

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EFree
April 9, 1995

Nehemiah Wrap-up

Laying back resting on freshly cut grass, as a kid, I remember looking up into a warm late-summer sky. I would watch the clouds float quietly by transforming themselves from rabbits to elephants. Often I would see the triangle of Canadian Geese winging their way South. It was fascinating to watch them fly in military formation, one just behind and to the side of the next one, drafting off each others work. One would think the guys in back were just sponging off the front guys work, but if you watched closely you would see them reorganize every few minutes. The point goose would rotate leadership. He couldn't handle all the turbulence by himself. They seemed to choose between a group of leaders who took turns at buffeting the wind. No one bird stayed out in front all the time. All the rest of the geese would be honking their encouragement to the point goose. One bird would be leading and the others honking their affirmation. Everyone had to fly together or they would never be able to reach their goal. The independent goose easily grew tired and either gave up or developed lead poisoning. To reach their destination they had to be a team. One goose next, to another goose bearing the work together, heading in the same direction.

That's not a bad model for the church is it. Leaders who can handle the turbulence but who are also aware that they need to share that leadership...they can't do it all by themselves. Then the others in the church all honking out encouragement. A team that is motivated and inspired to move on to the goal. A flock where everyone is flying in the same direction. All with different strengths and positions but all with a single purpose to be in this community, the light that God wants us to be. Leadership and Prayer. That's what the book of Nehemiah is about. He was a re-builder of walls and a re-builder of people. He was a servant leader who humbly knew how to encourage, coach and motivate people, while at the same time taking a good share of the turbulence in the point position.

For the past few months we have dissected and dismembered, extruded and expositied this book of Nehemiah. Usually that would be where the study is left, we would hang up our white coats with the book laying about our lab table, still in bits and pieces. We have learned much from our study, but now I'd like to try and put some of the pieces back together. I think it's wise to step back and enjoy the finished "Big Picture", before we rush off to another exciting adventure. My goal is for everyone to be able to think their way through the book of Nehemiah. One year from now when someone comes up to you and asks if you've ever heard of Nehemiah, I don't want the response, "Nehemiah? Wasn't that the shortest guy in the Bible...Knee High Miah?" No, I want to put a bar in your mind for you to begin to place your hangers. I want to put it together so it makes sense as a package. Are you ready? Here we go.

Let's begin by reestablishing the historical context. If we were to drop Nehemiah into a Biblical timeline where would he go? The youth are possibly missing those quizzes after a week of Spring Break so try this one. Where in the World would you place Nehemiah? A) Time of Abraham? B) The Israelite Kings? c) The time during the in exile Babylon? d) After the Exile? Post Exilic? f) Intertestmental? g)Time of Jesus? D is the correct answer. Remember Zerubabael led a group of folks back out of captivity in Jerusalem. Then Ezra brought a group back and finally a third group returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah in about 444 B.C. He decided to tackle this mission from prompting by his Brother who traveled all the way to Susa to tell about the hardship and shame that came on the people of Jerusalem because the walls were still in ruin. This was the initial problem that Nehemiah set out to correct. Flip to verse 4 of chapter 1. It brought him to tears that City of David was just a heap of rubble. He was filled with emotion that brought him to his knees in prayer. We see Nehemiah's passion all through the book. Especially in the first and last chapters. Remember he's the one in chapter 13 who's pulling out peoples hair in anger. Nehemiah was a man who felt deeply about the things that God was concerned for. What do you think God would cry about today? Does it make you cry? When presented with the problem it brought tears to Nehemiah, but he didn't stop there. He went to the

only source that he knew could bring help. He spent some serious hours in prayer before the Creator of the Universe.

Nehemiah was one of the most praying folks in the Bible. Almost every chapter in the book records a prayer. It's kind of nice to see a high profile politician on his knees. He was one whose dependence was on God and not himself. He knew a "come through" God who held to his promises. Remember Nehemiah the one with the prayer gills. Just like a fish can breathe under water naturally and instinctively. As soon as a crisis hits, threatening to drown Nehemiah, he instinctively drops to his knees in prayer. Maybe we should call him Knee-high miah. In chapter one he prays in specifics not glittering generalities. i.e. Bless the missionaries. He prays in confession, admitting his part in the nation's downfall. He refused to play the "I'm a victim" game blaming Israel's mess on other folks. He humbly confessed his part of the problem.

Remember when he came before the King to present his plan in chapter 2 verse 4, he shot up a short arrow prayer. He always had prayer on his mind. It was almost a constant conversation between he and God. It's as close to the New Testament exhortation for us to be praying without ceasing. Are you beginning to develop those prayer gills, that make prayer a more natural response? Are you getting thirsty for a prayer relationship with God that Nehemiah had? In a couple weeks on the 4th of May is National Day of Prayer. Christians from all over the United States have set that day aside to pray. That Thursday we are planning to hold a concert of prayer. Plan to be there and be ushered into the presence of God with fellow believers to pray for each other, our friends, community, our government officials, missionaries, and other requests. Nehemiah knew how to pray and he practiced it. Knee high Miah earned his name.

If you want to structure the book in your mind, the first half chapters 1-6 deal with what? Rebuilding the walls. The second half 7-13 deal with rebuilding the people. Which do you think proved to be the easier task? Overall the theme of Nehemiah is Leadership with a heavy foundation of prayer.

The problem prompted prayer which in turn piloted a plan. The leader must be able to organize, anticipate and plan what to do. Great ideas with a half baked plan, will often fall flat. God gave us minds and

Nehemiah is an example for us that planning is not a sin. We must look to the Spirit's leading in our planning. We must be open to God's changing of our plans. But we must be good stewards of the resources were allotted and plan. Nehemiah knew that the King would want a detailed plan that showed some thinking and anticipation of the potential problems in rebuilding a city wall. He knew there would be some opposition so he asked for signed letters by the king to allow access through other countries. He knew he would need materials so he asked for a requisition to use trees from the kings forests. He planned ahead. If you have a new idea or project you want to happen. Do your homework. Be prepared to counter the objections of that mossy horned boss.

A leader almost by definition must also be one that is able to fly ahead leading the flock through the turbulent winds. A leader must be able to handle the conflict and problems. Nehemiah was one that weathered the storms of criticism, compromise, false rumors and physical threats. In every group there are those who tear down, those who do nothing and those who build up. Nehemiah was a builder.

He responded to the criticisms by Tobiah and Sanballet by humbly evaluating the "suggestions" measuring his motives and actions against what he was being accused. After evaluating the criticisms he either learned from them ignored them or publicly denied when needed. He always responded first in prayer to God. He then asked himself whether their suggestion would further God's plan or hurt God's plan. In Chapter 4:4 Hear Oh God how we are despised"...v6 so we built the wall to half height. A good leader does not let the critics pull the people down. That tough. Nehemiah had a great characteristic of persistence.

Nehemiah also dealt with the temptation to compromise. The enemy tried to ridicule and demoralize the workers. They threatened and slandered but then they tried to compromise. This was one of their most dangerous ploys. They tried 3 times to lure Nehemiah out to the plains of Ono for a little conference. They wanted to distract him from the mission the vision that God had given him. Possibly they wanted to harm him, but compromise would work much better. You ever feel the enemy trying to lure you away from doing what God wants to be doing. Lure you to places where you know God doesn't want you to?

Compromise like criticism can be sulfuric acid to your soul. It can eat you from the inside out spiritually little by little till there's nothing left inside. Are you one who tears down? How about do nothing? Maybe your a builder...like Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was a motivator. He placed the people where they would be motivated to build a higher quality wall. He had people build the wall that protected their own home. He enhanced teamwork by putting people next to each other, next to that guy next to that guy. They didn't have to do the whole project alone. When the building project was physically threatened he had the men work in teams. One guy would stand watch with a spear while the other guy would be slapping mortar. He kept the moral high by getting the people to work together, increasing ownership in the wall and working on the wall himself.

He wasn't just sitting in the foremans' trailer barking out orders. He sacrificially spent long days and late nights on the wall. He didn't ask the others to do what he himself would not endure. He modeled sacrifice. It was Nehemiah who left the influential position and comfort back in Susa to come lead the building project. Nehemiah gave generously out of his own wealth for the building fund. He was a guy who refused to take the Governor's customary food allowance. He was out on the wall and with the people.

Because of God's strength and the peoples mind to work, the wall was finished on time and under budget. 52 days to rebuild a city wall is moving fast. That also proved to be the easier task. The second half of the book recalled the task of rebuilding the people. It began with the reading of God's Word. All great revivals throughout history have begun with the recovery, reading and preaching of God's Word. Ezra led the people to placing a priority on God's Word. The Word first brought conviction, then led to confession and obedience. Obedience to the Word then brought a great joy to the people. This is still is a guaranteed formula to moving towards genuine joy. A joy independent of circumstances, yet dependent on obedience to God's commands. Are you spending a regular time in God's Word? We need to be in the Word to know what it says so we then can obey and apply it practically to our lives. Gods' Word. That's where strength and refreshment come from.

In Chapter 10 the people committed themselves to following God's laws. They signed on the dotted line and said. "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord. We are committed to going God's way. We want to put first things first in our relationships, our business dealings, and in support of God's work.

If the book had ended in chapter 12, we would have counted Nehemiah a total success in rebuilding walls and restoring people. But, the last chapter in the book 13 lets us see that rebuilding walls is more difficult than rebuilding people. Nehemiah took a trip back to Susa for just two years and upon his return the people of Jerusalem had fallen far from where God wanted them. He passionately worked to restore the house of God and the people of God but that task will not be finished until Christ returns to claim His people. One day there will come a time of ultimate Sabbath. A time of rest for his people. That's why Christ came to the earth to die for our sins. To make that ultimate rest possible. To allow our broken relationship with God to be restored. Have you restored your relationship with God? Maybe it's time to stop trying to do life your own way. Maybe it's time to stop depending on your own strength and begin to pray in dependence on God's strength.