



We have officially entered summer! And the “Peninsula Vacation Scatter” has begun. People are in and out of town so much during these summer months, so I want to give a brief recap:

Over the past two weeks we’ve been looking at God’s Word from Nehemiah. We’ve been asking ourselves: When we face brokenness, how do we react? Throw money at it; gossip about it; suffer depression and despair? Nehemiah prayed, fasted, and kept praying for four months. During these four months, God gave Nehemiah a vision. It was a crazy vision because Nehemiah was a slave to the King and God’s plan made no sense, from a human perspective. As Nehemiah prayed, God gave him the vision to go to Jerusalem himself and lead a wall-rebuilding project. The whole book of Nehemiah is about rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem.

Now Nehemiah isn’t even in Jerusalem. He’s 800 miles away in Susa. In fact, he’s never been to Jerusalem. But that didn’t stop him. He took this vision and put the first step of a plan around it. Since he had to travel to Jerusalem in order to rebuild this wall, he discerned that he’d need letters of introduction to the various rulers along the journey so he could travel safely. He got King Artaxerxes, his owner and boss, to write letters of introduction to them.

Some themes that are emerging are ones like when God calls someone to something, He will provide so that His plan will succeed. A prayer from Saint Augustine says, “Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.”

Let’s pick up the story in Nehemiah chapter 2, with Nehemiah on the 800-mile 4-month journey to Jerusalem.

So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites (verses 9–10).

We’re given a little indication of why Nehemiah needed these letters of introduction. The rulers surrounding Jerusalem wanted to keep the Israelites in a weak position. As they were unprotected without a walled city, Sanballat and Tobiah could take crops, wine, women and slaves whenever they wanted. No wonder they didn’t want anyone to come to their aid. Now we

understand how shrewd it was for Nehemiah to get these letters of introduction and protection from King Artaxerxes.

I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on (verses 11–12).

God had put a vision in Nehemiah’s heart to lead the people to rebuild this wall and now he’s in Jerusalem. That’s where visions live—in our hearts. If it’s in your heart, your emotions get wrapped up on it, you might weep over the brokenness, you’d talk about it passionately with others, you’re willing to make personal sacrifice to see it accomplished.

Maybe you know all about this because God has put a vision in your heart for something. That’s an awesome thing! The world needs people with visions of making the world a better place: a vision to irradiate illiteracy or sex slaves or providing clean water to everyone. A vision to do something great for God that will outlive you. A vision to show God’s compassion and mercy, like we talked about a month ago on Compassion Sunday. If so, that’s an awesome vision! But a vision is nothing more than one idea of a preferable future without planning and action. Lots of people have a vision in their heart. Yet nothing becomes of a vision without a plan.

Nehemiah made a plan. The first step in his plan was those letters of introduction. The second step in his plan is unfolding in verse 12, **“I set out at night ...”** He’s got to investigate the wall for himself. He didn’t tell the leaders anything about his purpose for being in Jerusalem. He’s taking a low profile, making his plan.

By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King’s Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work (verses 13–16).

The word “inspect” in the original language means “to look into something very carefully.” He wasn’t casually looking around, he was carefully looking into the devastation and planning what to do next.

What do we learn from this secret inspection? A shrewd leader knows that he or she has limited chances to capture the hearts of people when the vision is shared. Nehemiah is getting thoroughly prepared so he can maximize his chance. Nehemiah has allowed this vision to grow in his heart for eight months. He’s been praying and fasting to first get this vision from God and second, to make sure he got it right.

Also, Nehemiah took his time because the task was overwhelming. This was a huge project. This is not like the weekend garage-painting project at your house. Nehemiah would need to rebuild a wall of some 1½ to 2 miles in circumference. We’re talking huge boulders. We’re talking major construction. And this would have to be done all by human hands and archaic building methods. They didn’t have a Bobcat or any of the machinery we have today.

After the vision has been living in Nehemiah’s heart for eight months, after Nehemiah has gathered detail and made a plan, he’s ready to share his vision with the people of Jerusalem. Everything hinges on this moment because everyone will be needed to rebuild this wall.

What do we know about these people? We’re not told in the book of Nehemiah but history and other Bible books tell us that they’ve been living in Jerusalem for over 20 years. Meaning they have gotten used to the brokenness. They’ve accepted it as normal and ok. They step over the broken wall on their way to work. We know it was pretty easy for them to focus on building their own lives and forget about God’s glory.

Through the prophet Haggai God chastised these same people for being very concerned about rebuilding their own houses while the temple of God stood in ruin. It was through Haggai’s confrontational words and Ezra’s leadership, from the book of Ezra, that led them to repent and then rebuild the temple. But after that was done, they left the larger project incomplete because they didn’t rebuild the wall. They returned to building their own lives.

It’s likely that in Nehemiah’s mind, this thing could go either way. I think that’s why he’s so thorough in his preparation before he’s ready to share the vision God has given him. And now, Nehemiah is ready to share it with the people.

Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me (verses 17–19).

Let me make what Nehemiah does really simple. It’s something I learned from Bill Hybels at the Global Leadership Summit a few years ago. He is taking people from **Here** to **There**.

Here:

- We are in trouble
- Jerusalem lies in ruin
- The gates are burned
- The walls are destroyed
- Our God is disgraced by this
- We are disgraced by this
- This in an intolerable situation - We cannot stay here

There:

- Let’s rebuild the wall

Hybels said that his tendency and the tendency of many leaders is to skip over the **Here** and just talk about the **There**. He would describe how great it would be **There**. He loved **There**. His heart was wrapped around **There**. He found that as dynamic of a leader as he was, this almost always resulted in resistance, push back and the potential death of a vision.

Why? Generally, people resist change. People like it **Here**. They’ve grown comfortable with **Here**. They can predict what’s coming next. There’s comfort in that.

Hybels has shared extensively about the preferable method that Nehemiah is using in these verses: Spend more time on describing how intolerable it is to stay **Here**. Give people time to wrestle with the problems with **Here**. Let the Spirit of God convict them that **Here** is not acceptable. In a church setting, we’re all filled with the same Spirit of God. It’s better for the leader to accurately describe the **Here** and see how the Spirit stirs all of our hearts.

After Nehemiah does this, the people replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.

It’s such a short verse, it seems anti-climatic. But this is no small commitment. They are going to give their time, their energy and their hearts to a vision to bring glory to God. This wall rebuilding project is the subject of the rest of the book of Nehemiah.

You might wonder, how can the description of rebuilding this wall take up 13 chapters of God’s Word? We don’t even build walls around our cities today. Isn’t this a bit out of touch? Those are fair questions.

God could have summarized the whole thing with a sentence like, “The Israelites got busy and built the wall.” But He didn’t. This must be about something more than a wall. There must be something timeless that God wants His followers to learn from this experience: Some universal spiritual truths in this experience. We’ve already seen two of them emerge:

1. When faced with the brokenness of **Here**, pray and fast and pray some more!

2. After God gives a vision to go **There**, make a plan.

The third is coming in verse 19 and will continue throughout chapters 4 and 6—opposition will come when going from **Here** to **There**.

God is teaching us timeless spiritual truths through this wall-rebuilding project. The opposition they face is two of the guys who were hassling Nehemiah earlier.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?” (v. 19).

This opposition is tame compared to what's coming later, a bit of mockery and ridicule. But sometimes, words of doubt, criticism or ridicule are all that's needed to derail a person. As the great theologian Taylor Swift recently sang, “Haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate. And Nehemiah said, “Baby I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake. Shake it off! Shake it off!”

Nehemiah doesn't allow some mockery to derail the vision God planted in his heart. He is clear about the direction God is leading him and the Israelites. He is resolved.

Where can a person find such resolve and confidence? Nehemiah found his confidence in the same place he's been finding it from the very beginning: In God.

I answered them by saying, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it” (v. 20).

He asked God for favor with the King in chapter 1 and it was given. He knew the gracious hand of God was on him (2:8, 18). He knew God had put the **Here** to **There** vision in his heart (2:12).

Nehemiah's confidence in God to use imperfect and flawed people to accomplish something to glorify the God of heaven was unswerving. He knew that, “The God of heaven will give us success.” He knew the same thing about God that the Apostle Paul knew. *“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19).

As I read on an internet blog this week:

When God Calls, He also Equips.

When God Calls, He Enables.

When God Calls, He Provides.

There are two areas of application I'd ask you to consider today. The first is individual; the second is corporate. Individually, if your heart is stirred by something **Here** that is intolerable, follow these Biblical steps: Pray, fast, pray. Make a plan and keep praying. Maybe God has a vision to plant in your heart for your family, your hobby, your business and your industry, your school, your neighborhood, your state, your nation. You'll know God's

vision, His favor, His equipping and His provision as you sit at His feet in prayer. That's the individual application for each of us today.

Corporately, I want to talk with you about how this relates to CPC South Campus. When we started this campus almost three years ago, we had the same mission we have today: to make and mature more followers of Christ. We had a great plan based upon the trial and error of starting our North Campus. We had a great launch team of almost 200 people. We were blessed with a great place to meet for worship—this synagogue. That doesn't mean everything was right though. There were some problems with **Here**.

One of them was that new people preferred in-person preaching. That surprised us. The North Campus had done pretty well relying upon video preaching. Those of us who've known Mark Mitchell, CPC's Lead Pastor, felt connected to him, even though he was on the screen.

But that wasn't the feedback we received from new people. We realized that we couldn't make and mature more followers of Christ like we wanted to if new people, who were looking to grow in their faith, left. It takes some courage to visit a church for the first time, even if you're comfortable attending churches. And for the people who haven't attended church ever or in many years, it takes a ton of courage. We wanted to honor that courageous step by providing the very best worship service we could. So we started praying about the problem with **Here**. Then a play started to emerge.

Two new staff members who are excellent preachers joined our staff: Neal Benson, our FC Campus Pastor and Dan Reid, our Community Life Pastor. By adding them into a rotation we've been able to decrease the number of video sermons from 35 a year to 12 a year. Through rotating Neal, Dan, Mark, Rob and me through all three campuses we're able to offer much more in-person preaching.

I now hear regularly from people how much they appreciate this change. And I believe that this is helping us and will continue to help us make and mature more followers of Christ.

Looking to the future, we recognize that there are still some problems with **Here**: Kids in our cities don't know who Jesus is and they aren't coming to church, so I ran a pilot Backyard Bible Camp at my house last summer. Fifteen kids attended, seven of them unsaved. This summer we are running three Backyard Bible Camp locations. Twenty unsaved kids will be attending.

One of them is a place to call our own. I've talked with many families who have come and then left CPC South, then started attending PCC, Menlo Park Pres or CPC Foster City because we don't offer the mid-week programming these other churches provide. We are realizing that we have some limitations in our ability to make and mature more followers of Christ like we

want to, when our church family doesn't have a place to meet throughout the week.

It's no surprise to you that we're scattered all over Redwood City and San Carlos and Menlo Park for almost **all** of our mid-week gatherings. We're in homes, parks, restaurants and coffee shops all the time. There's something we enjoy about being in the community we're praying for. But we're realizing that without a place to call our own, sometimes it could feel like the only thing our church does is meet on Sundays for worship.

It was always the vision of the elders to secure facilities for the North and South Campuses; we just focused more prayer on it. This is the Lord's church. Jesus Christ is the head of our church and we always want to be walking in-step with Him. So it's vital for us to hear from the Lord on this matter, like any other. After months of praying the elders felt like the time was right for this to become a high priority.

Over the past three months a small group of us have been looking at properties. Don't get too excited yet! So far, we haven't found our spot. Parking is our major obstacle. We need about 150 more parking spaces than most properties offer. It's no exaggeration to say, "we're praying for a miracle."

But I am not dismayed. I find great encouragement from the scriptures that God's church and Jesus Christ is the hope of the world. We are His church and we want to glorify Him. So I envision a time when we have a spot for:

- Mid-week Bible studies
- South Campus offices
- MOPS

- Men's Fraternity
- Women's Bible Study
- Junior High Life Groups
- High School Life Groups
- Worship band rehearsal
- Prayer gatherings
- Volunteer team meetings
- Storage
- Mid-week programs for kids
- AA meetings

We aren't **There** yet, but I can envision us **There**. For now, I am asking all of you to **pray**.

I am so grateful for men and women of great faith who have seen God work in supernatural ways. I mentioned George Mueller in my sermon two weeks ago and I want to end today with one of his quotes. "When sight ceases, it is the time for faith to work. The greater the difficulties, the easier it is for faith. As long as human possibilities for success remain, faith does not accomplish things as easily as when all natural prospects fail."
-- George Mueller

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.