

Norman C. Schwab  
Yacolt E.V. Free  
September 18, 1994

**No Pain...No Gain**  
Nehemiah 1:1-3

Junior High was an interesting time. Strange new emotions, clumsy arms and legs. Everyone tried to be cool, look like they had it together, but no one did. The tougher they appeared the more insecure they actually were. At Lewis Junior High in Vancouver, there were certain areas labeled as danger zones. The buses were not safe places to be. The halls were more like wild cattle drives, few of the normal people spent much time in the rest rooms. But one of the most intimidating places, a place where you were required to go every day, was the locker room. Those of you who have ever had the privilege of entering the sacred halls of a junior high boys locker room will be able to quickly recall the pungent odor that accompanied your tour. Our particular locker room had rows and rows of wire baskets filled with P.E. uniforms. These unis were the heavy double-sided cotton ones that were excellent at absorbing and retaining sweat. These uniforms were to be taken home once a week on Fridays and washed on the weekend. That theoretical ideal of course rarely occurred. In fact, the average wash time for most of the guys was "about once a month". One guy told me this was part of his strategy for not getting beat up in the locker room, to smell so bad no one wanted to touch him. I do not think he washed his uniform all year. The shower time that was the most intimidating part. On the way to the shower just above the bin where you threw those dirt brown towels, was a big sign. It read, "NO PAIN...NO GAIN" This was to be an inspiration to all of us to work hard at physical fitness. For some of my heavier classmates it should have read "NO PAIN... NO LOSS" but the sign must have been placed there specifically for me, because in junior HIGH I was very sensitive about how skinny I was. (I still am sometimes) People would tell me if I stuck out my tongue and stood sideways I would probably look like a zipper. They would implore me to wear skis in the shower so as not to be lost down the drain. The purpose of that sign "No Pain No Gain" was not to make me feel bad, the other guys did that job quite well. The purpose was to be an motivation for change. Whoever put that sign there wanted the guys to recognize a need. Pain was required before change occurred. Some Jr. High boys were blind to the need of change...blind to their great problem of their body odor. They did not recognize they needed a new change of clothes. Smells that bothered us did not seem to have any effect on their nostrils. The scary part was that after a while, even we kind of got used to the

smell. I remember, it didn't seem near as bad after you had spent some time in the stench.

Getting used to the stench may be helpful in surviving Junior High, but if you are slowly getting used to the stench of ungodly living in your own life, if you are becoming dulled by the problems and needs around us in our communities, it can be lethal. We may need to stop and look at our lives to see if there is an area where we need some adjustments, correction, possibly we are due for a major overhaul. It may be some of the areas look like just a tiny fissure, the cracks may be beginning to form in our spiritual walls. Some of those cracks that need attention might swirl around some bitterness from the past, anger, jealousy. Maybe those cracks are filled with selfishness, no time for God, immorality or rebellion. Maybe some of those things have begun to sow their ugly seed and you haven't even seen their sprouts. We are powerless to change unless we are first able to recognize the need. There is no gain before experiencing the pain. NO Pain...NO Gain.

Just like that sign in the locker room. "NO Pain...NO Gain. Without tears, without the movement of the heart there cannot possibly begin the process of rebuilding. Pain is the impetus to change. What do you cry over? What brings you pain. Is it the same thing that brings God to tears? My challenge for you this morning, as we look at the life of Nehemiah, is to begin to develop a God sensitive heart, a heart that is pained at the things that God is pained over. One that cries over the things God cry about. One must first recognize and experience the pain before rebuilding can occur. We must begin to Make God's pain..Our pain. Remember no pain no gain.

Turn with me to Nehemiah chapter one. Our character Nehemiah begins his journal describing a defining moment in his life. It was a moment in time when he became overwhelmingly connected to what pained God. In Nehemiah the first chapter read with me the first three verses. (READ)

From verse one we see that it was definitely the words of Nehemiah we are now reading. It could be that Ezra the priest was the actual author using Nehemiah's personal journal to write the bulk of the book and filling in some of the later details found toward the end of the book. At any rate, he is differentiated from other men with the same name as the son of Hacaliah.

"Now it happened..." Here Nehemiah begins to point to his defining moment. This is a moment so vivid in his mind that it shocked him out of his comfort zone. He remembers the details well. It happened in the month of Chisleu, which would correspond to our winter months of November-December. He was in King Artaxerxes winter palace in Susa. Nehemiah was in a place that was secure, well shielded from the

winter elements. It was safe and comfortable in the palace and he had a well paying job, plenty of food and heat. It was a place of comfort. This defining moment that would change the rest of his life took place in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes reign. Remember in the 6th year of King Artaxerxes reign, the king gave a priest named Ezra permission backed by royal funding, to return to Jerusalem to help restore the people to belief in God. Yet, in Ezra chapter 4 we read that the opposition to the remnant was intense. It was so intense that they got King Artaxerxes to put a temporary halt to the rebuilding that was happening in Jerusalem by writing a letter full of false accusations. The opposition took the temporary stop notice and used force to halt the work on the walls and foundations. READ Ezra 4:11-23. This parentheses was inserted here to illustrate the enemies continued antagonism toward Israel. The enemies of Israel just kept picking and ridiculing and scorning and insulting. They hassled the workers every chance they could get, until finally they got the stop order. Remember that opposition to our commitment to God will be long term, that is guaranteed. If you are feeling the heat now, don't expect it to stop any time soon. Remember too, where this opposition is coming from. Here it is coming from the Samaritans, those who were a mixed people both racially and religiously. They were Jews who had compromised. They had intermarried with foreign women and integrated pagan rhythms with worship of Yahweh. Compromise is the dry rot that will cave in your house.

So here is the scene. Nehemiah is in the palace. As a high government official it is quite possible he would be required to listen to many reports of conditions in various places in the empire, many pleas for help, many requests for assistance. If he had been prone to daydream like many of you now, was probably thinking about how his fellow countrymen were fairing in Jerusalem after the stop order... and in walks his brother Hanani and some other men. This was to be the defining moment. This was not a to be a family reunion. These men had just spent four months traveling on foot from Jerusalem, braving the bandit and weather with one purpose, a hope for help. They probably left Judah at the end of the summer harvest in order to make it in Susa by winter. They knew also that whether they got to see Nehemiah or not, they must then turn around and head back to Judah traveling another four months to get back for the spring planting. This trip was not done on a whim. It demanded commitment, driven by the sorry condition of Jerusalem. "Now it happened..." this was the defining moment. Nehemiah got out of his chair and gave them a middle eastern greeting of a hug and kiss then without waiting for them to give their appeal, without sitting down, he asked them about what had been burning on his mind. (Did you see that we know that he was standing because he didn't sit down until verse 4) Look what Nehemiah asks them.

Questions often reveal the heart. Note the text goes out of its way to say, “And I asked them...” He didn’t wait for the group to bring up the subject. He was concerned and thinking about the Jews back in Jerusalem. He was concerned about the welfare of God’s chosen people in the place God had chosen for them.

This was a defining moment for Nehemiah. Recognition of a particular need for you may start with a defining moment, a moment where you are so impressed by God that something should change, that you are called to do something, give something, that you are overwhelmed. What need awakens your heart? For some of you, it is the needs the great need in our community for the kids and youth. One does not have to talk long to Bill Mason. He loves kids, He sees a need and now our AWANA program is going wild. Others see that same need and respond as teachers leaders taking care of babies in the nursery to free up workers to serve. Many men see the need and how they can meet it. Over 60 different men have seen the need and responded sacrificially with your time and talents. John Allen, Todd Jacobs James Cortney so many see the desperate needs of our kids who need Christ. Others pray and give money sacrificially because of some defining moment when God opened your eyes to a need and impressed upon your heart to do something.

I remember a defining moment for me one evening when Erin and I were having dinner at Stuart Anderson’s Cattle Company. On the back of the paper place mat we were once again laying out the pros and cons of going into the ministry. We both can point back to that moment as the shift in our language from “should we go and leave Engineering” to “When are we going to do this” I remember a defining moment at a youth retreat going into junior high when I made the commitment to be totally sold out to God. All of us can remember some defining moments, pivotal points of decision in our lives that after which we are never the same. You and I may be in need of such a defining moment. We may need to receive a divine knock on the head as an impetus for change. If God were to present you with such a defining moment would you recognize it? Maybe some have already experienced that knock and for some reason never responded. Be alert and sensitive to God’s promptings. We must begin to make God’s pain Our pain.

Not only was Nehemiah **sensitive** to needs, Note also the **availability** of Nehemiah to listen to the needs and hurts from these men of Judah. See how he took the initiative in asking their welfare. Nehemiah showed intense caring and concern about what they were concerned. Nehemiah was concerned about what God was concerned, the welfare of his people. Nehemiah was one who made God’s pain his pain. Nehemiah made time to hear peoples pain. Is our lives so busy we can not even hear needs 1st alone

respond to them? If we aren't listening we certainly will not hear or experience needs. NO Pain... NO Gain.

Nehemiah was one who had a defining moment, and showed intense concern for the things that God cares about, but look at his response in verse four. Here is where we see the PAIN part in the text. After Nehemiah hears how the people are in great distress, mental strain and physical oppression. After he hears the reproach put on them, the ridicule, disgrace and shame due to living in a city with it's walls in shambles. After Nehemiah hears how the city lays in ruin and it's gates are burned, Nehemiah sits down and cries. Read v.4. Nehemiah grieved with his brothers sadness. HE didn't just offer the comment, "Boy, that must be real tough, and silently thank God he was in the palace and not in Jerusalem," it was get down in the dust and mourn with these men. The tears were a window to his soul. What could possibly move a high powered political figure to tears? I believe Nehemiah cried about the things that God cried about. His heart was soft enough to be touched by the things that made God cry. He made God's pain...His pain. He was sensitive to needs, He was open to hearing needs and Nehemiah experienced the pain of needs. He had to first feel and experience the pain before he could move ahead and be motivated to do something. No pain...no gain.

For Nehemiah it was knowing that the walls of Jerusalem were crumbling. Nothing was protecting the temple. Yet, Isaiah talks about the walls of a city being like our lives before God. In Isaiah 49: 15,16 It says "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me." God sees our lives as continually before Him, just like these walls. Yet, sometimes our walls, like Jerusalems lie in ruin, and we need the promptings of the Holy Spirit to bring our attention to the cracks and fissures within it. Some of us may easily see the needs of those around us, needs in the community.. but fail to see the needs in our own lives. Some of you may find the walls of your life in ruins, it happens slowly. First there is a loose stone here and there. A little weed is allowed to grow in the crack. Fissures appear that break into pieces. To those around you it looks like your a good Christian, but your spiritual wall has crumbled down around you. The spiritual wall that protects your life is in rubble and has been replaced by carnality. Maybe it's that bitterness from the past that has blinded you, anger, jealousy towards a family member. Maybe those cracks are filled with selfishness, no time for God, immorality or rebellion. Maybe some of those things have begun to sow their ugly seed and you haven't even seen their sprouts. We are powerless to change unless we are first able to recognize the need. Nehemiah saw a need. He cried tears over the lack of protection of God's temple

and ridicule of God's people. He made God's pain His own. In a defining moment in his life Nehemiah was prompted to tears, pain which motivated him to a challenging task.

Are we just going through the motions of our service here at church? Are we serving in ministry just so we will look a bit better and get recognition from others? Before we begin to serve we must see and feel the desperate needs. Before you take a position as a Sunday School teacher, ask yourself why? Why are we giving these kids Biblical instruction? Take a look at the curriculum that is taught in our public schools, the lack of biblical instruction, the human centered teaching that is pumped into our children and ask where else could they get thus instruction. Why do we come to Church? Does it just make us feel good?... is it soothing to our conscience? Before you come to worship and praise His name, take a look at the failure of God's people to worship God take God seriously. And youth...yes it's time to wake up. Does it make you weep when you walk down the halls of your school and look at the faces of kids whos lives are tracking for themselves and not going for God? Before we study the Bible do we mourn over the failure of many of us who fail to live lives that model and reflect the life of Jesus Christ?

Nehemiah was a leader who saw a need and responded in tears. He felt the why behind what he was called to do. Have you been prompted by God about being a Nehemiah leader who respond to meeting a challenging need? When was the last time you you were cried about a need in the community, in your own life. You may say, "I'm not a real emotional person, I don't cry alot." well, even the stoic of us can be emotionally moved without the shedding of physical tears. Has God stepped out of heaven and impressed a need where you have been motivated to do something. I know for many of you, God has already given you that defining moment of change, He has allowed you the delight of tears, seeing a need and you will never be the same. You have experienced the delight of change that couldn't possibly occurred apart from God's help. Others may have heard the promptings but for some reason it was choked out and it's been forgotten until now you been thinking about it. I challenge you to follow through! Respond and act! Others of us may have not yet had a burning desire a compelling desire to meet a need, to you I say pray. Pray that God would move you to tears about a need that you not just one you can fulfill but one you must fulfill. Pray for a vision to see that desperate need. We need to make God's pain our Pain. There must be the recognition of need before the motivation to do. Feel the tears of need. No pain...No Gain.