

BUILDING FROM THE KNEES UP

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Remember that old childhood game: "**Follow the Leader?**"

All kinds of strange antics—imitating whatever the leader does.

One of those antics was crawling on your knees

–NOT the best position to get ahead fast

We don't usually think of *leading* from our knees!

People don't normally get ahead in leadership on their knees.

You usually lead on your feet!

You can fight better on your feet.

You usually get more done while standing!

Among God's people, kneeling is *best* position to lead from.

A godly leader doesn't make a move

—even to do what he knows is God's will

—without spending time talking to God—on his knees!

Next few weeks we're going to look into

NEHEMIAH.

Usually churches study Nehemiah when starting a building program—that's because the book deals with building.

God has some things to say about **what HE'S building** that aren't related to a physical building like this one.

God refers to His church as a building;

but not a building of bricks and mortar. *WE are His building!*

Our Mission Statement: "BUILDING UP TO REACH OUT"

God has placed His people in the world to BUILD His church!

When Nehemiah talks about God's way of building,

we ought to pay attention to HOW HE wants us to build!

BACKGROUND

Nehemiah's story begins 13 years after Ezra's return from captivity to Jerusalem (458).

People have been back in Jerusalem for 92 years.

The temple has been rebuilt.

The people have experienced revival under Ezra

BUT, The walls haven't been rebuilt.

They're *defenseless*. The people are living outside the city.

The walls of Jerusalem are severely damaged.

The ruined walls make God's people vulnerable to attack.

They reflect poorly on the God Israel worships and serves.

They're discouraged–defeated–think God's done with them!

They'll never get back to what they used to be!

Then God brings Nehemiah – a man who trusts God to do things people don't think could *ever* happen.

He trusts the awesome, powerful, faithful God.

He trusts God to do something awesome

–rebuild what the enemy destroyed!

Nehemiah is cupbearer to the king—his trusted confidant.

Since they share the same fate, they share everything.

Artaxerxes previously authorized Ezra's mission.

Now he permits reconstruction of the walls,
knowing *Nehemiah* will be in charge.

He names him Governor and gives him authority to lead *physical*, as well as political and moral, reconstruction of Jerusalem and its people.

PURPOSE AND THEME [of the book]

Historical books have historical purpose, as well as theological purpose.

Nehemiah's *historical* purpose: Describe 3rd return from captivity to Jerusalem in 444 B.C.

- rebuilding of walls provides security to God's people
- political and moral reconstruction of God's people.

Nehemiah demonstrates God's involvement in restoring His people.

- God controls history;
He even uses pagan kings to accomplish His purposes.
- God brought His people back to re-establish them.

Before God's plan can be realized, they *must* acknowledge His holiness and live holy lives, distinct from their pagan neighbors.

Nehemiah describes the *kind of leader God uses*
He displays a balance of **THREE KEY TRAITS**:

1) Nehemiah is committed to God

He models what genuine commitment to God looks like.

Although in a high position, he never loses his heart for God.

2) Nehemiah has a vision
of what God wants to accomplish

3) Nehemiah is skilled in administration

TWO MAJOR DIVISIONS of the book:

PHYSICAL reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem.

1-7

SPIRITUAL reconstruction of the people to serve
God. 8-13

PREPARATION FOR RECONSTRUCTION of the City Walls 1-2

Nehemiah's province with its trouble 1:1-3

Visit by commission 1:1-2

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

Delegation from Jerusalem visits Susa, the capital of Persia.

This encounter shows us several **traits of this man of God:**

1) His heart is in the right place.

2) He asks the right questions.

He's concerned about the condition of God's land.

3) He has a listening ear.

He cares about their pain and discouragement.

Condition of the walls 1:3

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

Delegation reports on the people and the walls—Both are broken down!

=> **Nehemiah's prayer 1:4-11** His prayer shows us what his life is like.

1. Nehemiah is personally concerned about the need **4a** *When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*

He dedicates an extended period to prayer—"for days!"

If we want to achieve God's purposes,
we must spend more time "on our knees."

At first he just sits quietly expressing his grief.
He cares about what affects God's glory.

WEEPING leads to SEEKING.

2. Nehemiah goes to GOD first with his concern
4b-5 *For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. 5 Then I said: "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands."*

He pours out his heart before the Lord.

Fasting—Some think fasting is a way to manipulate God; to get Him to do what you want.

In Scripture, fasting demonstrates *total* commitment to discover and do God's will.

You're so committed to seeing God's will done "*on earth as it is in heaven*" that you lay everything else aside.

Nothing matters but God's will —*even eating!*

He presents concern to God

—prays for restoring of God's people.

His Worship 1:5

Then I said: "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands,

God is an AWESOME God

God is a FAITHFUL God—He keeps His covenant

God is a LOVING God—His covenant is based on His love.

He takes his appeal to the AWESOME, FAITHFUL, LOVING One.

3. Nehemiah recognizes God's greatness & faithfulness.

Considering **God's faithfulness** reminds Nehemiah of ***the people's failure and unfaithfulness***

His Confession 1:6-7 *let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. 7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.*

He identifies with his people and their disobedience.

He doesn't pass the buck and blame it on everybody else.

"I ... have sinned against You"

He acknowledges **his** failure.

4. Nehemiah recognizes their failure & unfaithfulness

His Appeal to God's Covenant 1:8-10 *"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' 10 "They are Your servants and Your people, whom You redeemed by Your great strength and Your mighty hand.*

5. Nehemiah relates their need and his desire to God's plan.

Child's refrain: I PROMISE!—"CROSS MY HEART; HOPE TO DIE!"

Nehemiah goes back to God's promise and holds Him to it.

Based on Deut. 28-30 1:8 = Deut. 28 1:9 = Deut. 30

Their condition is the result of disobedience;

it conforms to what God promised, if they rebel against Him.

But, He also promised to restore them, if they turn back to Him.

Presence of remnant in land is evidence God *is* restoring them.

Nehemiah hopes God accepts confession to restore His people.

Daniel prays the same way!

He wants to see them get on with what God promised.

He believes God will keep His promise; restore His people.

Focus on "YOUR" *"They're YOUR servants & YOUR people, whom YOU redeemed by YOUR great strength and YOUR mighty hand."*

He gets in line with what God wants, and prays that God will do it.

***When we desire to see God do something great,
we'd better be sure we understand God's plan!***

Essence of genuine praying! –getting us in line with God's plan.

His Petition 1:11 *O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."*

Basis of his request: He delights to revere God's name.

His desire is to *glorify God*. "Revere Him"

To revere God's name is to respect or fear Him.

Nehemiah's vision is the vision of *all* who delight in revering the AWESOME God. => *that God will be glorified by His people*

Based on God's promise, he prays God will intervene and cause the pagan king to grant his request.

6. Nehemiah acknowledges that the only way he'll be able to pull this off is if God does it.

Restoration of the wall isn't the end – it's a means to the end.

This is God's city – it's *His* people!

The city is in ruins *materially*.

The people are in ruins *spiritually*.

7. Nehemiah wants to see God's glory revealed through them.

He has a selfish motive => the restoration of his people
That brings him into agreement with God about His plan.

How about us?

Do we care about the people around us?

What's our vision? Nice place?

Our comfort? Meet our needs?

His vision—based on reverence for God—to see Him glorified—to see people turn to Him.

That's our vision: to see people turn to God—see Him glorified

APPLICATION TO OUR LIFE TODAY:

Re. Nehemiah and prayer:

1. **Nehemiah acknowledges that the only way to accomplish the task is by God's intervention.**

Therefore, he takes it to God in prayer.

Re. Nehemiah and God's plan

2. **Nehemiah acknowledges that the only way to accomplish the task is in conformity to God's plan.**

**Therefore, he makes sure he knows
and *lines up with* God's plan.**

Re. Nehemiah and God's promise

3. Nehemiah acknowledges that the only way to accomplish the task is as a result of God's promise.

Therefore, he claims the promises of God.

*He takes his petition **in prayer** to God.*

*He subjects his petition **to the plan of God**.*

*He bases his petition **on the promises of God**.*

Are we spending time with God in prayer?

Are we making sure our plans line up with God's plans for us?

Fulfilling our vision– NOT a building plan.

Our vision: ***BUILD UP TO REACH OUT.***

Is that God's desire for us?

IT ALL BEGINS WITH PRAYER!

Prayer that seeks to know HIS will!

Are we more concerned about **OUR** plans and programs, or about doing God's will?

Do we set aside significant time for prayer

to acknowledge that WE need HIM! (As Nehemiah did!)