

Fellowship Bible Church
"What If?" Series
"How It Is Shared"
02.08.2015
Dr. Crawford W. Loritts, Jr

TEXT: Nehemiah 3

It is good to see you this morning. I absolutely love these stairs here. I do. They are all carpeted and everything. I keep asking, "Can we have them every week," but I am only one voice among many. Yeah, never mind [laughter]. It is so good to see you this morning. It is a joy to be part of a team of people who believe God together, and it has been an exciting journey. Of course, we are on this side of what the LORD wants to do with regard to the student ministry's facility, but I just need to tell you this. In our staff meetings, in some of our personal meetings with many of you, and in our elders' meetings, there is a sense of oneness and a sense of what God is doing in our hearts. The word I can think of to express this is "precious." It is absolutely wonderful. I want to encourage you to continue to pray that God will protect that preciousness, because there is one person who does not like precious, and that is our enemy; so, we just praise the LORD for what He is doing. I am going to have a word of prayer and then we will get right into the book of Nehemiah.

Holy Father, thank You so very much for each other. Thank You LORD Jesus for what You are doing in our hearts, in our lives, and what You are doing in our church and where You want to take us Father. Jeff's words really grabbed my heart. We don't want to make assumptions without You Father. We don't want to act in ways in which we are using You to bless what we want to do, but we want to follow You completely. As we hear Your voice, may we respond. LORD, speak to us. Take us to where we need to be today. Father, You know where each person is coming from, and Spirit of the living God, I pray that You will tailor make everything that is said today for each individual. For those of us who are distracted, who are fighting sleep, and maybe who have great burdens on our hearts, I pray for windows of hope to be opened up today so that we can hear and savor what God wants to say to encourage us and to put fresh wind in our sails. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Here is a little anchor perspective. We are in the book of Nehemiah; and one of the reasons why we have chosen the book of Nehemiah is because we wanted to get a biblical framework for what God is calling us to do as a church. We have been making the statement that it is not about the building in and of itself, but it is about multiplying disciples and for our young people to be in a situation in which they can engage with Jesus without being distracted. That visual picture that Brian shared with us in the video really grabbed my heart, too. Here you are talking about Jesus, and excuse me, "The cart is coming through." We need places like that. I want to say this at the very beginning, and we are going to put this up on the screen right now; one of the things that I don't want us to miss, because in the Bible and throughout history God just does not call people to do stuff and it is all about that project. That is not what it is all about. Our soul should be greater than anything that God calls us to do. He uses what He calls us to do to make something out of it, and here is the expression.

God uses what He calls us to do
to reveal Himself to us and to make us more like Him.

Really, we are going to see this as we have two more messages, after today, in the book of Nehemiah. You are going to actually see where this whole building project, the rebuilding of the wall, ends. It ends with revival. It ends with awakening. It ends with them being better and greater than the very project that God gave them to do.

Here is a little bit of perspective as we walk through this. We began in chapter 1 at the very beginning with Nehemiah. Nehemiah is minding his own business. He is in exile. He is a “slave” or “servant.” They are in Persia, one of the ones who have been taken captive. In 605 BC, the Babylonian empire ransacked and besieged Jerusalem and later became the Persian Empire, and there Nehemiah is serving as cupbearer to the king. There is a remnant left back in Jerusalem. Evidently, they had some freedom to travel and this remnant, this delegation, comes and Nehemiah’s own brother, Hananiah, is part of the delegation. They show up. They meet with Nehemiah, and Nehemiah asks a question that changes the trajectory of his life. He asked this one question, “Well, tell me about how are things back in Jerusalem?” They gave him the report. In chapter 1, sweeping across to chapter 2:8, we find this amazing template that is always true of every assignment, every “what if” that God brings to us. It is the “what if” that God brought to Nehemiah and God will bring “what ifs” to all of us, but God’s “what if” follows this process.

1. You listen.
2. Then you pray.
3. Then you act.

Nehemiah listened long enough to allow the need to cascade over him. He prayed and sought the LORD, and in that prayer God called him to do something about it. So, Nehemiah walked into the king and he shares what is on his heart and what is on his life, and lo and behold the king not only says “go,” but he resources him.

1. He Absorbs the Need

Last week we find him showing up in Jerusalem, and now this is the real deal. It has gone from just an inquiry to a calling to resourcing, and now I am here. Nehemiah teaches us “don’t even print the brochure before you know what you are doing.” I just love the dude. He does not go “ready, fire, aim.” He quietly and in a stealth way goes and checks out what is going on here. What are the conditions? What is the reality here? What are we looking at? What are we up against? He says nothing to no one, so the first thing is he absorbs the need and figures out the best way of going about this.

2. He Shares the Vision

The second thing that he does is he shares the vision. He shares the vision and, boy, do the people ever respond.

3. Expect Opposition

The third thing that we see from the very beginning, Nehemiah was not naïve. He understood that the work of God does not take place in some controlled environment where it is apart from hostilities and that kind of thing. He understood from the very beginning that he and they were going to have enemies. So, you expect opposition. It is naïve, downright idiotic, to think that you are going to do anything great from God without getting pushed back from the kingdom of darkness. It is ridiculous. So, whatever you do for the LORD, you are going to get pushback. That is what this book also represents to us, that it is not all rosy and it is not all “oh, let’s just go rebuild the wall.” “Yeah, you do that, but you are going to have some issues, too.” So, that is what happened.

So, now we come to chapter 3. I told you last week that Nehemiah chapter 3 falls in the category of the “begats” and parts of Leviticus. You kind of like read it with a fan, and their names are hard to pronounce, and

this kind of thing. In fact, when we were talking about the text of Scripture to read this morning in our worship planning team meeting, I said, “I can’t do that to some young high schooler by giving them Nehemiah chapter 3 to read. So, he read first Thessalonians 5 with a section on encouragement, and we will see how that relates to the text here. I want to tell you this. I want to encourage you to read Nehemiah chapter 3 and hopefully by the time I am done today, you will want to read this text, Nehemiah chapter 3. Now I want to read the first two verses of Nehemiah chapter 3 and I am going to underscore a phrase there that is all throughout Nehemiah chapter 3, beginning at verse 1:

**“Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests,
and they built the Sheep Gate.
They consecrated it and set its doors.
They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred,
as far as the Tower of Hananel.
And next to him**

[notice that line]

**the men of Jericho built.
And next to them
Zaccur the son of Imri built.”**

And so on and so forth, you see that progression all the way through the book of Nehemiah. Henry Ford was famous for making this observation. He said, “Coming together is a beginning. Staying together is progress, but working together is success.”

“Coming together is a beginning.
Staying together is progress, but working together is success.”

This represents a shift in the book of Nehemiah. Now, they are in it right now. They have had the pep rally. They have sort of passed out the commitment cards and all this other kind of stuff, and now they are in it. They are building this thing right now. There is a difference from sitting in some little room and watching videos and saying what you intend to do and why you should do this thing and all this other kind of stuff. Now, they are in this thing together. If you want to put one word over Nehemiah chapter 3, it would be the word “teamwork.”

Now I do not mean to bore you with this, but God is into teamwork. That is not some little motivational statement, but it is really true. Have you ever considered this? The trinity is a team. It existed from eternity past, and some scholars talk about the intertrinitarian love relationship that they have for one another. The trinity was involved in all of creation. It was not just God the Father. The entire trinity was involved in creation. Did you know the trinity is involved in our salvation? God the Father plans it. God the Son purchased it, and God the Holy Spirit processes it. When God made mankind, He said it is not good for Him to be alone and the “not good to be alone” was prior to the fall; so the need for one another was not a need that was born by sin. From the very beginning, God was into team and so He created this thing called the family that would pass on His image from one generation to the next. When God wanted to make a huge declaration to the world in terms of what a relationship with God looks like, He did not go about this by selecting individuals to make that statement. What He did was raise up a nation, the nation of Israel, His family, His team, to model in human history what His intentions and purposes are. Even Jesus, when He came, what did He do when He announced His earthly ministry? He chose 12 disciples, a team. They would be the pillars of

this thing called the church. What is He doing in human history right now? Well, the church is now the stewards of His purposes and the lights in the world. God works through teams, through teams. It is hard to read in the Bible with any venture of God that a team is not involved in. Now could God have rebuilt the wall? Yes, He could have rebuilt the wall. He could have done it, but for whatever reason He determines and decides to use a team. So, the rebuilding of the wall was a team cooperative effort.

Now I want you to notice something. I do not have time, obviously, to go through the entire imagery and all of the details in Nehemiah chapter 3, but I am going to be extracting some that I think are incredibly helpful applications from this passage. I want you to notice the thing that opens up the text is this line. The expressions **“next to him,” “next to them,” “next to that,” “the next section,” “beside him,” and “beyond that”** occurs 28 times in this chapter – 28 times. So, you do not have to be some Bible scholar to figure out that He is really talking about **“next to.”** This is a whole team effort. He is not highlighting individuals. He is highlighting a team – **“next to,” “next to,” “next to.”** By the way, as you read this text, some 45 sections of construction are mentioned, including 10 gates. Nehemiah did his homework. That is what I am trying to say to you. Nehemiah did his homework; and not only that which opens up I really believe the direction of chapter 3 and the message that God wants us to grab hold of, Nehemiah, if you read this text and look at it closely, skillfully divided the workforce into some 50 manageable work crews. There are 50 work crews here in this text – 50 manageable work crews.

Now notice the brilliance of his strategy. He organized them by common interests and geography. He brings his team together. This is an amazing wall that needs to be built. There is a task that needs to be done. They are there. You have this amazing assortment of people. Nehemiah says, “Hey, look, there are 45 sections and 10 gates that need to be restored and rebuilt. How are we going to do this? Well, he says, what do these people have in common? Where are they from? He puts them together. Why? I call this the **“next to”** plan. Why the **“next to”** plan? Why does he do this?

My message is in two parts, and I am not going to be long this morning. The first part are the reasons for the plan and the second part is the power of the plan. The first part are the reasons for the plan and the second part is the power of the plan. I have identified four reasons for this plan. Now, admittedly, if you push me, these are implications as you walk through this passage; but they are justifiable implications. As you delve into this and get a little bit of background of what has taken place here, where these folks are coming from, what he is trying to do, I think there are four big reasons for this brilliant **“next to”** plan.

REASONS FOR THE PLAN

1. They were assigned sections of the wall near their homes.

Well, what is the point of that? Well, it is high motivation to press into the task. Why? -- because we live here. You have to connect this back to the vision. What did he charge them with over in chapter 2? He tells them, “We are in derision. Look at you. Look at your property. Look at where you are living. Look at the condition of this place. Don't you,” and I really believe he said this, “don't you have any pride in the way you live?” So, it makes sense, he says, “Okay, I want to station you right close to your own neighborhood where you live.” His point was I want you to be motivated about this.

I was thinking this past week about what my mother used to make me do. We lived in an apartment until I was 12 years old in the central ward of Newark, New Jersey. It was three stories and we actually lived on the third floor. It was an old apartment building with those high ceilings. I am just trying to add to the trial that my mother put me through by making an observation. My job, every Saturday morning, was to sweep the

stairs down. Okay. She started me early. I am like 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 years old and I swept the stairs down. I had to sweep all of them down. We lived on the third floor. I am a little slow. It took me until I was 9 and a half when it finally dawned on me, "Why I am sweeping in front of the Matthew's apartment, why am I sweeping down in front of the Philabakas's [sp] apartment?" So, I asked my mother and said, "Mom, we live on the third floor. Why don't I just sweep down to the second floor and let them take care of their floor." I thought it was a brilliant plan. Mom did not agree, but I thought it was. I remember what she said to me. My mother was a little bit of a neat freak. She looked at me and she said this. I said, "Why are we doing this?" She just said these words -- "Because we live here." I think sublimally what she was saying is, "I don't care if they care that much, but I care about what people see on their way to our apartment."

I think what Nehemiah was saying here was, "Look, I am putting you right here because you need to care about where you live, and if you care about where you live, you are going to have a little added incentive to take care of what is going on."

2. They would not have to travel to another part of the city to their jobs.

I think the second big reason is this. They would not have to travel from another part of the city to their jobs. Now he knew already, as he was a smart man, about Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, and the enemies that were there. He did not want these people traveling long distances. I think the whole motivation behind this is he did not want to waste valuable time and he wanted to get the job done as soon as possible. So, you build around where you lived and let's cut down the commuting time here. Error increases with distance. There are many things that can happen because it is going to take a long time to get to your work station, so let's just stay right here together. I do not want to waste time. You will read this later on. The wall was done in an astonishing 52 days! I want to tell you something. That was intentional. Nehemiah says we cannot waste time and we cannot waste money. We cannot waste human resources. Let us do the best we can with what we can and leverage it the best way possible right here, right now.

3. In case of attack, they could stay and protect their families.

I think the third reason was in case of attack they would not abandon the task. They were highly motivated. Why? -- because they would stay and protect their families. They had a little added incentive right here. I am working next to my children. I am working next to my wife. I am working next to my cousin. I am working next to my dad. If I was working across another section of the wall when my family was back over here, I may not be as motivated to protect folks. Nehemiah knew from the very beginning that some strange funny stuff might start happening, so I need to put what was most valuable to you right with you, buddy, because you are not going to turn your back on them.

4. The whole task would largely be a family effort.

I think, fourthly, and this really connects to the third reason, the whole task would largely be a family effort. As you read through the text, it would largely be a family effort. What is the reason for that? I think he was using not only all of their available talent, but he was mentoring the next generation. There was multiplication put in "how" this thing was going to be done.

By the way, I might say this to you, too. Please, please, please do not neglect your children and their involvement with this mission expansion that God has placed on our hearts. Share it with your kids, you know, their babysitting money, or the money that they get from doing chores around the house, or other things. It is not that we are trying to get money. That "ain't" it. What we are trying to do is that their engagement will

change them! Can you imagine those kids being on that wall with their parents and them telling them why we are doing this, the history of Israel, the background our people, the ability of our folks, and what God has placed in our hands. Do you know what that process did to them, telling them why this was important? In fact, look at verse 12. It says:

**“Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh,
ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters.”**

I want my girls part of this thing! Nehemiah was brilliant.

POWER OF THE PLAN

What is the power of this **“next to”** plan? Well, that is sort of like the moving parts and the motivational stuff there. What is the power of this plan? As you sit in this, you need to drop it into the broader context of the entire book. By the way, one of the problems is the chapter divisions are translator tools, There are some books of the Bible that you should just try to read in one sitting or try to read a whole section in one sitting. If you read chapter 1 through chapter 8, there is a good breaking point in the book of Nehemiah. It helps you with the flow of the story and you begin to connect these. I actually think that Nehemiah did this more for the encouragement of the people than anything else. That is the power of this **“next to”** plan – the word **“encouragement.”** I am going to give you five sources of encouragement in a second that you can clearly see, but let me just ask you a rhetorical question, and if you are older than 15, I know it has happened to you.

Has discouragement ever stopped or sidetracked you?

Yeah. Yeah, you have those regrets. I wish I had finished college or I wish I had finished this. I wish I did not run from that opposition or I wish I had pressed into this. I wish I had said **“yes”** to this thing over here. I wish I had not quit over here. I wish, I wish, I wish, I wish, I wish.

Discouragement becomes systemic when we fail to persevere.

Low expectations get set in concrete when we constantly run. Did you hear what I just said? Did you hear what I just said? When you constantly quit, or you constantly run, or you give up because it is too hard or it is too difficult, or there is too big a gap, you do some very damnable things to your own self. Now, mind you, Nehemiah wanted to keep these people encouraged. Consider where they came from. They are living in shambles. They are oppressed. You have outsiders controlling their future and they were told, **“You will never be anything,”** and we will see next week one of the sources of the attack, **“This never happened to you. What makes you think you can do this, living in derision?”** Nehemiah knew that the people felt as low as an ant’s belly; and somehow or another he had to create an environment where they could feel good about themselves, given the possibility of success and to see something through.

You do know what makes those TV programs, like **“The Biggest Loser,”** so successful is the power of encouragement? You see these folks crying and weeping. **“I can’t do it.” “Yes, you can. You can do it. I will do it with you.”** You keep moving them ahead. This sounds like a weird paradox, but I have to tell you that this is true. Interestingly enough, encouragement comes through perseverance. Right? Yeah. This is probably true in your life, but some of the folks who were the most encouraging people I have ever met in my life had a background which is not necessarily what you think. When you hear their stories, often they are stories of seasons of great perseverance, and they did not run. I am getting to an age right now where I am also listening to those dudes who are a little bit older than me, and man, I have a birthday coming up. I

remember one time when my father was about 80 years old, and we were sitting around the table and he said, "Boy, I don't like going down to that barbershop anymore." I said, "Why is that?" He said, "There are a bunch of old folks there." I said, "Pop, you know..." At any rate, that is not in the text here, but what I am trying to say is that what brings joy to a lot of older people is that they can look back and then look at their children and their grandchildren and say, "I did not give up." Think about that. I have talked to older people and what brings them great joy is not that everything worked out. It is the endurance ride and they said, "I did not quit." Nehemiah knew that these people needed something in them to help them to get to where God wanted them to be.

One of the great parallel passages on encouragement and is a great, great visual is Exodus 17:8-13 when they were fighting the Amalekites in the valley with Joshua leading the Israelites into that battle. Moses "ain't" no spring chicken. He is up on top of the mountain and his arms are getting heavy. Whenever he holds the staff of God up, Israel prevails. When his arms start falling down, the Amalekites prevail; so Aaron and Hur said, "Man, we have to come help him. He can't do it by himself." They put stones under him and said, "We will hold your arms up. We will hold them up. Just trust us. We will hold them up." What a picture of encouragement.

I would also say this, and I know I am probably sounding a little bit random here, and I promise I will get to these five sources; but let me tell you something that I have learned the hard way. I have learned it by kissing burnout myself; and experience is not always the best teacher, but it is the only school a fool will attend. Listen to me. Listen to me. Listen to me. One of things I have learned the hard way is, and I wish I could re-do this stuff, but before embarking on any God-sized dream determine what it takes to refresh your soul. Did you hear what I said? We think just the opposite. We think just the opposite – just full steam ahead! Let's get this thing done. No, no, no.

Before you embark on any God-sized dream, don't only think about what is going to take to get there. Think about what it is going to take to sustain you and refresh you along the journey. To put it another way, we get burned out because we speed past the rest stops on our way to our destination, and often we fall short of the very destination. Why? Those rest stops are there for a purpose and what you have here in this "next to" plan is Nehemiah brilliantly putting into the plan rest stops that will continue to fuel the people as they do what God has called them to do. So, here you have it. Embedded in this plan are at least five sources of encouragement, at least five. There are all implied by "next to," "beside," "next to," "beside," "next to," "beside," "next to," "beside."

1. Unity.

We are to draw encouragement from unity – "next to," not by yourself, "next to." What do you mean by that? I think what he is saying is this. From a national perspective, among the Jews, they had never done anything like this before in their lives. They did not think this was possible. So, the very first visual with them being "next to" one another is to say to themselves we are not alone. You don't bear this by yourself. You are part of a team.

I think the other side of unity, what it broadcasts, is not only among themselves but to the enemy. This was intentional. Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and all of those guys who had a stranglehold, ridiculed them, and this kind of thing, it broadcast to them that here is a show of strength. I can see the dudes coming. This is the reason why they kicked up the opposition, because they began to see evidences of success. They walked past that wall and saw all of these Jews coming out of the woodwork. I think Sanballat goes, "Oh, Shmama, where did they come from? What is this all about?" Maybe they are not as scared as they should be.

2. Cause.

I think the second source of encouragement, frankly, is cause. What do you mean by that? I think the very fact that they were there on that wall standing together, having never done that before, was saying to one another, "What we are doing is worth it," and echoing in the back of their minds was Nehemiah's challenge. "You have nobility running through your blood. Do you think Abraham left Ur of Chaldees pursuing the promise of God was for us to be like this? Do you think Moses walked out of Egypt with 2.5 million Israelites for us to be like this? Do you think David ran for 16 years and was installed as king of Israel, in this blessed city, for us to be like this?" I think what encouraged them was standing there together and hearing what Nehemiah had said and they are saying, "This is a cause that is greater than we are and it is worth is of giving ourselves to."

3. Support.

I suppose the third one, sort of mingled into these other two, is support. Just think about this "**next to**" strategy. Think about how they felt when they looked "**next to**" them here, "**next to**" them here, down the wall. Just think about that. Support means that we embrace mutual dependence. Did you hear what I just said? Proud people cannot leverage support. Standing together, what they were saying is we cannot do this by ourselves. Looking at one another, the person on your left said to you, "Hey, Crawford, I need you." I said to them, "I have you." To the person on my right I said, "Hey, Levi, I need you." "Crawford, I need you, too, but I got you on this one." They supported each other. It says, "I need you and you need me. We have got this thing. We have got this thing. That is the reason why most ventures of God are greater than any one leader could ever pull off. I want my people to be better. What makes me pound the table and weep over this strategy and what God has called us to here, and I have to tell you I cannot tell you how much I pray about this. I pray about this every single day. LORD Jesus, help us to be better people of God, better people of God. May we grow more in love with one another and with You. Support.

4. Confidence.

Number four is confidence. This "**next to**" strategy gave them great confidence. It was a source of encouragement. What are you talking about? Specifically, I am talking about synergy. We can do this! We can do this! I think progress feeds success. It does. It is delightfully addictive. Yeah. I see incremental progress. What do you mean by that? Just imagine. It "ain't" all that heavy. You are standing on the wall, right? You are not just doing your little thing in isolation. Somebody over here is working. Somebody over here is working. Some one down the wall is working and if you just had blinders on, all you would see is, "Man, this is going to take me forever. I just went this high on the wall," but then you look down and you say, "Oh man, **many hands make light work.**" There is encouragement and synergy. Can you imagine at break time and they are saying, "Hey Joseph, how did you do today?" "Well, I did this today," or "I did that today." Together they saw great progress and God used that to build their confidence.

5. Protection.

The fifth source of encouragement I would say is protection. We have already mentioned that – "**next to**," "**next to.**" The point being is we have each other's back and we will all fight for who we love. Can you imagine how that would make you feel? I have my brother. I have my sister. I have my dad and we are going to fight for who we love. I don't want you to be intimidated.

I had not planned on sharing this. I shared it in the earlier service and it was not part of my notes and stuff,

but I will share this. I think I did tell this illustration in a story in this little book I wrote about my dad's impact on me called, "Never Walk Away." Let me give a little bit of a disclaimer here. In today's world, my father would not have handled this situation the same way. In fact, he told me this as he got older when we talked about this little incident in my life; but it does underscore something. Have you ever had those defining moments as a kid when all of a sudden God pulls the curtain back and you see how valuable you are to your mom and dad? This was huge.

I always knew that pop and I were close, but I was about 10 years old in Newark, New Jersey. In the summertime, they had those rec programs at Warren Street Elementary School, which was a block from the house. There was a rec director there, a dude, who was probably in his early 20s or mid 20s, and he accused me of something that I did not do. I did not do it "that" day [laughter]. I do not want to make myself sound that good. I was capable, but I did not do it "that" day. He accused me of doing something I really did not do. So, I will never forget this. He grabbed me. He was so mad, and as he was screaming, he twisted my arm and grabbed me by the back of my shirt. There were about six to eight concrete steps going down to the playground and he pushed me down them. Have you ever been so scared your heart beat so fast you could hear it? I could hear my heart beat. I did not know if the dude was going to kill me or what.

So, I am scared to death and I run home. My father was at the apartment. He said, "What is wrong?" I told him what happened, and being the wise dad that he was and realizing that his son is not always truthful, at any rate he said to me, "Now slow down. Tell me that again. Now you did not do anything and he just did that?" He got up and grabbed me by the arm and he went down the street, and being a wise dad, he got some of my friends, Lloyd Cotton and Dwayne Rainey, and asked them the same question. "No, Mr. Loritts, he just went off on him or whatever." So, we went into the playground, and I will spare you the details. Let's just say what my father said and a bit of what he did physically made that a very memorable experience for me, the young man; but I will never forget what pops said. This is what grabbed me. I am standing there. I will never forget what he said. He looked him into the eyes and said, "Young man, you will never in your life put your hands on anything with the name Loritts." Do you know how that made me feel? Whoa! Whoa! I am loved. I am protected. Later on, he told me, "If I ever catch you doing what he said you did that is going to be another issue."

I know that is an intense illustration, but I do not think it is too far from what Nehemiah is doing. Nehemiah says, "I am putting you next to people you love." The visual of that is this. It "ain't" just about building this wall. It is about building their future, and why would you let somebody come in to destroy this wall and to erase their future? Why would you do that? Why would you let somebody come in and mess with your heritage, mess with your kids, mess with the direction? I have called you to do this.

Nehemiah gathered people from an assortment of backgrounds as you read the text and different places and all of that kind of thing, but what brought them together was a rising nationalism and a rising patriotism, that they were destined for more than this rubble. They were destined for more than just getting by. They were destined for more than just putting up with stuff. God had raised them up and they need to hold their holy heads high and begin to do what God called them to do.

I could not help but think about 911. There, for a brief moment, a brief window, we threw our narcissism and our self-centeredness out the window; and a week or two after 911, my goodness, you could not drive under any overpass without seeing an American flag or hear, "God bless America." Prayer in school is not allowed. Are you kidding me? People were praying all kinds of stuff and all of this. Why? Because for a brief moment we saw what really mattered – for a brief moment.

One of the things that I am most concerned about (and I live in this fallen world, too, and find myself drawn to it as well) is how we sanctify self-absorption and how we give ourselves passes at doing the minimum amount of sacrifice. So much of the book of Nehemiah and what we are talking about right now flies in the face of the consumerism that has our culture. I have to be honest with you, it has the church by a stranglehold. People do not typically do stuff unless there is some big take away for them, some perceived value for them, or some benefit for them. It will be interesting how much we would give if the government said, you know, for all of those who preach the Bible there is no more tax exemption. That would be interesting. Yet, throughout our lives, God calls us through seasons of our journeys to step outside ourselves, to once again place it all on the altar and say, "This is a cause that is bigger than me."

Next week I am going to talk about what happens when the vision, when the mission, is opposed? I want to encourage you to read chapters 4-8. What happens? To tip my hand a little bit, you are going to see opposition coming from all different angles that increases with intensity. I will say this not to de-motivate anybody; but the truth of the matter is in my biblical experience I "ain't" never done anything for the LORD that has not had seasons of strong pushback from the enemy. We we will probably have some of that over the next year and a half or two years. The vision is worth it and **"greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world."** As long as we are clear about where God is taking us, we keep our eye on the ball, and we do it with godly integrity, victory belongs to Him. Amen? Let's stand together.

I would like for us to take seriously the prayer card that has been given to us. If you are like I am, I get so much stuff given to me. I put it in my Bible and wonder now, "Why did I put that in my Bible?" I want to encourage you to make praying for us and praying for this as part of your spiritual disciplines. Pray that God would work. Again, I just feel led to say this. Listen to me. Hear me on this. If everybody in this church does what God tells them to do relative to the challenge that He has placed before us, we will have more than enough money. So, the issue is listening to the LORD, responding to Him, and doing what He wants done. That is what it is all about.

The elders, Stephen Ministers, and some of our staff will be up front, and we would love to pray and interact and pray with you. If you have any need, please do not leave and walk out of here. One of the things that sometimes burdens me, and you have heard me say this, is that we have folks in our church who are burdened with issues and needs and will turn around and will sort of like vanish and walk out carrying those things. We may not have the complete answer, but we know the One who does and we would love to pray with you about those needs.

Father, thank You for Yourself. Thank You for Your grace and mercy, and the truth of Your Word. Greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world. Thank You for this church. LORD, I just look out over this body here and I think of the many people who encourage me all the time with notes, words, statements, and cards, and I know that we do that for one another in this church. I pray we will continue to do that as we stand on the wall together building our section of the wall. May we know that we are not alone, that not only is Jesus with us but Jesus is with us in and through our brothers and sisters who are also with us. So, dismiss us from this place. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.