



For eight weeks now, we have been studying the book of Nehemiah and talking about how God is rebuilding our broken world. At this point in the book, the walls have been rebuilt and the Temple is starting to function again. The wall needed to be rebuilt to provide safety and security to the City of God, the Holy City of Jerusalem. A city without a wall wasn't even considered a bonafide city. What's amazing and even miraculous is Nehemiah built the wall in only 52 days. No one, for over 160 years, had been able to accomplish that feat. So, we expect the book of Nehemiah to end in chapter 6. The wall is rebuilt; that is what Nehemiah came to do, end of story. But, what we will see from here on out is the real rebuilding begins.

If the book of Nehemiah really isn't about a wall or even Nehemiah himself, what is it about? The book of Nehemiah is all about God's glory revealed in his city through his people. Nehemiah was a foreshadow of a greater Nehemiah—Jesus Christ. Jesus left heaven to come to our broken world to rescue, redeem and rebuild us, his people. Jesus not only rebuilds broken places, he specializes in rebuilding broken people. So, here we find Nehemiah with an even bigger task—the rebuilding of the people of God. And yet again, he faces another major problem: no one is living in Jerusalem. The once glorious city of Jerusalem is a heap of rubble and looks more like Detroit than Dubai. The city needs to be inhabited in order for the center of God's activity to thrive. But how will Nehemiah, how will God, get the people to move back in?

Today we are going to look at Nehemiah chapters 7, 11 and 12, and in these 152 verses (I promise not to read them all!) what we find are mostly genealogies, long lists of names. After careful study, I've grown to appreciate these verses and all the 250 plus names mentioned. I find it so interesting that in the 13 chapters of Nehemiah, five are genealogies—lists of people. Why is that? Why are these names preserved for us? Because God cares about people. Nehemiah's job wasn't just to rebuild the wall, but to help establish the people of God as a separate, mature, community of faith within the Holy City of Jerusalem. From history, we know that in 70 AD Jerusalem was destroyed along with most of the wall, but the people of God continued to press on. Today, beautiful churches of the past are empty all over the U.S. and Europe, yet the people of God are still thriving. Christianity has never been about church buildings, programs or walls, it's about people who live for God. Here in Nehemiah, God wants his city to be filled with people devoted to him, but how will that happen?

The first thing Nehemiah will need to do is appoint people to lead the city.

**“After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites were appointed. I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do. I said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses” (Neh. 7:1–3).**

### **Nehemiah Begins to Repopulate the City**

The key word here is “appoint.” The first thing Nehemiah does is appoint key leaders. Like any great leader, Nehemiah knew it was time to change the organizational chart. Up until this point, everyone reported to him. Now it was time to delegate responsibility to others. Great leaders know how to work themselves out of a job. They delegate responsibility, not just tasks. The goal was to get God's people to live in the city for God's glory; people who will live with God and for God. To do that, Nehemiah appoints two of his trusted men in leadership. First, he appointed his brother Hanani as basically the mayor of the city. Nehemiah would still remain the governor of the province, but he would no longer be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. Remember, Hanani was the guy who first told Nehemiah of the situation in Jerusalem in chapter 1. Now, he is made mayor.

Second, Nehemiah appoints Hananiah, who was in charge of the fortress. Hananiah was like the chief of police in charge of security. Nehemiah didn't just appoint anyone for these key offices; notice what is said of Hananiah, “he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do.” Character was more important than charisma. These two men were to be people of integrity and people who fear God. If the city was going to be safe and civil, it needed a government to run it and a chief of police to guard it.

The next thing we see Nehemiah do is set gatekeepers and residents to guard Jerusalem's 10 gates. Nehemiah was still concerned about invasion. Ancient cities were more like fortresses than cities and the weakest part of the wall are its gates. Typically, the gates would be opened at dawn, but for some

reason, Nehemiah commands them to only open the gates when the sun is hot-mid day. Why did Nehemiah do this? Sure, he was still worried about foreign attack, but I wonder if he was worried about another invasion, a more subtle one—the influence of the surrounding nations. It could be by keeping the gates closed for a longer part of the day, God was protecting the city from worldliness. Nehemiah wanted the city to be inhabited by God's people first and not by others. He was protecting them from the slow erosion of competing values and interests from those who were not living for God's glory.

I wonder, how are your gates doing? Do you have gates in place on your home computer and your TV? Are you monitoring what your kids listen to and see? One of the things I've been meaning to do for my family is install Covenant Eyes, an internet accountability and filtering program on my home computer, my work computer, and my family's phones. It's a gate that I've been putting off but I need to do it. What gates do you have set up when it comes to dating? Money? Movies? Music? Books? Your family? Your time? Work? Video games? Or are you a defenseless city without gates? The reason why we don't put up gates is because it's hard work. It takes effort and discipline. Not to mention, people just don't understand why we wouldn't go see a movie like *50 Shades of Grey*. Some of you need to install a few gates this afternoon!

Nehemiah enlists godly leadership, he secures the gates, the city is safe; now he needs people to fill the city with more people.

**“Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. This is what I found written there: These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, in company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum and Baanah):... (7:4–7).**

### **Nehemiah Establishes Citizenship in the City**

It's kind of funny if you think about it. The city wall was up. The Temple was running again. The mayor and the police chief were working, but the city had no people! We have the opposite problem in our cities today! So why was no one living in Jerusalem? There were several reasons. For one, for years it wasn't safe. A city without a wall was like a home without any doors. The city was easy prey for invaders. It was easier and more safe to live out in the country because if you were attacked at least you could run and hide in the wilderness. Second, the city was a mess. What happens if you don't landscape or clean up your front or

back yard? In a matter of weeks it's overgrown and gnarly. Now imagine an entire city, destroyed and left to rot for 160 years! Here in the U.S. we've seen entire cities abandoned once manufacturing jobs left or went overseas. For these reasons, when the people did finally come back from exile, they set up farms and built their homes outside the wall. For years they had enjoyed living in the suburbs. The weather was nice. They had space for their kids to play. The schools were all 9's and 10's. And it was less crowded. Why would they want to move to the city?

Nehemiah, in verse 5, found an old book of genealogies. After blowing the dust off the book, he opens it to find a list of exiles who have already returned from Babylon. We see this same list in the book of Ezra. I'm not going to read the entire list, but it can be divided into nine categories of people:

- The original leaders were listed (the men of Israel)
- Jews who were laymen (the men of Bethlehem)
- Priests
- Levites
- Musicians
- Gatekeepers
- Temple servants
- The descendants of the servants of Solomon
- Those whose ancestry was questionable; they got cut!

So, after looking at ancestry.com, Nehemiah held a meeting to enroll people, to register people by families, all 42,000 of them. And only those who were truly Jewish and could prove so from the list were qualified to live in the holy city. On the surface, this long list of names in chapter 7 means very little to us. But, for the Jews, it meant a great deal. To them it was like our Vietnam Memorial Wall. These were the names of people who had sacrificed a great deal to establish Israel after 70 years of exile. Nehemiah establishes citizenship in the city but, more convincing needed to be done. In between chapter 7 and 11, there is a full-on revival that takes place (we'll hear about that next week). Because of God's work in the people's hearts they are now ready and willing to move back into the city.

**“Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten of them to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. The people commended all who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.... (11:1–2).**

### **Nehemiah Encourages Resettlement of the City**

Chapter 11 picks up where chapter 7 ends. This is not an old list, but a new one. The people of God were deeply touched by God in chapters 8-10. God then moved in their hearts and some of them, not all, were led to move into the city. We read that the leaders were the first to settle in. Others cast lots, they roll the

dice, and a tenth of them also moved into the city. It seems to me that these people went willingly, they weren't forced. They trusted God in the casting of lots and settled their families inside the wall. But then, there were others who "volunteered" to live in the city. Like Nehemiah, these volunteers were moved deeply by God and said, "I am in!". Evidently most people preferred to stay in their native towns and villages, but some were compelled and moved to be a part of the new thing God was doing.

This reminds me so much of starting the North Campus. Well over six years ago, I stood up at the Foster City Campus and held several meetings encouraging people to leave that campus and join us on a new adventure of faith. My own family left our beautiful duplex in San Mateo to move to Millbrae. My wife and I have always had a core conviction to live in the city we serve. Thankfully we were not alone and over 150 people left the Foster City Campus to plant this campus of CPC. There were some who lived in our area who chose to stay in Foster City. To be honest, I was frustrated by that. But after prayer and conversations, I chilled out and focused on the task God called us to do. We didn't want anyone to join us out of obligation. And some of them had really good reasons to stay. But, because of our original 150 pioneers, we were able to start a new thing first in Millbrae and now in San Bruno. Now we have close to 800 people who worship together here at the North Campus. To God be the glory! But, we couldn't have done it without our pioneers. In fact, if you were one of those pioneers, thank you for taking a risk, for living by faith, and helping us start the North Campus!

Has God ever compelled you, deep within, to do something for him that is totally above and beyond what you have to do? Nobody's telling you to do it. Nobody is twisting your arm. But, the Holy Spirit is tugging you to do something. God works that way sometimes. Like my family, maybe God is calling you to adopt. Maybe God is calling you to move into the inner city of San Francisco. Maybe God is calling you to quit your job and be a stay-at-home father. I've found there are times where God will ask us to do something that scares us to death. That's a great thing! God did that in Nehemiah's day and chapter 11 ends with the city of Jerusalem filled with close to 10,000 people.

I want to end by asking two questions: Do you have a **place** and are you in the **Book**? First, do you have a place? Poet Wendell Berry wrote, "If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are." In Wallace Stegner's essay *Sense of Place* he put it this way, "A place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, known it, died in it. ...Some are born in their place, some find it, some realize after long searching that the place they left is the one they have been searching for." I can't help but read this story and think about the city I live in, Millbrae, but also the great city of San Francisco. Today 54 per cent of the

world's population lives in urban areas, and that is expected to increase to 66 per cent by 2050. Projections show that urbanization combined with the overall growth of the world's population could add another 2.5 billion people to urban populations by 2050, with close to 90 percent of the increase concentrated in Asia and Africa, according to a United Nations report. China, for example, is set to resettle 400 million people from the countryside to the city in the next 30 years. There is no doubt about it, people are moving to the major cities of our world. But sadly Christians are moving out.

Today the global church is struggling to reach Millennials, adults under 30, which is the biggest generation in history. Why is that? Well, guess what, Millennials are predominantly living in cities. One article I read this week said, "It seems that in an innovation-driven economy, more innovation happens when smart people are swirled together with a ton of other smart people. Innovation needs an ecosystem, argues economist Enrico Moretti in *The New Geography of Jobs*, which details the shift of work to hotbed cities such as San Francisco, New York, Boston and Seattle. 'A growing body of research suggests that cities are not just a collection of individuals but complex, interrelated environments that foster the generation of new ideas and new ways of doing business,' Moretti writes. 'By clustering near each other, innovators foster each other's creative spirit and become more successful.'" So, if the church wants to reach Millennials, we need to reach the city.

Did you know that God is really into cities? Any careful reading of the Bible will quickly see that God loves cities. In fact, he created cities. Hebrews 11:10 says, "**For he (Abraham) was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**" Apostle Paul planted churches in the major cities of the Roman World because they were the most open and the most strategic places for the Gospel. Did you know that heaven is depicted in Scripture as a city, the New Jerusalem? The Bible starts in a garden, but will end in a city. You'll be an urbanite whether you like it or not! And what's so great about the heavenly city is there are no gates! It's also always day and never night. Our future home, the heavenly City of God, will be filled once and for all with the people of God from every nation, tribe and tongue. I can't wait!

No matter where you live, God calls us all to restore and rebuild cities. True, not everyone is called to live in San Francisco, but we are all called to help restore and bless the city in which we live. I'm so thankful for those of you who live in San Francisco. There are over 200 of you who attend CPC. I know some of you would love to move down to the Peninsula, but I'd encourage you to stay right where you are. The city desperately needs more followers of Jesus. For the rest of us, we need to start right where we live. The Peninsula is desperate for Jesus as well.

Here's what the Bible says about our call to restore and rebuild the city. The prophet Jeremiah writes, *"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper"* (Jeremiah 29:4–7). I find it fascinating that Jeremiah encouraged the exiles living in Babylon to bless that city. Not to complain about it, or rally against it, or use it, but to bless it.

The book of Proverbs also encourages us to do the same, *"When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy. Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed"* (Proverbs 11:10–11). How do you bless the city? You follow Jesus. You obey him. You seek to glorify and honor him in all you do. Do you have a place and are you committed to it?

Finally, is your name in the Book? The genealogical list of Israelite names was an exclusive list. The only way to get on the list was birth. Meaning that inclusion was completely out of the control of a person. Jesus has a book too but it operates differently. Jesus' book is the Lamb's Book of Life. It is exclusive because only those whose name is in the book will be granted entrance into God's heavenly city. However, by placing their faith in Jesus Christ anyone can get their name written into this book. The writer of Hebrews put it this way, *"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect"* (Hebrews 12:22–23).

Is your name in the Lamb's Book of Life? Your name can be there the moment you place your faith in Jesus. Have you been called to a place? Is your name in the Book?

*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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