action to ensure righteousness.

4. If we are going to excel at builders, really whether in our own personal lives or in the kingdom of Christ, then we have make the determination to be encouragers! **(1 Thess. 5:11, 14)**

a. Builders are people who realize the importance of mutual edification… the building up of one another. They understand that we rely upon one another. They rejoice in watching others excel. They have a loving concern for others.

b. Builders try to bring others in and get them involved. They speak words that motivate and lift up others. They stand by in support and assistance to others who are building. They serve.

c. To truly be encouragers we have to know people… we have to know each other. This means more than knowing names and general information and this takes more than just coming together a couple times a week and exchanging pleasantries. It takes getting involved in each other's daily lives… spending time together… opening up to each other. It takes effort!

d. I am sure we all recognize Paul as an incredible builder in the Lord's kingdom. He was also a great encourager. But we also see he had a strong appreciation of the need to surround himself with people who were also encouragers. People like Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Eph, Aquila and Priscilla, all those who sent greetings, etc **(Acts 14:22, 15:16, 31-32; 16:40; 20:1-2; 27:36)**

H. Nehemiah Was A Builder Who Refused To Allow Criticism To Stop The Lord's Cause:

1. From the very beginning we find Nehemiah having to ward of the negative impact of criticism, particularly from three men – Tobiah, Sanballat, and Geshem **(Nehemiah 2:19-20)**

a. We actually were introduced to this group a few verses earlier when they were greatly disturbed because a person (aka Nehemiah) had come seeking the welfare of the people. We aren't told what it is at first, but this group has a vested interest in keeping God's people down!

b. They mocked God's people – They "jeered" & "despised" ➔ Jeering literally means "to speak unintelligibly." Picture a kid mocking some another kid says with words you can't make out. They are looking down on God's people and their plans and doing it loudly and in the open so everyone can hear… They fully intended to stop the work right then by their discouragement!

d. The belittled God's people – "What is this "THING" that you do?" They call it a "thing" not a "work," "reconstruction," or "rebuilding" ➔ Why? "Thing" diminishes the work in their sight

e. They scare God's people – Accused them of rebellion. If they were really rebelling against the king they would've faced his army invading, in a violent way, to enforce submission. They knew it!

f. Nehemiah handles this directly and with boldness – First, he tells them this was God's work… As God's work, they needed to know if they interfered, they'd be interfering with a power much higher than the king! Second, he tells them that they don't belong… These were foreigners who were oppressing God's people and Nehemiah makes his goal clear… They must go!

2. When the wall gets halfway complete, the criticism resumes. This time, the criticism appears to strike the hearts of the people and bring the work of God to a screeching halt **(Nehemiah 4)**

a. **vs. 1-3** ➔ They belittle the people by calling them feeble… getting them to think they don't have the strength to finish. They shift the focus of the people… not saying look you are half way done, but look at all the rubble on the ground. They belittle their work… saying something so small as a fox could tear down the wall. ➔ They are trying to destroy the people's morale!

b. Nehemiah handles this criticism by praying for God to intervene and destroy their enemies. He then turns the people's eyes back to the work. Notice that in spite of all the discouragement, it still says the people had a mind to work. Nehemiah kept their faith & focus strong! **(vs. 6)**

c. **vs. 10-12** ➔ This time the enemies got some allies together and plotted war and it is achieving the results they desired… the people are scared stiff! They quit working! God's people started saying amongst themselves that they were took weak, the rubble was too great, and they couldn't do it alone. The words of their critics were setting up in their hearts! Now Nehemiah faces having to not only deal with criticism from without, but also from within!

d. Nehemiah handles this criticism by saying, "Remember the Lord!" What a rally cry! They felt like their strength was weak, but Nehemiah reminds them that their God was greater! They felt like their enemies were mighty, but Nehemiah reminds them that their God was mightier! After returning their faith, he returns their focus by getting them busy in the work. He came to face an important principle that day… If good people hear bad criticism long enough, they will start to believe it themselves! **(vs. 13-16)**

3. When this has failed these men turn their attention to Nehemiah himself… This time they are going after the leader and they try to discredit him through their criticism **(Nehemiah 6:6-7)**

a. This had to be especially painful for Nehemiah because the attacks turned personal. They are now coming after him trying to destroy him. They know if they take him down, they can take back control!

b. "The three stinkbugs" had come up with a plan to separate Nehemiah from the people and kill him when they had a chance. You could call this "The Ono Conference" – They said, "Let's get together & talk this out in the plains of Ono" ➔ Nehemiah said, "NO!" and they got angry

c. So they decide to send out some false rumors about Nehemiah in the form of an open letter – Why an open letter? Because anyone and everyone could read it! They make this very public!

d. They attack his motives and his work – They say he is only doing it to play a secret insurrection against the king, they say Nehemiah is only is doing this so he can become king himself, they say Nehemiah has his own agenda that he is pushing. ➔ Serious & potentially devastating!

e. Nehemiah handles it with open blunt honesty – He brings the matter to the people and testifies of their falsehood. Nehemiah points out the source of them… "the three stinkbugs" made it all up. How'd they know what was true? Nehemiah's work & character backed him up! **(vs 8-9)**

4. We cannot expect to do well in our building if we are not realistic. We have to be realistic about the criticism we will face and we have to deal with it **(I Peter 2:12, 3:16; Prov. 29:1)**

a. If you are a builder you will be criticized and often it will be unfair! Your motives will be attacked. Your work will be belittled. Your effectiveness will be doubted. Sometimes it will be very personal! It will be painful and discouraging. ➔ Don't grow weary in doing what is good!

b. Think about Jesus – They criticized Him for His teachings. They criticized Him for His relationships. They criticized Him for His good works – they attacked their motives and their manner.

c. We need to be prepared because sometimes this criticism will come from within… Sadly, a builder will face criticism from His own brethren in the work He is doing.

➔ Why? Some are jealous of the recognition a builder gets. Some are convicted about their inactivity and criticizing others makes them feel better about themselves.

d. What has Nehemiah shown us? Sometimes you can ignore criticism and it will go away, but if it is open and out there, we often have to confront the criticism. The work we are doing is worth defending and so is our testimony! We have to identify the truth and be bold about it.

e. Part of facing criticism realistically is understanding that sometimes even when criticism is unfair it carries some element of truth. Perhaps the truth is exaggerated or perhaps only a part of it

is true. Instead of allowing the criticism to tear you down or instead of allowing it to fill you with anger and bitterness… look for those elements and use it as motivation for good!

I. We Must Be Builders Who Remember The Lord:

1. Imagine being a builder working on the walls of Jerusalem… Wouldn't it be real easy to become too enraptured in Nehemiah the man? This could have created a big problem.
   a. **Illustration:** Some people today get infected by a disease called "preacheritis" ➔ They are so caught up in a preacher, they forget he is just a man. They elevate him to such a place of prominence in their minds and hearts that their faith really hinges on him. Their motivation is driven by him. They put more stock in what he says than others. If he falls, they may fall!
   b. Remember, as the king's cupbearer Nehemiah was a "big whig" back in the Persian Empire. He left that to come to Jerusalem and with him comes the king's authority as well as lots of supplies. It would have been impressive to have Nehemiah show up and be your leader.
   c. Nehemiah was very motivational. He inspired the people he was around. He spoke with words of faith and excitement. He was the reason they had gotten up and gotten to work.
   d. Nehemiah showed courage by standing up to the people who were keeping them down. I am sure the Jews cheered when Nehemiah said, "you have no right or place in Jerusalem!"
   e. Perhaps Nehemiah realized this, perhaps he didn't… but throughout this book he never draws attention to himself, his own abilities, or his position. Instead, he focuses people on God!
   f. In this book of only 13 chapters he refers to God more than 75 times… We think that is natural since it's the Bible, but remember the nature of this book is mainly about physical work they were doing in Jerusalem… Even though this is physical work, Nehemiah stays God focused!
2. The one way Nehemiah focuses people on God the most is through his prayers **(Nehemiah 4:4, 9)**
   a. Now, when we read of him praying we aren't told how many heard it, if anyone heard it, but when you consider how often this book records him praying it's clear prayer played a prominent role in his daily life. People saw and heard him praying. He certainly prayed with others.
   b. At least 11 prayers of his are recorded. Some prayers were quick & some were long prayers, but all were heart-felt appeals to God. Remember, he was a builder from the knees up.
   c. Nehemiah is facing intense opposition – He makes practical plans for handling the discouragement, but his first step is to pray. He is fighting his battles by prayer… A real prayer warrior!
   d. Notice it says, "We prayed…" ➔ The people are losing heart and faith. He brings them together and prays together. The people saw their enemies as powerful & the work ahead as difficult, by prayer Nehemiah refocuses them, reminding them that their God was greater!
3. When the people were facing their greatest trials, Nehemiah provided simply but powerful words of encouragement: "Remember the Lord, Great and Awesome!" **(Nehemiah 4:14-15)**
   a. Remember how they started the work – "I told them of the hand of my God…" **(Neh. 2:18)** – They started with a great focus on God. When fear and mocking shifted that focus, Nehemiah had to restore it. They knew about God, but they forgot about God's nature… Distracted hearts!
   b. How does Nehemiah rally the people? He reminds them about God! God is GREAT & AWESOME!
   c. When he says, "Remember the Lord…" – He would've flooded their minds with some great events:
      1) Perhaps he caused them to remember a young shepherd named David making that giant trained killer and warrior named Goliath eat dust! How? By God's power!
      2) Perhaps he caused them to remember God opening up the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to cross on dry ground and then send the waves crashing down on the Egyptians.

3) Perhaps he caused them to remember the walls of Jericho come crumbling down on top of the city. How? Because they marched and shouted? No, God made it happen!

4) Perhaps he caused them to remember how God created this world and the universe out of nothing. How God spoke it all into existence. That's GREAT & AWESOME!

d. The people Nehemiah spoke to need to remember that this was their God… That they were doing God's work… and because of these things they had no reason to lose heart & be discouraged

4. As we build the walls in our lives, in the local church, and in the lives of others, we have to stay focused on God. We must "Remember the Lord, GREAT and AWESOME" **(Isaiah 40:38-41)**
   a. We serve the same God! God who created this world from nothing! God who has raised the dead! God who has routinely put to flight the enemies of His people! God who defies the laws of nature with mind blowing miracles! God whose knowledge and wisdom is unfathomable!
   b. Perhaps we are facing a trial that seems too strong, we need to remember the Lord! When the work we need to do seems too difficult, we need to remember the Lord! When the temptation to sin seems too powerful, we need to remember the Lord!
   c. Often times we get distracted and discouraged in our lives. The work on our walls slows or comes to halt. Our vision has shifted away from God. We need to put God back in the center!
   d. Many times we will have the opportunity to help others who are struggling. These people need to hear how GREAT and AWESOME God is and what God can do with their life!

J. We Must Be Builders Who Resist Complacency And Carelessness:

1. If there was a time when Nehemiah could have grown satisfied in the work and the effort it was here:
   a. They were over halfway done with the wall. It would've been easy to slow down at this point.
   b. Nehemiah had just fought a major spiritual and physical battle and won! While we'd think that would motivate you even more, it also makes you very susceptible. Just ask Elijah after his battle at Mount Carmel. It's a time when you can easily become discouraged and distracted!
   c. The plans of their adversaries had been defeated, they were on a mountaintop of progress, the work was going great… time for a break, right? WRONG!
   d. Looking from the other angle, they were having to deal with threats and the ongoing possibility of war… It would be easy to make excuses to stop working or slow down. Perhaps some might even reason that protection was more important than wall building. Not to Nehemiah!
2. Nehemiah not only seeks to prevent opposition, but he steps up the intensity and activity **(Neh. 4:19-23)**
   a. When we read about his setting a rallying point and giving them weapons we think about him getting ready to fight if necessary, and he was, but that's not all that was going on here. If their sole focus now was to prevent attack they would've slowed down greatly in the work.
   b. While he emphasizes the guard they set, notice that he also emphasizes that the labor continued. Had the labor slowed down or stopped so they could set a guard, then the enemies would have succeeded without ever having had to attack Jerusalem! The work had to go on!
   c. We see Nehemiah's resiliency in how he never took off his clothes except for washing (NKJV) – Why record that? Let me reword it: "Nehemiah never took of his WORK CLOTHES except to take a bath." - He is cranking up His energy so this work can get finished!
3. The book of Nehemiah is an action packed book. It's far from boring because you are constantly reading about what's getting done. He had a focus that would not be moved until the job was done.
4. Successful spiritual builders are not super humans of faith, but they rather relentless builders of faith. They are people who refused to become satisfied and so they press forward **(Matthew 5:6; Phil 3:12-14)**

a. There is never a moment when we can grow complacent or careless in our spiritual lives. There is always room for growth. There is always room for greater service. Remember, we have to guard against this satisfaction whether we are on a spiritual high or a spiritual low

b. It's interesting that in most areas of our spiritual lives God never draws a line of what is expected… There's no exact measure of what's enough. How much prayer? How much Bible study? How much giving? How many services? How big of sacrifices? By not giving us an exact line, God opens the door for us to show the depth of our love and devotion for Him

c. Sometimes our awareness of our own weaknesses and struggles helps to keep us humble, but sometimes it also helps to keep us lukewarm. We focus on where we've been and we have a sense of satisfaction in how far we've come. We focus on the problems in our lives and we reason we will always have problems in our life, so we grow complacent with their presence.

d. Are we satisfied spiritually? If so, we will never grow! If so, this church will never grow! Are we satisfied in our spiritual activity? With our Bible knowledge? With our talent development? With our giving? With our efforts to spread the gospel? With our level of spirituality?

e. The pursuit of only what is enough will always leave us short of enough. Why? Because when we've done all that is our duty, we are still unprofitable servants. We must seek to excel!

K. We Must Be Builders Who Immediately Address Our Problems:

1. From the very start of Nehemiah's work, it was clear that he was going to have to fight some battles, but these were battles that originated from outside of the walls **(Neh. 2:10, 19)**

   a. It's mainly Tobiah and Saballat, but Geshem also joins in at times. They were not Jews… they were outsiders. But they had gotten a lot of control within Jerusalem. The more the Jews stayed down, the more power these men had… of course they were upset to see Nehemiah there!

   b. From the start they are trying to discourage and dishearten the people. They make fun of them, they make threats against them, they rile up more enemies against them.

   c. Nehemiah never lets their opposition slide, but deals with them directly and bluntly.

2. Now problems start bubbling up from within the walls that had been brewing for quite some time. Several factors came together to make this the kind of problem that multiplies upon itself **(Neh 5:1-5)**

   a. There had been a famine in the land that had taken its toll – Food would've gotten more expensive then become scarce. Jobs would have been lost. Fears and anxieties were multiplying!

   b. Heavy taxes had been levied on the people by the Persian King Artexerxes – So first food gets more expensive, then you have to pay more in taxes! Now people are frustrated & angry!

   c. Just so they could get by, the common people were having to borrow money from their Jewish brethren who charged high interest rates they couldn't handle. Hopelessness has set in!

   d. With nowhere to turn, the people had begun selling themselves into slavery to pay what they owed… but due to the conditions, there was really no way for them to get out of slavery!

   e. You can hear & feel the despair in their voices… They don't see a way out. All roads are blocked!

3. Notice the immediate & direct way Nehemiah handles this situation – "A Bud Nipper" **(Neh. 5:6-13)**

   a. First, he rebukes the Jewish leaders for what was going on – He is essentially charging their leaders with sin. First he confronts them, then he brings the whole assembly of people against them.

   b. He led the way for people to do all they can to redeem those sold and pay their debts – He was in a position redeem some, but not all of them, so he gets others involved in this good work.

   c. He refused to charge any interest to the people he was able to help – The problem wasn't with the loans, but with the interest. Nehemiah must make sacrifices to do this, but does it anyway

d. He holds those mainly responsible for this injustice personally responsible and accountable for it never happening again – He makes them commit to it & binds it with an oath taken publicly

e. Nehemiah gets pretty upset about this situation… There's several reason why he'd feel so strongly:

1) I am sure that Nehemiah realized that this problem had the potential of stopping all the progress they had made. At best, it was going to great slow down the work.

2) He also realized what was going on was unjust and unmerciful – It was immoral in nature

3) But at the heart of his response was his love for God's law – God's law clearly condemned acting as creditors against your brethren, piling up interest charges **(Deut. 23:19-20)**

4. Spiritual builders share this quality with Nehemiah… They are people who immediately address problems:

a. **Illustration:** Ignoring a flat tire – We say, "I'll pray about it…" but if we drive on a flat tire, it's still flat. We say, "I think I can keep driving on that flat tire" but it's still a flat tire. We say, "I'll just ignore it and it'll go away" but it's still a flat tire" ➔ In the end, the tire is ruined, the rim is so bent up it can't be used again, the shocks are blown, and the axle broken. It's then that we stop and say, "You know, I really should have changed that flat tire!" – You Think!

b. Remember the church at Corinth – They had a morality problem that they ignored. Perhaps they thought it wouldn't be an issue if they just didn't address it. What does Paul say, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump!" Not only would the problem not go away, it would fester and grow and create bigger problems and bring more people down! **(2 Cor. 5:1-6)**

c. **Illustration:** Child sweeping dirt under his rug, throwing clothes under his bed, cramming junk into his closet. His room is still wrecked, he's just covering it up. The problems are still there!

d. Don't forget that first builder principle – We must be builders who care! Such builders hurt when they see problems. They mourn over sin. Because they care, they do something about it!

e. Why do spiritual brick masons immediately address their problems? Because they understand the eternal consequences of not doing it. They see the devastation the problems are causing and they care enough to get involved in fixing things. Will it mean sacrifice? Yes! Will it mean making enemies at times? Yes! Will it mean stepping out of our comfort zone? YES!

f. In all of this, balance is needed – Some people are so "problem" driven that they see problems everywhere, sometimes even creating problems in their mind that don't even exist. Some are so filled with indignation over problems that they fail to show mercy and grace. Beware of extremes… We can't let problems go unchecked, but we can't be problem seekers either!

L. We Must Be Builders Who Give Serious Thought Before Taking Action:

1. One consistent characteristic we have seen in Nehemiah is his thoughtfulness:

a. Remember how he spent three months in prayer before going before the king? He wasn't just praying, he was also planning and preparing. He knew what he needed & how long it'd take!

b. When Nehemiah stands before the king and the door of opportunity opens, we see Nehemiah's thoughtfulness in the polite and practical way he approaches the king.

c. Then when he first arrived in Jerusalem he spent several days surveying the walls at night… alone. Why? So he could survey the damage and create his strategy. More planning & preparing!

2. Before Nehemiah took action in handling the internal problems that developed, Nehemiah said, "I took counsel with myself" **(Nehemiah 5:7)**

a. Superficially, this may sounds a bit arrogant. Why is Nehemiah taking counsel with himself? Why not seek the advice of others on how to handle this? That's not what's taking place here…

b. The NKJV translates it this way: "After serious thought…" – Nehemiah stops to think about it first!

c. Nehemiah takes serious thought because he is very angry. He was a man of great zeal and passion. It would've been easy for him to get unbalanced… To go too far in his response, be too harsh

d. Nehemiah takes serious thought because of the intense and difficult nature of this problem. There was not going to be an easy solution to the problem. It could get ugly before it gets better.

e. Nehemiah takes serious thought because he is about to call his own religious leaders on the carpet about this issue. He is about to rebuke people who are spiritually over him. Not only will he rebuke them, but he will do it in a very public way. This was not something to take lightly!

f. By spending some time in thoughtful reflection, Nehemiah calmed his heart before he reacted. In fact, two Bible "versions" tries to capture this sentiment: "I calmed myself down" (Easy to Read Version)… "and my heart reigneth over me…" (Young's Literal Translation)

3. Take a moment and consider the grave consequences that could have resulted if Nehemiah had acted rashly and handled it wrongly:

a. If he handled this wrong, there could have been a huge split in God's people. The leaders could have gotten some to side with them and some would have sided with Nehemiah

b. If he handled this wrong, there could have been a complete undermining of the authority and trust of the spiritual leaders. People would have despised their leaders & refused to follow them

c. If he handled this wrong, the work on the wall could have ceased. Debate and infighting would have caused distraction and discouragement. With so much disagreement filling the air, little to no work would have been accomplished. Too busy fighting each other to build!

d. If he handled this wrong, he could lose the confidence of the people and the work would fail.

4. God's spiritual builders must be people who are thinkers. People who take great personal counsel within themselves before moving forward words or action **(Prov. 15:28; 29:11)**

a. It's not uncommon to hear people brag about not being big thinkers. They will say, "I just speak whatever's on my mind!" or "I speak first, then think!" – its bragged about as if it's a good thing. We are told to see this as a good thing because you'll always know what is on their mind… as if we really want to know what everyone is thinking! This is nothing to brag about!

b. In our zeal for truth and righteousness, we need make sure we are balanced. That we do not rush in with guns blazing without any regard for grace and mercy. We can be understanding and patient without compromising truth and righteousness. Thinking helps keep us balanced!

c. Being a people given to thought will calm our hearts before we have to handle a difficult situation. Going in with a boiling spirit will often make us handle things wrongly and be supersensitive.

d. We need to take serious thought before taking action, because it allows us to prevent unnecessary mistakes. If we are being spiritual builders, these mistakes can cause eternal damage!

e. There's an even more direct application here… We must give serious thought before taking action against those who are over us spiritually. Paul instructed Timothy to do this **(1 Tim. 5:22)**

f. Finally, we need to be always given to serious introspective thought to see if we need to take any action… Examining ourselves, our faith, and our relationship with God **(2 Cor. 13:5)**

Review Two Points We've Touched On, So We Are Skipping Over For This Series:

- ➔ **A builder who was not side tracked by things that weren't a priority (Neh. 6:1-4)**
- ➔ **A builder who always gave glory to God (Neh. 6:15-16)**

M. We Must Be Builders Who Inspire Others To Build After Us:

1. Nehemiah was an incredible worker both spiritually and physically, but his work was limited because he was only one man:

a. As one man, he was limited by space. He could not be everywhere at one time. He could only do work in one place at one time. What if there were needs on the other side of the wall?

b. As one man, he was limited by time. His work was limited by his lifetime. Perhaps he lived to be 80 or even 100 years… he was just a man and so he only had one lifetime in which to work.

c. As one man, he was limited by energy. He could only do so much. Nehemiah had other duties and obligations that'd demand his attention. In fact, he had made a promise to return to Persia!

2. Finally the wall is finished, but Nehemiah's work among God's people will continue. He is done building walls… now he turns his attention to building leaders **(Nehemiah 7:1-3)**

a. Nehemiah would return to Persia. The time has come to "pass the torch" to the next leaders of God's people. He cared too much to leave them without a leadership provision. So he appoints two men to look after the city, men in which he could place total confidence & trust

b. Notice his concern – He wasn't looking for fame or ability to fight in war… What he was looking for in a leader was someone who was faithful and God-fearing. These guys might not have won a "people's choice award" but they were what the people needed… Reliable & Reverent!

c. He didn't just raise leaders to replace himself… but this entire chapter is about him placing people in roles throughout the city to lead providing spiritual and physical leadership.

d. He wasn't just a good leader because he got work done, but he was a good leader because he worked to bring up leaders to come after him. He instructed, inspired, and encouraged.

e. Nehemiah shows that he has resisted the problem of promotion erosion. He was an important man. He even says he is the most important man in Judah. He isn't so power hungry and insecure that he refuses to raise leaders to replace him. He serves because he loves people!

3. Moses was another great leader like Nehemiah. Except Moses struggled a bit to recognize his need for help, or at least do something about it… The need to raise up more leaders **(Exodus 18:17-18)**

a. Recount what Moses had been through as he led – Perhaps he was too busy to realize his need for help. The absence of raising up other leaders was destroying Moses and he couldn't see it!

b. Thankfully his father-in-law, Jethro, saw the need and had the courage to confront Moses about it.

c. Moses wasn't being prideful about doing it all… he was just a leader who got consumed by leading. He was blind to the toll it was taking on him physically, his relationship, & the people he led.

d. Jethro is direct and forceful, but he needed to be… Notice his focus – Find men who are capable, reliable, and honest to lead the people. Let them come to you only with important matters!

4. Isn't this extremely practical for God's builders today! We have to build with awareness of our need for help and the foresight of the need for future builders and leaders **(Ephesians 4:11-16)**

a. This is why it's so important that we seek to inspire others to build with us and encourage the growth of others along the way. If we don't do this, the spiritual leading and building will die off with us! If we don't do this, the local church won't strengthen, develop, and grow!

b. What is the role of the local church? Why do we have pastors, teachers, and preachers? It's to equip the saints for the work of ministry. It's about growing and developing more spiritual leaders and more spiritually mature Christians. It's about getting all to grow more like Christ

c. Elders need to be encouraging other men to develop into elders. Bible class teachers should look for people who could teach & seek to get them involved. Those who lead by serving should be trying to include others in serving. We should be trying to grow more builders & leaders!

d. But we must make sure we are placing leaders in the role of leaders. We need to look for people who are faithful and God fearing like Nehemiah did! Some tend to find people they like who aren't really all that faithful and place them in leadership roles hoping they will grow into the role. Solomon says this causes problems like a bad tooth or hurt foot! **(Prov 25:19 - NKJV)**

N. A builder who promoted zeal for the word of God

1. While Nehemiah has been a great spiritual leader, the bulk of his focus has been physical… rebuilding physical walls. Now Nehemiah turns his attention toward spiritual building:
    a. He had already been laying a spiritual foundation with them so this transition makes sense… He continually prayed with them and focused them on God.
    b. Together they fixed things on the outside, now they need to fix things on the inside. If all they did was rebuild the walls, the problem would not be solved. The people need to be spiritually revived, restored, and redirected.
    c. What use is having good walls if what is inside is in disarray and disrepair?
    d. Where do you start if you want revival, restoration, & redirection? God's Word!
2. As soon as the walls are finished, we find Nehemiah along with the people taking part in what many call "The Water Gate Revival" **(Nehemiah 8:1-6)**
    a. Here the focus becomes Ezra in the reading of God's law, but as we will see in a minute, it is very clear that Nehemiah is not only present but helping to lead in this great event
    b. What is the focus point of this gathering? It's God's word. They aren't doing this because of gimmicks, well crafted stories, entertainment, recreation, food, or other things. This is just about God & His word. This is a spiritual event for a spiritually minded people!
    c. At this revival you have God's people calling for God's word with eagerness to hear and obey it. This is met by God's leaders faithfully reading God's word and explaining it.
    d. Throughout this there is an appropriate use and display of emotion – There wasn't an artificial use of emotionalism to get the people excited about Gods' word. The people were excited about God's word and emotions followed. Respect, worship, & weeping.
3. Not only is Nehemiah's leadership in this important, but so is the response of all of the people…
    a. They ask for the word – They're spiritually hungry. They desire to know it & love to hear it. What's cool is that the people call for this reading of the law… Not Ezra or Nehemiah.
    b. They were attentive to the word – Listened… for about six hours! They weren't distracted by comfortableness or a clock. Hungry worshippers aren't hurried worshippers
    c. They showed respect and reverence to the word – They stood up when it was being read, they bowed down, they said, "Amen! Amen!" and most importantly they obeyed it!
    d. They genuinely repented – They discovered they were wrong, they wept over their failure to keep God's laws, and they immediately did something about it.
4. As we noted, what followed the spiritual revival was an obedient response **(Nehemiah 8:14-18)**
    a. Sometimes during such an event people will get really convicted by the preaching of God's word, but the message is soon forgotten. Oh, they remember how great the event was, but nothing is done with it. This group immediately responded with obedience!
    b. There is no debate or delay. No complaint about how inconvenient it will be… They simply learned what God said and they went out and obeyed and they obeyed fully.
    c. They sought to do all God had told "according to the rule" ➔ Today these may get labeled as legalists because of their concern with law and authority. They weren't focused on law for the sake of law alone, but because they were trying to please God!
5. God's builders today are no different than these… They are a people who are hungry and thirsty for His word. They are a people who respect and revere His word. They are a people who seek revival and restoration. Are we challenged? **(I Peter 2:2; Hosea 4:6; Psalm 42:1-2)**

O. A builder who encouraged the support of spiritual leadership

1. For the majority of this book, the focus has been on the leadership of Nehemiah. We have read about what he has said and done. Suddenly we find its Ezra in the spotlight **(Nehemiah 8:1, 4a)**

a. Sometimes leaders struggle with this… stepping out of the spotlight and letting someone else take the lead. Some become jealous and act selfishly. Some just refuse to support the new leader

b. Nehemiah is very gracious with this switching of attention. He doesn't fight Ezra for the position of prominence on this day. This business of reading God's law to the people was Ezra's job, it was Ezra's "gift" and "field of expertise" so Nehemiah steps aside so Ezra can step up.

c. As a leader himself, Nehemiah no doubt appreciated good leadership. He saw this in Ezra.

2. Even though Nehemiah has stepped out of the forefront, he is still leading. He is leading by doing what he can to support the work Ezra is doing **(Nehemiah 8:9-11)**

a. He supports Ezra by standing beside Ezra… Nehemiah was no doubt a very beloved and respected man. His presence with Ezra would have brought that attention to Ezra as well.

b. He supports Ezra by reinforcing the words that Ezra had read… He emphasizes their importance

c. He supports Ezra by encouraging the people… Had the people become overcome by their feelings of shame and guilt they could have given up. He encourages them to get moving & obeying.

3. Nehemiah wasn't the only one supporting Ezra that day… Others stood beside him **(Nehemiah 8:4, 7-8)**

a. Each of these men became Ezra's "right hand man" that day… even though they just stood there.

b. By simply standing beside Ezra they encouraged Ezra and endorsed him in the eyes of the people… by their presence they were saying to the people, "Listen to this man!" – Each of these men had respect from different people gathered there… their support impacted the crowd.

c. As Ezra was reading God's law there were men who worked through the crowd explaining what the law meant. Not only did this teach the people, but reinforced the work Ezra had done.

4. God's builders today are people who understand the importance of good leadership, recognize good leadership, and support good leadership. We must seek to do all we can to aid and encourage the work others are doing. We must guard against allowing bitterness and jealousy to cause us to withhold our support when others are followed and praised **(1 Thess 5:11-13 NASV; Heb. 13:17)**

P. He Was A Builder Who Stood Uncompromisingly And Passionately For Truth And Righteousness:

1. To help us appreciate Nehemiah's incredible zeal in this chapter, it's good to get a background of what has been going on since the "Watergate Revival:"

a. Remember, at the revival the people of God showed great spirituality and passion for God's word. They repented and implemented God's laws in their lives. They were on fire for the Lord!

b. Following the "Watergate Revival," they made some vows **(Nehemiah 10)**: (1) To fully follow all of God's laws, (2) To not intermarry with the idol nations that surrounded them, (3) Carefully observe the Sabbath, (4) To tithe so the priests & Levites could focus on their work

c. Things looked good. So Nehemiah returns to Persia to serve again as the cupbearer to the king just as he promised. We don't know how much time passed, but it becomes clear his heart was still in Jerusalem so he gets permission from the king to go back. When he arrives back in Jerusalem he finds things weren't like he left them. The "Watergate Revival" had worn off!

d. It's not that Nehemiah comes back to find a whole new set a problems to deal with… he comes back to find that the same old problems had reared their ugly head again. All of those commitments they made were broken. It hurt Nehemiah personally because of all the time he poured in, but ultimately this was a God thing. This flows from a love for God & God's law

2. When Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem, the first problem he encounters was shocking & personally trying… Tobiah was being allowed to live in the storehouses of God's temple! **(Nehemiah 13:6-14)**

a. Remember from the beginning of his work, Tobiah has been a thorn in the side of Nehemiah. How personally insulting and outraging it must have been to come back to Jerusalem and find that man living in God's house. Someone bent on doing wrong was living in a place built for right!

b. Nehemiah handles this personally and firmly – He physically removes all of Tobiah's stuff from the temple and throws it out on the lawn. Nehemiah literally evicts Tobiah from his new home!

c. Nehemiah doesn't handle this with softness… He is very angry. His anger is justified. While he takes drastic measures in his anger, his anger is certainly controlled.

d. Picture it… Tobiah returns to his room in the temple to relax and get some sleep. He opens the door and grain pours out all over him. "Where's my stuff?" he says. Then Nehemiah steps from around the corner and says, "It's out on the lawn." Tobiah would then respond, "Who put it there?" And Nehemiah could say, "I did! Do you have a problem with it?"

e. Remember how we've been referring to Tobiah, Sanballat, and Geshem as "The Three Stink Bugs?" ➔ Going with this analogy look at verse 9 again… Not only does Nehemiah get Tobiah's stuff out, but he fumigates the place! He doesn't want any part of that stink bug to stay around!

f. Besides the harboring of the enemy of God's work there and the breaking of God's law, Nehemiah takes this situation so seriously because it is hindering the worship of God's people. The Levites are having to go find "secular" work to care for their families. They were supposed to be supported by tithes, like the grain tithes. Where were all the tithes? They were gotten rid of to make room for Tobiah to sleep! So those who led in worship & sacrifice had to quit!

3. As soon as Nehemiah finishes giving Tobiah the boot, he finds that the Sabbath day, a day that was to be holy to the Lord, was being allowed to be profaned **(Nehemiah 13:15-22)**

a. The Sabbath rolled around & it looked like any normal day in Jerusalem… there was nothing special about it! Grain rolling in & out, wine being pressed, & merchants doing business. None of this was inherently wrong, as long as it wasn't take place on the Sabbath day. As Nehemiah points out, breaking the Sabbath was a big cause of their captivity. How soon they forgot!

b. The first thing Nehemiah does is confront the leaders – These people are ultimately responsible. They knew better than this, or at least should've known better. The merchants coming in were foreigners and might not have known God's laws… but these people should have!

c. As the Sabbath began, Nehemiah took physical steps to prevent God's law from being broken – He shuts the gates and positions servants there to make sure the gates stay shut! Even if others would allow God's law to be broken, Nehemiah wouldn't stand idly by and watch it happen!

d. Nehemiah personally threatens any who would break God's law – Some camped out around the walls just waiting for a chance to slip in. Nehemiah basically threatens to whoop these guys… to knock 'em out… to punch their lights out. You know what… I bet he could've done it!

e. He acted in a tough way, but the message got through… No one tried to break God's law!

4. Another problem arises which Nehemiah handles in a bold and aggressive way – God's people were intermarrying with the nations around them **(Nehemiah 13:23-31)**

a. They were breaking direct commands from God. God couldn't have spoken any more plainly about this. They weren't allowed to marry foreign people because they'd influence them to sin!

b. Certainly he is passionate about this simply due to the disregard of God's law… but it is intensified by the knowledge that this too was a big part of why they faced captivity in the first place!

c. This problem was so pervasive that half of the kids couldn't even speak the Hebrew language… this tells us their heritage had become mainly Gentile and idolatrous! Now they are suffering corruption and losing their identity as God's people because they have ignored God's laws!

d. See how extreme & boldly Nehemiah handles this problem… There was no doubt where he stood!

1) He cursed them – Doesn't mean he spoke profanity, but he spoke words of disrespect and dishonor to them. Probably spoke the cursing God promised if they broke this law.
2) He struck them & pulled out their hair – He is physically going after the guilty ones. Can you see the bald & tattered guys walking around picking up the pieces of their hair?
3) He holds them responsible & accountable to change - Binds them to an oath of repentance
4) Is he going overboard? I don't think so. Certainly he is leaving no doubt as to the severity of their sin and giving a strong reminder of how big of a deal this sin is. He doesn't allow the message to get lost in political correctness & tact… Drives the point home!

e. Nehemiah shows great courage in this because he isn't selective in who he goes after… The grandson of Elisahib the high priest was married to the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite. Intermarriage had even defiled God's priesthood! So Nehemiah chases even him away!

f. As Nehemiah prays to God we see great leadership – He not only got out everything that went against God's will but he put into place things and people to fulfill God's will.

5. It seems ironic to some, but God's builders have to be a people who are willing and able to get mad about some things. They take truth and righteousness seriously. As a result they become passionate and involved when they see sin and error going unchecked **(Luke 2:14-17; Romans 12:9)**
   - Notice that after each change Nehemiah enforces, he prays to God for grace!

Builder Principles From Nehemiah:

1. A builder who cared **(Neh. 1:4)**
2. A builder from the knees up **(Neh. 1:5)**
3. A builder who laid everything on the line **(Neh. 2:5)**
4. A builder who was time conscious **(Neh. 2:6)**
5. A builder who arose to action **(Neh. 2:5, 18)**
6. A builder who encouraged the people **(Neh. 2:18)**
7. A builder who knew the people **(Neh. 3)**
8. A builder (leader) who gave everyone a job they could handle **(Neh. 3)**
9. A builder who in trials remembered the Lord **(Neh. 4:14)**
10. A builder who did not go looking for a fight but was ready if one came **(Neh. 4:7-9)**
11. A builder who did not become careless or satisfied **(Neh. 4:21-23)**
12. A builder who immediately addressed his problems **(Neh. 5:6-11)**
13. A builder who gave serious thought before taking action **(Neh. 5:7)**
14. A builder who was not side tracked by things that weren't a priority **(Neh. 6:1-4)**
15. A builder who always gave glory to God **(Neh. 6:15-16)**
16. A builder who made arrangements for leaders to follow him **(Neh. 7:2)**
17. A builder who built and kept unity **(Neh. 8:1)**
18. A builder who promoted zeal for the word of God **(Neh. 8:1ff)**
19. A builder who encouraged the support of spiritual leadership **(Neh. 8:4, 9)**
20. A builder who enforced religious purity **(Neh. 13)**