



Good morning. My name is Neal Benson and I am one of the pastors here at CPC. This is my first time preaching at our North Campus since I'm normally at our Foster City Campus. Let me give you a quick introduction of myself. I was born in L.A. and my parents separated when I was about two years old. My mom took me to church as a young boy but I strayed and made a bunch of unwise choices during my teens. When I was 20 years old I cried out to God from a jail cell to save me, and He did. I've been sober for 15 years and I've been pastoring for 12 years. I have a wonderful wife and a great family!

Growing up without my dad in my life on a daily basis meant I didn't know much about sports. I went to my first professional baseball game when I was 20 years old. I didn't go to my first pro football game until I was 31 and I've never been to a pro basketball game. When I arrived in the Bay Area, I quickly noticed cars driving around with these little yellow flags and a blue logo that said Golden State Warriors. I've never really been much of a basketball fan but this year I started watching the Warriors during the playoffs.

As I watched the Warriors play and heard their story I was impressed. Now remember, I'm no basketball expert like John Wooden, but I began noticing things about the team. It was evident the players wanted the best for the team. I just got this sense that it wasn't about any individual player like some of the other teams out there. I also noticed the commitment of the fans. Everyone was rooting for their team and wearing yellow. That's when the slogan "Strength in Numbers" tied it together and it all began to make sense. It wasn't about one person; they weren't putting all their hope in one person to win. If they were to win, it would be a group effort.

This is exactly what we're going to see in the story we're studying this morning. Open your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 3. While you're finding it, let me quickly catch you up on Nehemiah's story. Nehemiah is an Israelite who was born in Persia and living in the capital city of Susa. He was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes, the ruler of the known world around 450 B.C., and he lived about 800 miles from the city of his ancestors. One day a bad report about Jerusalem was brought to Susa. Nehemiah was heartbroken when he heard the report. He committed to praying for his people, and one day God opened a door for Nehemiah to ask the king for permission to return to his people and help them.

Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's request and he returned to Jerusalem. After Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he waited

three days, made a secret inspection of the walls, and finally challenged the people of Jerusalem to join him in a massive rebuilding project.

This is where we will pick up the story this morning. I need to warn you, on the surface this is perhaps one of the most boring chapters in all the Bible. This is the kind of chapter you skip over because you can't even pronounce any of the names you come across. But it's a huge miss to skip it. As we reflect on this chapter, we'll begin to see that it's extremely exciting and informative, especially in what it teaches us about the church.

The book of Nehemiah is designed to instruct us on the greatness of the church and how to build it according to the plan laid out by its architect, Jesus Christ. Of course, when we talk of "church building" I'm not talking about building a physical structure out of wood and brick or a physical location. I'm speaking of building a community of people who have had their lives transformed and are established on the foundation of Jesus Christ. This is a group of people who are being increasingly transformed so that their life together becomes an example of the love of God for a lost and dying world.

Manageable Sections

When you read chapter 3, the first thing you notice is how Nehemiah divided this project into manageable sections. The point is so obvious that it's often overlooked. In his description Nehemiah moves counterclockwise around the city, mentioning 41 sections of the wall, along with numerous gates around the city, and about 50 different people or groups of people who worked on those specific sections.

The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place.... The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place.... (verses 3 & 6).

The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. They also repaired a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.

The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Rekab, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem. He rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place.

The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun son of Kol-Hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt it, roofing it over and putting its doors and bolts and bars in place. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam, by the King's Garden, as far as the steps going down from the City of David (verses 13–15).

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. How do you rebuild a broken down 1.5–2 mile wall? One section at a time.

The great theologian Carl Henry was once invited to Northwestern University to give presentations on Christianity. The whole thing was organized by a energetic young man named Doug Coe who desired to see his campus won for Christ. He put together a planning committee who prayed, chose a theme, picked a date, reserved the hall and contacted the speaker. When the big day came, Henry and Coe were backstage before the first lecture. Coe decided to peek through the curtain and was stunned. No one was there. Why? He had forgotten to advertise the event!

Having manageable sections of the wall to rebuild is what helped Nehemiah accomplish this great work of God. The place Nehemiah excelled in successfully managing this project is the same place where others fail. This was the case in the story I just shared. This young energetic leader underestimated the task of pulling off such a great event. In all his planning he forgot a key component: to promote the event to his schoolmates. We could say he procrastinated or tried to do too many things at once, but the real problem that I think Doug Coe encountered was creating manageable sections of the project to work on. He thought of all the detailed aspects of planning an event but forgot to recruit someone skilled in marketing to promote it.

Doug Coe didn't have to invite all the people himself, he just needed to delegate the work of promotion well. When you plan an event, how well do you manage the details? Do you find yourself procrastinating or forgetting priorities? Do you try to do the whole thing yourself or are you a master delegator? Upon reading this chapter, we learn more of Nehemiah's organizational leadership in accomplishing God's work.

Their Unity

Nehemiah breaks down the project into manageable sections and the next thing we see is the unity of the people rebuilding the wall. Another way to say this could be that the organizational leadership of Nehemiah is displayed. Here are people from a variety of backgrounds who join, in unity, to rebuild the wall. Throughout this chapter, names are connected to each other by the words, "Next to him... next to him... next to him..." and it continues right around the city, mentioning about 50 groups of people, covering every square inch of possible wall.

Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made

repairs.... Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah—Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth—places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates.... Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib's house to the end of it.... (verses 4, 7, 21, 27).

Nineteen times Nehemiah uses this phrase, "Next to him..." This level of organization didn't happen by chance. We get the sense here that Nehemiah was a master organizer and manager. He recognized rule #1 for all good managers: delegate! And that couldn't have been easy. Some places had to be more attractive to work on than others. Imagine Nehemiah gathering everybody around and saying, "Okay, who wants to work at the dung gate?" I'll bet he didn't get a lot of volunteers for that one! But somehow, as we read this chapter, we get the distinct sense that everyone knew and accepted their assignment. Nehemiah had the ability to delegate work, even unpleasant work, to others and make them want to do it.

To mobilize and organize a group as diverse as this in a common cause required a man who understood the need to carefully plan and organize very seriously. The fact that he mentions various landmarks in such great detail shows that he mapped out the entire project according to manageable units, leaving no part of the wall unaccounted for. We also see his wisdom in assigning the work to the people. Nehemiah assigned sections of the wall near their homes to those living in the city. Not only would this assignment be more convenient for them, it would probably ensure their best work. Think about this: they would want the wall to be as safe as possible near their homes and they never wasted any time commuting! In addition, people would get to know those working and living near them and possibly form friendships.

What makes it even more amazing is to look at what he had to work with. We know the Israelites were defeated in spirit. They were a hopeless group of people living in shame. Three factors stick out to me about the unity of this group of people. The first is the diversity of the group. Nehemiah tells us there were priests, men, women, city officials, Temple servants, city guards and merchants, all working on the wall together. There were laymen working side by side with priests and Levites. High officials were working side by side with slaves. Locals were working side by side with those from neighboring towns. This reminds me of the church. This is what the church body should look like—a diverse group of people working together to accomplish a greater purpose than anyone could do on their own.

Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel (v. 1).

The second factor that sticks out is the priests who are mentioned in verse 1. The priests must have played an important part in the building of the wall, and I think this is why Nehemiah lists them first. They are also mentioned near the end of the chapter in verse 28 and in the middle in verses 17 and 22. The priests very well could have excused themselves from the heavy work of rebuilding, pleading that it wasn't their calling to move stones, but they didn't. You get the impression the priests are the first to roll up their sleeves and get to work. And when they are done, they dedicate their work to God because they were working for God. Their commitment reminds me of Paul's instruction to the church of Colossae. *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,"* (Col. 3:23).

Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters (v. 12).

The third factor Nehemiah mentions appears in verse 12. Here is a guy who is out working hard with his kids. Since I'm a dad with young daughters, I imagine Nehemiah going around encouraging the workers, and then he sees one man serving with his little girls out in the hot sun. We don't know their ages, so any guess is speculation on my part, but I imagine the girls helping to clean up the rubble. They are moving the stones they can and laughing and giggling. They are helping their dad plaster and get the stones in just the right place so the wall will be as strong as possible. Their laughter and joy encourages those around them and motivates them to continue working hard.

Now this father probably could have completed the work faster without his daughters there. If you've ever served with your children it can actually take longer. But as the Church we are called to train up those who are younger and this is a great example. When we step back and look at the entirety of this chapter, the completed wall is a testimony of the interdependent partnership of the Israelites working in manageable sections.

Repair, Repairs, Repaired

We can have the most organized project with people who are united for the same cause, but if we don't do hard work, the project isn't going to get finished. The most obvious thing in this chapter is the use of the word repair. It's found at least 38 times. It's the word used to describe the actual work these Jews were doing—repairing the walls.

The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.... Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him.... Next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section, from a point facing the ascent to the armory as far as the angle of the wall (verses 5, 10, 19).

I enjoy working with my hands. Before becoming a Christian, I started working in construction at the age of 15. There is a sense of fulfillment in working with your hands that you sometimes don't get other places. For example, just a few weeks ago I found a great play set on Craigslist for my kids. I bought it for a tenth of the original price, had some help moving it, power washing it, staining it and reassembling it. Now my kids have what looks like a brand new play set in the backyard, and they love it. It's a joy to see my kids want to go outside and play.

The point Nehemiah is making here isn't about working with your hands, he is emphasizing the hard work of the workers. The wording in this chapter reminds us that building anything of significance, including the church, involves very hard work. It sounds so simple, but it's so simple it's easy to miss. Nothing in God's Kingdom has never been accomplished without hard work. Scripture tells us that one of the things God created each of us for is to be workers. This is a part of being made in the image of God. God Himself is a worker, remember? He is a creator, and He gives us the privilege of working under Him. In all of our work, we have the opportunity to glorify God by simply doing it for His glory. You might have a job you don't particularly enjoy, but you can choose to work hard for God. Even if we think work is boring or meaningless we can work hard for God and honor Him in all we do.

This concept of working hard also applies to the work of building the body of Christ. Some people want to believe that all we need to do is pray and everything will work out fine. We don't need to plan, let's just pray. We don't need to budget or prepare, let's just pray. Now don't misunderstand me on this and text Rob and tell him I said you don't have to pray! I'm not saying we don't need to pray. What I am saying is, I think we need balance. If all we focus on is being busy in work, we miss the point. If all we do is pray and not work, then we also miss the point.

The book of Nehemiah shows us how Nehemiah's story is saturated with prayer. Nehemiah is a man of prayer, but if he never worked the wall wasn't going to rebuild itself. If he never planned or prepared, the people would not have united. Prayer is never meant to be a substitute for work. In the New Testament the apostle Paul was a man of prayer, yet he also said to the Corinthians, *"We work hard with our own hands"* (1 Corinthians 4:12a). He also called his disciple Timothy to be *"a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed"* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Nothing has ever been done for the kingdom of God without work. When we work hard, we are building the church. No church or ministry has ever been built apart from hard work. Think of what it takes just to accomplish a Sunday morning here at CPC. It takes a lot of work by a lot of people. There is a parking team helping people find a spot, ushers helping people find a seat, greeters, coffee makers, CPC Kids team, student ministry leaders, sound technicians making my voice sound good, a

worship team, and many others. This is how the church should be, each of us pitching in to help out. Think about this: When God's people work in unity, we can accomplish God's work.

Unfortunately there are many churches right now that could be referred to more like a football game. Let me explain. In a football game there are 22 men on the field in desperate need of rest, while at the same time there are 60,000 people in the stands in desperate need of exercise! When Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he told them the job of the pastor was to equip people for ministry, not do all the ministry themselves. *“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”* (Eph. 4:11-12). The church is meant to be a united effort of people serving next to each other.

Names

So we've seen how Nehemiah divided the work of rebuilding the wall into manageable sections and united the people to work in the most strategic places, and then they were able to begin rebuilding the wall. Now I want to mention the list of names here. I'm going to go on a limb and say, “None of us know any of these people listed here.” This would be like my grandchildren reading the guest book at my wedding; they would probably not know any of them.

Before you write this list off as unnecessary, I want to present a different view. This list reveals Nehemiah's concern for people. I once heard someone say, “People don't care what you know until they know that you care.” This statement is so true. These people had to feel so cared for by Nehemiah who was documenting their hard work and writing down their names! Some are even recognized for working especially hard.

The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. They also repaired a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.... Next to them, the men of Tekoa repaired another section, from the great projecting tower to the wall of Ophel (verses 13, 27).

These men were extra hard workers. The residents of Zanoah are documented as having rebuilt 1500 feet of the wall, which is no small feat! In verse 20 Nehemiah mentions a man named

Baruch who zealously repaired another section. It seems their extra hard work was worth special recognition.

There is a name missing from this list of people though and that is Nehemiah's name. He doesn't include himself in the list of people. As I've thought about it, it reminds me of a book I read after attending the Global Leadership Summit. Jim Collins wrote *Good to Great* and documented what good leaders do and what great leaders do. One thing he says about great leaders is this, “Level 5 leaders look out the window to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well. At the same time, they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility, never blaming bad luck when things go poorly.” This means that as a great leader when things were going well in Jerusalem, Nehemiah gave credit to those who were working hard.

We've looked at four essentials to building the local church: organization, unity, hard work, and caring about people. This chapter reminds me of the New Testament description of the body of Christ. Each person is using their unique gift to serve the body, to be built up, to be encouraged, so we all can show the love of Christ to those around us. Does this get your heart beating a little quicker? Does it excite you to be a part of reaching this little stretch of land on which God has placed us?

When the wall was finished, I'm sure it didn't look like track housing in Sacramento, but more like a patchwork blanket reflecting the unique work of each person or group. Just as each person played their own unique role in building the wall, we too can play a unique role in building the church. I already mentioned a few examples for you to consider. You can serve in so many different ways. You can go to the Global Leadership Summit to receive training to lead better. You might want to start serving with your kids by taking part in the Backpack Drive.

Remember, it's going to take a little longer but it's worth it. As we work together in building the church remember this: When God's people work in unity, we can accomplish God's work.

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

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