

A Servant From the Knees Up

Nehemiah 1:1-11

January 17, 2016

In the fall of **1847**, **Charles Ellet Jr.** was commissioned to construct the first **suspension bridge over the Niagara River**. The designated site was the narrowest point of the river, **about 800 ft. across**. The first obstacle was to project a solid line in order to establish a link from the Canadian to the American side. It was determined that it was **too dangerous to attempt to establish this link by water**, due to the fierce whirlpools in the area. It occurred to someone that **kite-flying might be the answer** to this difficult problem.

A contest was held with **a five dollar prize being** offered to the person who could fly a kite across the Niagara Gorge. A **young American boy named Homan Walsh** won the contest on the second day of the competition. The string of his kite was fastened to a tree on the American shoreline and a light cord attached to it and pulled across. Next came a heavier cord, then a rope and finally a wire cable composed of a number of strands of number ten wire which was the beginning of the new bridge.

A kite flying contest, a small, but an important beginning.

We are beginning today, a study in the OT book of Nehemiah. **This is a story about building a wall, a construction project**. But it is also about building God's people. . The **principles, qualities and characteristics** that we see modeled by Nehemiah transcend time, location and circumstances, and **apply to everyday issues in our world, and in your life**.

In his classic commentary, and book on leadership, "Hand me Another Brick," Pastor Chuck Swindoll says this about what we can learn from Nehemiah.

In this biblical manual for potential leaders we find timeless and reliable guidelines that work. They enable us to know how to build quality characteristics in ourselves and others, the kind that are rarely seen today. **These truths are modeled by Nehemiah as he accomplishes an incredible project against unbelievable odds**. Before coming to the end the story, it will amaze you how **many character bricks were passed from his hands to yours**.

What needs to be built or rebuilt in your life?

Is it relationships?

Is it your spiritual life, and your love relationship with God?

Is there some other area in your life that you most urgently need for God to give you direction?

I believe that you will see how your life will be impacted by these truths and principles, **and that we as a church, will understand how God wants to come in to build, and rebuild His church, and His people, here at Evangelical Free Church Bemidji.**

Israel was a significant power in the world during the reigns of David and Solomon. After Solomon's death, **first the Assyrians conquer part of Israel**. About 120 years later, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, invaded Jerusalem, and all of Judah, and took the people captive, **including Daniel and his friends**.

This is the beginning of "The Babylonian Captivity." Read about this in II Kings 17-25

Almost 50 years later, **539 B.C.**, when the Babylonians are conquered by the Persians. **Cyrus, the king of Persia began to allow the Jewish people** who had been dispersed throughout the empire, **to return to Israel.** They did so slowly in small numbers. **This is found in 2 Chron. 36.**

Work began on restoring the Temple in Jerusalem. **Almost 80 years after this process began, (458 BC)** Ezra returned to Jerusalem in order to finish the reconstruction of the Temple, found **in the book of Ezra.** Even after the Temple is mostly completed, **the city of Jerusalem itself is still in shambles,** and the walls around the city still lie in ruins.

In December of 445 B.C., in the 29th year of the king. We meet **Nehemiah, cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, ruler of Persia.** He lived in Susa, the capital of the Media-Persian Empire, like Washington D.C., **possibly the most important city of its day.**

One day, Hannani, a fellow Jew, **(one of my brothers)** and others from Jerusalem, **visit from the “old country.”** **As they shared,** this particular report touched a nerve in Nehemiah. **Things were not well.** The Temple had been rebuilt, but the walls to protect it were broken, **the gates had not been repaired.**

The people in Jerusalem were in great affliction and struggling to survive. Instead of a magnificent city, **Jerusalem was in shambles;** the walls were crumbling and the people were disheartened.

This news impacted Nehemiah in a life changing way. (Nehemiah 1:2) **“Nehemiah questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.”**

He cared about his heritage, and about God’s people. He was interested in what was happening, even very far from home.

When we have a heart that is softened by the love of God, **we care about people.** Then we want the facts, no matter how painful they might be. When God places a burden upon our heart, a need or an opportunity before us, we feel compelled to find out more. **That is what Nehemiah did here.**

Christ followers take their eyes off of themselves, off of their own needs, their own challenges, even their own preferences, and think about others.

We need to care about the world around us. Why don’t you become Nehemiah in people’s lives? Be intentional, and **be aggressive to become aware,** inquire in a meaningful way of hurting people or circumstances.

Nehemiah got the word that things were not good in Jerusalem, for the city or the people, **and look at how he responded...**

“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.” Vs. 4

This was not a momentary reaction, it wasn’t a reflex that happened and then was quickly over. **He** felt the sorrow of the news, of his broken history, and the agony of people that he didn’t know, **but he felt their pain.**

This was a spiritual experience for Nehemiah,
“He fasted and prayed.”

Fasting is not primarily about not eating. Fasting is about replacing a significant activity in your life, **with a more significant one**. The idea of fasting is that, **instead of spending time eating, you spend that time focused on God**.

What would happen in your life **if you spent 1 full hour every day, pursuing God**? Seeking Him out, listening to what He has to say, and really considering how to apply that in your life? **I dare say that for most of us, that would revolutionize our lives.**

When we become aware of difficult situations in people's lives, or in the world around us, **it should touch our heart**. When Jesus saw the masses and their needs

Matthew 9:36 "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Nehemiah made himself **aware of the conditions, he cared about the information that he discovered, and Nehemiah did something about it.**

We will see throughout the rest of the book of Nehemiah, **all that he did in response** to this information that he received, and how God directed his life, through passion and action. **But his first response, that which is important for one who wishes God to direct their life.** He sought God through prayer.

Seeking God, His presence, His purpose, and His power, **is always the place to begin**. A connection with God is the deep foundation that we have for building a stable, strong, meaningful life.

Too often, **prayer is the last course of action, it should be the first**. If you come to the point when you say, **"I can't do anything more, but to pray."** That is a good place to be, you should have gotten there earlier.

Prayer is conversation with God. There are many reasons why prayer should be an important part of our lives. Including the fact that **God tells us to pray**, that prayer really does make a difference, and it is the **best means that we have for developing our love relationship with God.**

In addition to those reasons Prayer:

1. Makes us wait

By waiting, we don't rush in and do or say the wrong thing. Prayer forces me to leave the situation with God, and hopefully then, wait for His timing.

2. Clears our vision.

As we pray and bring our focus on God, He then helps to bring into focus our situation. It helps us to see things through God's eyes.

3. Quiets our heart.

It is difficult to pray and worry at the same time.

Philippians 4:6 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." As I am quiet before God, He brings quiet and peace to my heart.

4. Activates my faith.

Prayer is a reminder to myself that I need to put my trust in God. As I say the words of, "God take this concern, give me direction," I actually begin to be more open to God speaking to me in this circumstance.

Reminder: Since Prayer is "conversation with God." Conversation is two-way communication. It is not just me talking. I need to give God **at least** equal time. In reality I should do more listening than talking. Listen for and to God.

We see a good pattern in Nehemiah's prayer.

Praise (5)

Confession (6b) "I confess the sins owe Israelites, including myself and my father's house have committed against you."

Petition – Please help these people and this place that is hurting.

So how do we turn to God regularly in our lives, especially during times of need?

Have a relationship with God.

Recognize our need for a Savior, and that Jesus is it.

Ask Him to be our Savior and the Lord of our lives.

That means that He is in control.Q

Walk with Christ daily.

Daily Quiet Time, bible reading, prayer

Pray throughout the day to God.

Seek to understand the mind of God.

Ephesians 1:17-21 "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit[f] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

Nehemiah responded through prayer and seeking God, when faced with a painful and difficult situation for his people and significant city. What are the issues in your life that require an aggressive seeking of God? Are you facing financial difficulties, job tensions, relationship stresses?

Are you anxious and confused about where to head, or even the next step? Don't wait to seek God, make that your first priority.

Here at Evangelical Free Church Bemidji we are in a time of transition. Soon this church will have a new Pastor. It will be a time of rediscovering and defining God's agenda for His people in this place. Let us recommit ourselves to seek God through prayer, and above all to seek His purpose, for this next season.