

you that person that when someone shares a need you stop and say, “hey, let’s pray about it right now”? Are you the one who realizes how much we are all sustained by prayer. I need you prayers. I was so encouraged this week when someone stopped me out of the blue to ask how my Monday went this week (answer: not great). I knew she had been intentionally praying for me because she asked. It is the prayer warriors who are the unsung hero’s of our church.

Another might respond. **I am a watcher**, a gatekeeper. (V.19,25). I am a guardian, a protector. Another unspectacular task, but fulfilled with faithfulness. Another might respond to the street reporter. **I am a singer** in the house of God. (V.22 and 12:8) Bakbukiah and Unni were antiphonal singers echoing back the praises of God. While one side sang out, “God is great”, they would sing, “Yes, God is great. Praise him for His marvelous deeds.” If Bakbukiah and Unni didn’t bother to show up, the antiphonal choir of praise wouldn’t have quite the punch intended to draw the worshippers to God.

All these people; the leaders, the followers, the remainers, the servers, the fixers, the pray-ers, the watchers and singers. All knew their identity and their responsibility. They knew who they were and what God wanted them to do. They served not to become famous, but served faithfully regardless of whether they had a highly visible task or worked behind the scenes. Never underestimate the importance of simply being in the place and doing what God wants for you. Its not about being famous. It’s about being faithful. Hebrews 6:10 says, “For God... will not forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name in serving others.” It is faithful people who make a difference. We rarely see all the results this side of heaven. We may never discover this side of heaven, how our faithful service had an impact on other people.

D.L. Moody led Wilbur Chapman to Christ who became an evangelist. One day Wilbur Chapman was walking with his team in downtown Chicago inviting people to meetings at the Union Gospel Mission. A man who played professional baseball for the Chicago white stockings happened to be leaning against the brick wall outside a bar. He decided to go to the meeting and Billy Sunday came to Christ. He ended up working with Chapman and took over as evangelist. In one of his meetings, a man named Mordecai Ham came to Christ. Mordecai became an evangelist down in the south. Two men were invited to come to one of Mordecai’s outreaches, one was quite reluctant, but came anyway and Billy Graham came to Christ. So going back to the front of this story. Who was it that led DL Moody to Christ? It was his Sunday School teacher, Edward Kindall, who was challenged by his pastor to visit each one of his students and ask the one

question, “Where do you stand in relation to Jesus Christ?” He enters a shoe shore in Chicago and confronts the teenage boy named Dwight Lymon Moody and he came to Christ. Who was the Pastor who challenged Edward Kindall to witness? Nobody remembers his name...but God knows. That pastor had no idea what his teaching set into motion. No one remembers his name, but God does. God loves to use beautifully ordinary people just like you and me and people with a background like Perez.

Are you ready to be used to lead? To move when God says move? To follow when God says follow? To remain when God says stay? To serve? To fix, to support? To pray. To watch. To love. To encourage? He has placed you where you are for a reason. It was not by random chance. God’s people live in God’s location for God’s glory. How will you live where God has called you?

“Beautiful Ordinary”

Sermon Series: Nehemiah



Catalog No. 372
Nehemiah 11:12-26
Pastor Norm Schwab
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Just south of San Francisco there is a town called Colma. In 1924 it was founded as Necropolis; city of the dead. When San Francisco made it illegal to bury any one inside their city limits, this little town, just 2 square miles in size, became the burial ground for the Big city. There are only about 1,800 people living in the town, outnumbered by over 2 million who are buried there. Driving past it down 280 you can see cemetery after cemetery. Next to the freeway is a large military cemetery with rows of little white crosses. It is a silent reminder to the thousands of soldiers who gave their lives to secure our freedom. On each grave is a name of a life lived in obscurity. They are names few people today would even remember, but they are the reason we have freedom today. Unknown, but willingly, they gave of themselves. Not all had the same rank. Not all had the same tasks. Some were drafted, some joined the cause voluntarily, but all sacrificially gave largely unremembered. Sure, there are a few famous people whose names we would recognize those buried in Colma like Levi Straus, Wyatt Earp and Joe DiMaggio, but mostly it is a large group of beautifully ordinary people.

At first glance, the passage we will be studying this morning appears to be a long list of boring, hard to pronounce names of people who have long since been buried. Most would recommend we skip over this section and move on to something more practical or meaty. But a closer look at this list of names serves to highlight some powerful truths about God and about us that will both challenge us and encourage us. So, let’s pray and then jump right in.

Turn with me to chapter 11 of Nehemiah. This section serves to highlight the significance of the ordinary, but really brings value and worth to any position, responsibility, gift and place that God has you in right now. Isn’t it tempting for us to believe that unless what we are doing is always spectacular and impressive, then we really aren’t doing much at all. I can look back on my month and see being part of a couple dramatic and powerful things that make a difference in the lives of people. But, really most of what I do is mundane, normal almost boring. I sleep, the alarm goes off, I eat breakfast, I drive to work, study, mow the lawn, take out the garbage, fix the leaky faucet. Most of what we do is not marked by the spectacular, but by normal, ordinary and the average. This passage highlights the significance of ordinary people faithfully doing basic things. A steady consistent commitment to the basics like doing laundry, making meals, cleaning your room, doing your chores, showing up when you said you would be there, telling the truth. Let-

ting your yes be yes. Following through when you promised you would complete a task. There is something beautifully ordinary about being devoted, loyal, consistent and sacrificially faithful. God doesn’t call us to be famous...He calls us to be faithful in the assignments of life He gives to us, and most are neither splashy or spectacular. What’s your assignment? What has God called you to do? Has He called you to be a leader? A follower? A remainder? A fixer? A prayer? A server?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 11. The problem was first brought up in chapter 7:4 the wall around Jerusalem had been completed and the gates were in place, but “the people in the city were few and the houses were not built.” Jerusalem was a city with hardly any people living in it. There were leaders living in the city, but not many people who were there with them. Now in chapter 8 the people gathered together on the plaza just inside the water gate to hear God’s Word and they were convicted that they needed to apply the truth they just heard. In chapter 9, the people got right with God and confessed their sin and in chapter 10 they committed in writing that they would put first things first in their love life, their work life and their church life. But Nehemiah knew that the nation could never be strong as long as Jerusalem was weak. And Jerusalem would stay weak as long as there were so few people living there. The people around Judah would ask, “Why rebuild a city wall if you don’t plan to live there?” What an embarrassment if people do not want to live in the city where you say the presence of God lives in your temple. The city is not much of a display of God’s glory if it is empty. If your God is so great, then why aren’t many of you living in the city where His presence dwells? Yes, the temple was rebuilt and the walls were rebuilt, but most of the city still lay under a pile of rubble that was grown over by 160 years of neglect. It had become a refuse dump for the surrounding suburbs. There was a lot of work involved moving into the city. The homes hadn’t been built. Besides, they had already built their lovely homes in the surrounding area. They didn’t want to give up their family homestead on the farm. Their friends all lives out in their neighborhood village. They remembered the history of Jerusalem, that the city for centuries had been a lightning rod for invading armies. So that is the problem and the challenge they faced. There were many reasons for not moving into the city, but the leaders knew it needed to happen in order to have a strong country. So let me read a few verses in this section to give you a feel for it. READ: 11:1-6, 10,12,14,15,17,19,25

So **why the long lists of names** and re-

sponsibilities people served in? It shows us that the city was getting itself organized. The leaders, the temple servants, the police force, gatekeepers all the people infrastructure was being put in place. The very existence of such a list demonstrates the value of people, the history, those who have made a contribution. In our modern day we so easily update our lists and keep them current. Those who have moved on get deleted and flow right off with little sense of history of who has been here before. It demonstrates honor to those who have sacrificed and gone before us to provide what we now enjoy. We may remove your name from the lobby mailbox list, but not God. He always remembers your name. We may forget names. Wouldn't it be cool to have your specific name mentioned in the Bible chapter 11 of Nehemiah? Yeah...but it wasn't cool enough for me to even read it. I may not ever read your name publicly, but God never forgets your name because He cares about people. One of the guys on Wednesday morning mentioned this long boring list of names is actually an evidence that speaks to the authenticity of the Bible. This list is far too boring to make up. No myth maker hoping his writing would catch on and go viral would ever write something so tedious and boring.

The list shows it takes a team. This was not a one man show. Nehemiah spent several chapters in his journal listing those people's specific names and what they did to move together toward the goal. Each person on that list was important to God. Even the most obscure task in service of God is just as important as the most public of jobs when done in the will of God. So that is a challenge to those who are overly impressed with their position or place God has them in. Our significance is not based on the particular task God has given you; whether it be in front stage or behind the scenes. Our significance is based on our faithfulness to God in doing what we happened to be gifted and called to do. That causes us to stop and ask, "Do I serve people only because it is feeding my significance? Is the only reason I serve or preach for the applause of people? Will I only serve if I receive recognition?" Matthew 6 warns people, "Do not do your acts of righteousness because you want to be seen by men, so that people will say, "Oh my look at her, look at him, aren't you so gifted, aren't you talented." If all you want is the admiration of people, then Jesus said that is all you will get. There will be no reward for you in heaven. Here is the test for us. You will know if this is your struggle by your response, when after serving no one says thanks, no one applauds your efforts. Everyone likes to be called a servant, but no one likes getting treated like one. This list of names provides a warning for those who think too much of themselves, that it's all up to them. It is also an encouragement to those who are prone to think they don't matter, they are ordinary, common and because what they do it not spectacu-

lar and flashy, they don't matter and are of no worth.

God will use even the most unlikely people to do His work. Notice in verses 4 & 5, the name Perez is focused. He was one of the sons of Judah in direct line of Jesus. Genesis 38 records the birth of Perez. His conception was a scandalous affair between Judah and his daughter in law, Tamar, who dressed up as a prostitute and seduced Judah because he had sinned against her, refusing to provide a promised husband for her. At birth it was discovered she bore twins. The first to poke his little arm out, the midwife put a scarlet string around his wrist. But then he pulled it back in and Perez pushed past his brother to be the first born. Perez became a great hero of his tribe of Judah. The point being God doesn't care how sordid and messed up your family or how you got started out in life. God can use you in mighty and wonderful ways. God loves to use the weak, rejected, abused and tainted to do wonderful things through them.

Who are these people? The list shows a group of people who understood their identity and responsibilities. Imagine a roving news reporter for the Jerusalem Chronicle walking through the streets of the revitalized city of Jerusalem trying to capture the heart of this city by asking people the identity and responsibility questions; "Who are you?" and "What are you doing in Jerusalem?"

One person on the street might respond, **"I am one of the leaders"**. (11:1) We found out the leaders moved into the city first. The leaders are leading. The leaders had already made the sacrifice, left their homes outside in the country and moved into town. They had caught the vision and knew that if they were not the first to sacrifice, the people would never follow. Isn't it refreshing to see the leader's leading? They are doing exactly what God has called them to do-to lead. Times were tough, but that is exactly when leaders can shine. Abigail Adams wrote, "These are the hard times in which a genius would wish to live. Great necessity calls for great leaders."

In verse 11:1 the Leaders of the Jerusalem chamber of commerce got together and decided that a tenth of the people in the surrounding areas should be drafted to move into and occupy the city. In the previous chapter 9, the people committed to giving a tenth of their resources to God, and now they are committing to giving a tenth of themselves for inhabiting the city of God. Not all the people liked this idea. They knew it was needed but they didn't want to be the one to move. If you are a leader, there will be times when you have to make some tough decisions that aren't popular with everyone. But the body of believers must sometimes not get just what it wants, but what it needs for life and growth and vitality. The leaders must lead no matter the shots they take, no matter the sacrifice. If you are leader you need to know where you are

going and LEAD!

Stuart Briscoe writes about a colleague of his who was officiating at the funeral of a war veteran. The dead man's military friends wished to have a part in the service at the funeral home, so they requested the pastor to lead them down to the casket, stand with them for a solemn moment of remembrance, and then lead them out through the side door. This he proceeded to do, but unfortunately the effect was somewhat marred when he picked the wrong door. The result was they all marched with military precision into a broom closet...in full view of the mourners. Leadership principle number one - If you are leading make sure you know where it is your going. Second, If you are going to follow, make sure that the one you are leading knows where they are headed. If God has called you into leadership, then lead well.

The Jerusalem reporter asks another on the street, "What are you doing in Jerusalem?" Response. **"Well...I live here"**. (11:1) I had only a 10% chance of getting drafted and my name was drawn in the move lottery so here I am. That's it. Nothing dramatic. He was commanded to show up and he did. Another person who might also answer, "I live here" came voluntarily because they wanted to (V.2) "People blessed those who volunteered to live in Jerusalem." The Hebrew word for "volunteer" means to be stirred up from the inside, compelled internally by God to volunteer to make the move. They caught the excitement of the vision from the leaders. They saw what needed to happen. The part these folks played was to re-establish the community by just being there. They packed up their belongings, left the safe and secure neighborhood with their friends living just down the street and kids played together in the park. They left their family-inherited farm for rubble cleaning and building a new home in downtown Jerusalem. These were sacrificial followers who did it and showed up. Sometimes obedience to God simply means showing up. For some people this morning, that is what God has called you to do. Perhaps in this season of life that is all you have in the tank. Simply show up. And I'm glad you are here. You can picture if the person sitting next you decided to not show up, that you would be sitting next to an empty seat. But you chose to come to live, to worship, to gather with all of us. You live here. Never underestimate the importance of simply being in the place where God wants you to be. It may not be a dramatic ministry, but simply being there, simply showing up is a ministry. It's beautifully ordinary.

I am so very thankful for those of you and others who 41 years ago when the pastor at 4th Memorial Church called for the challenge to plant a church on the north side of Spokane and you sacrificed by leaving friends and a comfortable building and ministry to start a church in a pizza place. We are all in your debt because you made the sacrifice

to go and live and worship and gather here. Thank you.

Are you a leader? Then lead well. Are you a follower? Then go, follow. Perhaps you are a Remainer. Did you notice that 90% of the people remained in the villages and suburb neighborhoods. Not everyone is called to lead. Not everyone is called to follow. Some are called to remain, to be a support for those who are leading and following. Some might say, Yes! That's the easy job. That is the one for me! Ok, well how well are you doing at remaining? How well are you supporting? Are you encouraging or complaining? Here is the risk for remainers, because you are not involved directly in the vision, it's tempting to snipe from a distance, to develop a critical spirit. Maybe you physically aren't able to be on the front lines any more, but you can get there via prayer support, you can be an encouragement in remaining well. We don't all have the same gifts or tasks, but we can all be equally committed. God places His beautiful gems tucked way back in the furthest part of a cave where no one will ever see but Him. God will reward those who never will be seen or get a chance to shine in the daylight.

Whether you are a leader, a follower or a remainer, know this- God's people live in God's location for God's glory...so live where God has called you. If you go, go for God's glory. If you remain, remain for God's glory. Ask yourself, "Why am I choosing to live where I am? Why do I live on my street? It's convenient? It's near work? Near the best schools? The reason we live where we are is to give glory to God. Why are you at your work? Why are you at Northview? Is it all just a random chance or does God have a purpose in it?"

The Jerusalem reporter stops another person in the street. Why are you in Jerusalem? Response - I work at the temple. **I am a server**. (V.10,12,15, 12:1 11:12) 822 of them work at the temple; plus priests and Levites and others. Being one of 822 does not seem very significant, but we are all part of a team.

Another gets interviewed by the reporter on the steps of the temple. "What are you doing in Jerusalem?" (V.16) "I am in charge of the maintenance of the temple. I do the outside work of upkeep on the temple. **I am a fixer**." We too quickly assume that the public, more visible tasks of the ministry are the most important. But the Apostle Paul was quick to write it's those parts of the body that are not for public presentation, that are hidden, the heart and the brain are the most important (I Cor. 12:23). Most people have no idea how many people work behind the scenes so that we can meet in a clean, safe, friendly place. Are you prepared to be totally unseen for God's kingdom?

Another person responds to the reporter's question. **I am a pray-er**. (V.17) It was Mattaniah's responsibility to lead people in prayer of thanksgiving, Bakkukiah was on that prayer team too. Are