

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 continue 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 get all the joy, fun, the privilege and reward for serving "our Lord." Join in. There are so many different opportunities to serve here. Once people see the power of teamwork, there is no stopping them.

The final leadership truth I see modeled by Nehemiah is the way he **personally engages** with people. The project is task specific, yet He is people oriented. As Nehemiah is writing down in his journal, he mentally moves from section to section of the wall remembering who built what. He knew them personally. He had to have interacted with them continually as he directs and leads and helps them. But I am impressed that he remembered their names. These are not easy names to pronounce, let alone remember. These people were more than a number to Nehemiah. He understands that every task happens in the context of relationship. Nehemiah engages in relationship. Vision will only get carried out if people know they are loved and get along with each other. Commitment is fostered when we feel we belong. People make a contribution to the whole when they know they are valued. If you find yourself lacking commitment it may be because you feel disconnected. Do you believe you matter? Would anybody care if I didn't show up? Does anyone know my name? Perhaps it's time to build relationally and engage. Commitment will drop when relationship is not fed. What am I doing to feed relationships where I ought to be more committed?

I love the way Nehemiah appreciates and recognizes by name each of the those who shared the load with him. Is this the week you write a note to say thank you to someone who has ministered to you or alongside you? In Ken Blanchard's book, *The One minute Manager*, he challenges reader to look at the face of your watch and cause that to prompt you to take one minute out of every day to look into the faces of those we manage, work alongside of and realize they are our most important resources. The number one reason people quit their job is not due to poor pay, its due to poor appreciation. Leaders, how are we doing?

I love the humility Nehemiah demonstrates here. Nehemiah doesn't list his own name in this wall builder hall of fame. He listed another guy also named Nehemiah in verse 16, but they have different fathers. He didn't put his name on a brass plate on the wall. He didn't take the credit. He gave that away. Effective leaders, level 5 leaders, says Jim Collins in his classic book, *Good to Great*, are those who "look out the window to give credit to those outside themselves when things go well. At the same time, level 5 leaders look in the mirror to take responsibility when things go poorly."

Nehemiah engaged personally and remembered names. God has not forgotten our name either. Is your name written in the lamb's book of life? Will you join His team this morning? Jesus is in the reno-

vation, restoration business, but it is a team sport. We need each other. We grow in the context of community. As I look out on the congregation, I see people 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.

"Better Together"

Sermon Series: "Nehemiah"

NORTHVIEW BIBLE CHURCH



Catalog No. 356
Nehemiah 3
Pastor Norm Schwab
February 11, 2018

It was a hot dry summer in 1981. I was working on crew 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 past midnight but I was still sweating profusely. 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 hard work, but we were working hard together, we were sweating hard together, we were growing closer together. 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 provided drinks and snacks for the hay crew. I remember one night one of the larger guys on our crew, who we affectionately called "Baby Huey," enjoyed almost a half dozen homemade fancy chocolate covered biscuits. I was glad that he ate all of them before I got to them, because later we found out the gals had served chocolate covered biscuits... doggy biscuits. Now that promotes unity...We were better together.

This morning we look at Nehemiah and many of the people of God who worked shoulder to shoulder, working hard together, sweating together, rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. At first read, the passage seems like a boring list of names that are very difficult to pronounce. Even Chuck Swindoll's popular book on Nehemiah, *Hand me another Brick*, chooses to blow right past this chapter 3. I believe all God's word is powerful and has something we can learn from, and a closer look at Nehemiah chapter three reveals some powerful leadership truths we can apply to every project God calls us to tackle, whether we are leading or following. Do you want to become a better leader? Do you want to become better at following? Let's take a look together at Nehemiah chapter 3. **(Slide of Nehemiahs wall)** to give a visual picture of the wall during Nehemiah's day. The Sheep Gate at the north-east corner was where they kept the sheep to be sacrificed in the temple. I wonder if the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Jesus, ever thought about his future sacrifice as he walked through this Sheep Gate? The Fish Gate, present day Damascus Gate, was the entry point for those bringing fish from the Mediterranean Sea. Matthew 4:19 says, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Last week we found out the Valley Gate, down here in the south west corner, was the gate Nehemiah entered and exited on his midnight inspection tour of the walls. Then in the south-east corner was the Dung or Refuse Gate. The garbage was taken out of the city through this gate and dumped into the Hinnom Valley where it was burned with fire. Jesus used this valley, Gehenna, as a word picture to describe what hell would be like, a

stench of constant burning of garbage. Is there some garbage we need to get rid of outside our gates? The Fountain Gate is here very near the Pool of Siloam where a number of us visited a few years ago. John 7 talks of the "spring of living water," the holy Spirit, that gives life. Nearby Hezekiah's water tunnel from that spring kept the city alive and hydrated during a siege. It is still there today. **(slide; Hezekiah's Tunnel)**. The Water Gate is the place where, in Nehemiah 8, Ezra the scribe stands up to read God's word to the people. Water is a symbol of God's word. The East Gate is now called the Golden gate. **(Slide; Golden Gate front)** Tradition says Jesus walked into the city and entered the temple on Palm Sunday right here. It is the gate through which King Jesus will one day return and enter the city of Jerusalem. You can see from this picture it is all blocked up, done by a 16th century Ottoman Turk ruler, who also placed a cemetery right in front of the gate to assure it would never be used and opened again; as if a bricked in gate and several hundred-dead people will stop the king of glory from returning and entering the gate. This gate speaks of hope and expectation ready for Jesus to return again. **(Slide, Golden Gate back)** Here is another group waiting from the temple mount side, also eager for Jesus to come back soon. So you can get an idea of what the city looked like in Jesus day (was different than it was in Nehemiah's day, much smaller, and the wall that surrounded it. **(Slide; city model)** The gates were a means of access, in and out. Of course, the gates did little good if there were no walls. They were the most important places to defend because they were so vulnerable to attack. The gates brought a sense of order to every part of society, markets and trades. Legal disputes and business agreements and government happened at the gates. Life of the city occurred at the gates. Are the gates and walls of your life broken down? What are you allowing to flow in and out of your gates? What are you seeing, hearing? Speaking? Are you open to truth? Is your life gate closed to things that are harmful and corrosive to the soul? What things do you need to throw out of the Refuse Gate, confess and get rid of? Kelly Minter writes, "All day long we choose what goes in and out of our hearts and minds."

So that gives you a visual picture and sets up the reading for this morning. This chapter is the most important in the Old Testament in determining gates and walls and locations of Jerusalem. I am going to read the first 5 verses and then give you the greatest hits of the rest of the chapter. Be on the alert for any leadership truths you may see hiding in these verses. How does Nehemiah teach us to be a better leader and follower by his example? (READ 3:1-5)

In Chapters 1 and 2, Nehemiah planned his work and now in chapter 3 Nehemiah works his plan. Nehemiah is concerned with only one thing. The glory of God. Here in chapter 3 Nehemiah works to **foster**

This message from the Scriptures was presented at NORTHVIEW BIBLE CHURCH, Spokane, Washington.

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unity. He helps people see the common vision of rebuilding the wall is far greater than any individual differences. For far too many years, as the prophets wrote, the people who returned were in survival mode, doing whatever was best for them, building luxury homes. Nehemiah unifies them around a purpose. He calls them to interdependence, to need each other, depend on each other, work with each other in order to restore God's glory, restore faith in God people and send a message to the pagan around that God had not abandoned His people. This not just a "Jerusalem" thing. (V.13) People from up to 18 miles away set aside their city rivalries to come help rebuild. People come from Jericho, Tekoa, Mizpah and Gibeon. Jericho certainly should be able to relate to the need of rebuilding walls. All who come to worship at the temple in Jerusalem will benefit. Those building the walls probably had differing ideas of how it should be done. I'm sure Nehemiah ran into some of the same difficulties and conflict that we could run into. They 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 chapter three, notice that those things never paralyzed them. They could have been distracted by add-ons. Wouldn't a deck be great on this part of the wall right outside my house? The view will be fabulous. I wonder if we work a built-in pizza oven? No. They refused to be distracted from the purpose. Nehemiah fostered unity and kept the main thing the main thing.

This is one thing I have so appreciated about the people here at Northview. There may be debate and robust discussion, but once a vote is taken, a decision is made there is unity and everyone is on the same team. People haven't forgotten the vision the purpose. Unity is much more important than getting it done your way, being right, winning at all costs. Nehemiah's vision was far bigger than "what's in it for me?". He fostered unity by being a champion of God's agenda. Look what God has done. In the first verse 3:1 the priests are listed first and they are consecrating the work to God. Unity comes when we know who our work is done for.

Unity is not uniformity. There are all different kinds of people working on this project. It's not just a group of paid construction guys riding Harleys 12 miles to work from Tekoa Valley. There are goldsmiths and gate keepers, priests and Levites, perfumers and merchants and city officials and temple servants. All of them come from different work skills. Unity is not uniformity. If a football team was filled with players who all wanted to play quarterback, that might be uniformity, but it would not be unity. It could not function as a team. Someone has to play second violin. Someone has to be the backup singers. Not everyone can play a lead role. In order to foster unity people must see the

big picture and not get distracted from the main goal. A jeweler or a perfumer may not be particularly gifted to build walls, but they are in because they get the big picture. A man came up on a building project and asked a worker what he was doing. I'm just mixing mortar. He asked another worker who was detailing a floor mosaic, hey you there, what are you doing? "Man, I'm just earning a paycheck." He asked another who was sweeping up debris. What are you doing? Answer: "I'm building a cathedral, a monument to honor God." Do you see the big picture of your work? Is it far more than just earning a paycheck? Do you see the value of the project? The value of the project to the worker will determine the value of the worker to the project. If it means a lot to us, then we will mean a lot to the project. Nehemiah fosters unity.

Nehemiah also **empowers and releases** people to serve. He can't do this alone. He needs everyone to work together. He coordinates people and delegates with clear specific responsibilities. He gives each group a manageable section that is doable. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Everyone knows their responsibility and they are equipped and trained to do their jobs. 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. There may be times when you would like some coaching on your teaching of Sunday School or leading in your family. We are offering LIFE group leaders training next weekend. We offer 40 hours of training for our Stephen ministers. Maybe you need some encouragement in your marriage or with relating with your grandchildren, (that is why we ran the Parenting Summit a couple of weeks ago.) There are those here among us who are "skilled" in those areas and can provide coaching. Nehemiah fostered unity by coordinating the people well, empowering and releasing. He didn't have to do everything himself. DL Moody said, "I would rather put ten men to work than to do the work of ten men." Here's my 80 percent rule of delegation. If someone else can do the task at least 80 percent as good as you can do, let 'em do it. Release and empower them. But give them authority to do, along with responsibility. Anyone who has had a boss assign them a job to do, but then failed to give them the authority and resources to complete it, knows the frustration. Responsibility without authority is tyranny.

Nehemiah empowered and released and motivated people by inviting them to work in affinity groups where relationships were strong. He gave them sections of the wall that meant most to them. The priests worked on the Sheep Gate near the temple. A number of places he put people working on the part of wall right next to their residence. That would ensure quality work that part of the wall they would be building defends their family. It would cut down on the commute to work. If they got attacked they would already be home, ready to defend their family. I smiled to read in verse 14 that city officials, the politicians, were the ones he assigned to rebuild the Dung Gate. I

would think the perfumers might be a better choice for that gate. Nehemiah assigned groups to where they would have the greatest ownership and motivation. God has placed each of us strategically in our neighborhoods, business, families. This is where God says our ministry should be. There is a reason why we are placed there.

Nehemiah is also in the trenches working. He is leading and inspiring. From the next chapter we know he was sweating and working long hours just like all of them. A leader can't ask anyone to go where they wouldn't go themselves. A leader can't ask to give what they won't give of themselves. The leader sets the example. He leads not by dictating and pushing but by pulling alongside. One of the men from Wednesday morning sent me this picture that illustrates the kind of empowering servant leadership Nehemiah modeled. (**Slide: Boss versus leader**)

Did you catch the Father named Shallum who in verse 12 modeled working hard alongside his daughters? He wanted his kids to be a part of the project. I'm not sure how old they were at the time. Maybe they were young and the wall was filled with their laughter and giggling, but I'm sure those daughters never forgot helping work on the wall alongside of their dad. What an example! What an inspiration to others working on the wall. Albert Schweitzer spent his life as a musician, author, doctor, theologian, missionary concluded this; "There are three ways to train a child; by example, by example and by example." Are we empowering and releasing our kids well? It's an ever-changing target as they grow and mature. They are watching, learning.

Leadership truth number three. Nehemiah not only fostered unity, empowered and released, but he also **inspired teamwork**. There is a phrase repeated over and over throughout this chapter "next to him... and next to 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 one's 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. It takes all of us working together to complete the project. Each one of us has a job to do. If we don't get it done, the wall simply will not be able to be effectively used. We need all hands on deck. Quite unlike the scene at a football stadium where there are 60,000 people sitting in the stands badly in need of exercise watching 22 men on the field, badly in need of rest. It's a sad statistic in too many churches, I'm glad isn't true here at Northview, that 20 percent of the people shoulder 80 percent of the work.

They knew they couldn't do all that by them-

selves. We need each other. C.S. Lewis wrote: "Christianity thinks of human individuals not as merely a group of items, but as organs in a body." I Corinthians 12 describes the parts of the body and links that to the church. We are all various parts and each one is needed in order for the body to operate well. The eye can't say to the foot, I really don't need you and for that matter you really stink! If you are a follower of Christ, You can no longer say, "you don't need me" or "I don't need you." It is the awareness of this very truth that breathes life into a vital, growing fellowship. Aren't you glad God didn't call us to have to serve alone? Aren't you glad God didn't call you to have to do it all? God uses all kinds of people working together for a common cause. That may be one of the greatest evidences of the church. It's amazing how many different kinds of people and backgrounds attend church here and yet we can worship together, even disagree and have strong conversations all because we have a common goal and purpose.

Notice also the various levels 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 1,500 feet of wall repair. 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. I'm just living alone in this rented apartment. What can one single guy do for you God? Yet, He is mentioned twice in this wall builder's hall of fame.

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 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 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 (nobles) truly refusing to follow? It was a spiritual problem in rebellion against the true Lord, Adonai. When the wall was completed they were more than happy 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 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 those who have been around and been a part but never quite committed. Is it time to place yourself under the leadership of the Lord? Notice this blurb about the Nobles from Tekoa is placed right in the middle of the chapter. The wall just keeps on being built right around them. Whether or not you decide to step up to