

Norman C. Schwab
October 16, 1994
Yacolt E.V. Free

I Have to Sweat next to That Guy?

It was a hot dry summer in 1981. I was working at Trout Creek Bible camp near Corbett Oregon. Part of my duties included putting up hay for the horses. To avoid the heat of the day the guys would go out to the fields just after dinner and work until the early morning bucking hay up onto the old flatbed truck. It would be midnight, one o'clock but I was sweating quite well with straw matted to my clothes. It became a contest to see how high we could stack the hay bales. The last few layers were almost as much work as all the others as we pushed from the bottom and others pulled from the top. It was late at night and we were tired, but we were working hard together, we were sweating hard together, we growing closer together as guys becoming men. Bone tired I remember falling into my bunk still sweaty and straw covered. Unity was being fostered. The gals of the camp also desired to be a part of this male bonding experience and would provide drinks and snacks for the hay crew. I remember one night one of the larger guys on our crew we affectionately called "Baby Huey" enjoyed almost a half dozen homemade fancy chocolate covered biscuits. I was glad that I didn't get the opportunity to eat any of them, I was glad because it wasn't until morning we found out the gals had served chocolate covered biscuits... doggy biscuits. Now that promotes unity...

Just as the hay crew guys were working shoulder to shoulder out in the hay fields of Oregon, just as we here are working shoulder to shoulder framing the new building, setting trusses in place while the rain falls and laying down sheeting with blisters on our feet, Nehemiah and many of the people of God worked shoulder to shoulder rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. You see I'm sure Nehemiah ran into some of the same difficulties and conflict that we could run into. He could have easily been sidelined by conflict. They could have argued about not getting a reasonable section of wall to repair. They could have complained about who they were assigned to work next to. They could have said, "Nehemiah you aren't going to make me work next to that guy...he sweats too much." They could have been consumed by discussing the proper design for constructing a city wall. They could have debated the merits of different types of mortar or even roofing materials for the gates... but as we read parts of this chapter three, notice that those things never paralyzed them. Notice the coordination the cooperation and the commitment of the men and women who worked on the wall. They knew how to keep the main thing the main thing. This is one thing I have so appreciated about the people

here at Yacolt. There may be debate and discussion, but once a vote is taken a decision is made. There is unity and everyone is on the same team. This is a family and a family learns to sweat next to someone is doing God's work even if he smells bad, even if her attitude is not always sweet. Because people haven't forgotten the vision the purpose. Unity is much more important than being right, winning at all costs. My purpose this morning is to encourage all of us to enthusiastically shoulder the work of God together in unity. This passage is filled with teamwork.

Turn with me to Nehemiah chapter three. Here they begin to build. Let me read a few of these verses to give you a flavor of the "shoulder to shoulder" unity. (5)

Well Coordinated. First we notice how well Nehemiah organized the people. There were specific tasks to be done and everyone knew their responsibilities. The tasks were specific and clearly designated. I've noticed people as they come to work on the church. They walk around and see who's working on what area and they scope out their part, the place where they feel they would be most significant or a place they know needs completion. They mark out the task, get the materials and assistance and they are off and running until lunch. People want a job that they are able to do. People are more than willing to do a job that is needed to be done and know that they have the resources to be able to complete it. This is true not only on the building, but in service of the church. People want to see a need they can meet and be given the resources to do it. They go. People are not going to enjoy a ministry that they feel ill equipped to perform where responsibilities are not clearly outlined. Look at verse 17, "the Levites carried out repairs under Rehum." There was supervision training and coaching for those who needed a little assistance. There are times we need to be stretched out of our comfort zones to work in areas we don't naturally feel gifted. Yet, look how Nehemiah provided coaches. I am so glad for the professional carpenters who helped coach me through certain building aspects of building on our new addition. There may be times when you would like some coaching on your teaching of Sunday School or leading in your family, relating with your grandchildren, maybe would like some encouragement in your marriage. There are those here among us who are "skilled" in those areas and can provide coaching. Nehemiah fostered unity by coordinating the people well. He didn't have to do everything himself. He knew how to delegate. Teamwork is well coordinated.

Teamwork also means cooperation. Nehemiah is task specific, but people centered. He has remembered everyone's name who worked on the wall. He is a people person. As he takes a mental journey around the city of Jerusalem he can personally recall the names. He didn't look out and just he progress, plans, mortar and bricks...Nehemiah saw the people working together.

. “Next to Him” next to him, after him...” On and on it goes. 31 times. It continues to emphasize the shoulder to shoulder working together spirit that was evident on the wall project. Isn't it amazing to see the number of different occupations that are working together? In verse one the wall building is kicked off by the priests. We see here that the building of the wall is primarily a spiritual issue. This is God's wall, God's project, not Nehemiah's pet project. Giving of ones resources time and money is primarily a spiritual issue. We see sacrificial giving of oneself modeled by the spiritual leadership. Next to the priests are perfume makers, goldsmiths, politicians, servants, border guards, merchants. I'm sure there were many who were operating outside of their own natural giftedness, but they had a willing heart to do the work of God. Those perfume makers and goldsmiths were probably used to working with a very high class clientele, they did precise and artistic work satisfying with the whims of only the rich and famous. But look at them on this list. They are out there on the wall slopping mortar. They aren't detailing gold challices, they are pushing heavy boulders into place. Surely they could be doing something far more significant than that? NO...there they are “next to him and next to him” Shoulder to shoulder building Gods wall. Teamwork means cooperation. People next to people.

Let me read a couple more verses. Note the motivating force behind Nehemiahs plan. (Read v.22 and 23) They are repairing the section of wall that is next to their own house. Now that's some motivation. They couldn't go off to work on the easiest , or best or safest section of wall. They were to rebuild the portion of wall that protects their home. They would make sure that if the enemy did attack and got through the wall, it certainly was not going to be the wall that protected their own family and home. Nehemiah knew that the strength of the whole was in direct proportion to the strength of each of the parts. This cooperation of the 42 different work crews being next to them and next to them demonstrated to all the people that the strength of the whole depends on the strength of the parts. Our church can only be as strong as the strength of the parts. We must be committed to encouraging each other and building each other up. The strong links must support the weaker struggling links. If you are a struggling link don't put on a fake front and say I'm a strong link I can handle it. We need to let the church family know, I'm hurting I need some coaching I need some encouragement I could use a listening ear. That's teamwork. That's building up the body. Unity. Cooperation. They were a diverse group of folks coming from all walks of life, but they had a common goal and a common God. Teamwork is well coordinated plan and fosters a spirit of cooperation, standing man to man, shoulder to shoulder, working together as we build the kingdom of God.

Teamwork is not only well coordinated with people next to people cooperating together. But Teamwork is marked by commitment. Notice also the level of commitment that Nehemiah records here in the verses. We read that some of the groups completed large sections of wall repair. In verse 13 we read an out of town work group completed 1500 feet of wall repair. It wasn't just a "Jerusalem thing." All believers in God who worshipped at the temple were concerned that it be protected. They were able to set aside city rivalry and jealousy of Jerusalem and come help their brothers. Others are mentioned twice for completing several sections of wall. Look at Baruch in verse 20 "He zealously repaired the wall." This guy was a go getter. Read in verse 30 about a guy named Meshullam he carried out repairs in front of his own quarters, he didn't have a house. All he had was an apartment, a chamber to live in. Yet, look at the commitment level. He may have thought, I am insignificant. In a single apartment chamber he probably lived alone. What can one single guy do for you God? Yet, He is mentioned twice in this wall builders hall of fame. God will empower and strengthen the insignificant to do the work He wants done.

Notice Nehemiah remembers not only the workers, but the shirkers. Look with me at verse 5 of chapter 3. Here are the nobles of Tekoa. Literally in the Hebrew the "majestic, magnificent ones." They were far above working under the project supervisors. They didn't support the work. They didn't want to bury their pride and take orders from the blue collar construction foremen. They were above such work and certainly were not about to get their robes all sweaty. There is sort of a play on words in the Hebrew. The "Adoreem" (the nobles) refused to work for the "adoneem" Lords or supervisors. You may recognize Adoneem is a plural form for Adonai the word for Lord. Interesting, since it was God's wall and God's project. Who were these Adoreem truly refusing to follow? It was a spiritual problem in rebellion against the true Lord, Adonai. They were more than willing to enjoy the benefits of the wall, yet they were unwilling to put their shoulder to the boulders, they were enjoying the fruits of others labor. We call them...sponges. Are there any in our churches who are sponging off the work of others? Are any of us willing to enjoy the benefits of the church yet unwilling to pay a sacrificial part? I'm not talking to visitors, I'm talking to the family those who have been around and been a part but never quite committed. Is it time to commit to someone, to place yourself under the leadership of the Lord?...notice this blurb about the Nobles from Tekoa is placed right in the middle. The wall just keeps on being built. Whether or not you decide to step up to the plate to shoulder a share of the load or not, the others who are committed will keep on building. The church of God will continued to be built but ...wouldn't it be fun to get in on a piece of the action? Don't let just a few folks steal all

the joy, fun, the privilege and reward for serving “our Lord” Join in. There are so many different opportunities to serve.

Teamwork is well coordinated, it means cooperation and commitment. These things all push to one goal. Unity. A united well oiled team that can do great things for God. As I look out at the families in the congregation I see men and women who desire to impact the town of Yacolt, Amboy, Chelatchee Prairie for Christ. They are families shoulder to shoulder coming from different backgrounds to serve the same God. Next to them.... Next to them... Next to them. I encourage you to enthusiastically shoulder the work of God together. In unity. Thank God for the person next to you to encourage, to work with, to pray with, to dream with, to minister with and to sweat with. (Go out into the new building and hold hands sing “bind us together Lord” We are one in the Spirit’ Bless be the tie that binds”