



The year was 1951. Bill was a student at Fuller Theological Seminary. He was studying for a Greek exam late one night when he received a unique impression from God that had nothing to do with Greek. The unique impression was this: Invest your life in helping reach the entire world with the saving hope of Jesus Christ and start with college students. The 50's weren't a thriving decade of spirituality on college campuses in America so this seemed like a strange and unexpected approach.

But as we've been learning from our study of Nehemiah over the past seven weeks it doesn't matter how illogical the plan might seem, if God is calling you, step out in faith. When God calls someone to something, he will also provide so the plan succeeds.

So Bill organized a 24-hour prayer chain and hit the UCLA campus as classes were starting in the fall of 1951. In the first year more than 250 UCLA students received Jesus as their Lord. Everyone sensed that the Lord was doing something special. To have a dozen new Christians would be amazing but 250 ... wow! Bill and his wife couldn't do this alone. To continue this work, six fresh college graduates were hired to live among the students; to continue sharing the good news of Jesus and disciple these new Christians.

From there the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, later renamed Cru, spread and kept spreading. As of today, Cru is doing ministry in 190 countries. This represents 99.6 percent of the world's population.

How did this happen? People were willing to show God's glory and endure whatever personal cost that would involve. RA's in the dorms would gather their hall and share their testimony. Apartment clubhouses would fill with students sharing their testimony. Cru staff lived among college students in order to reach the vision God had given Bill Bright.

This is the same theme we see in Nehemiah 7, 11 and 12: God is calling the Israelites to show his glory and endure whatever personal cost that's involved.

Have you ever wondered what God's grand purpose is for your life? Why do you live on your street? With your neighbors? Why do you work at your company with your co-workers? Why are you in this church? Does God have a purpose in it or is it just random circumstance?

Our section of scripture from Nehemiah today will give us insight into these questions. Let's start reading in Nehemiah 7 and see how this story unfolds.

**After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites were appointed (v. 1).**

For eight weeks now we have been studying the book of Nehemiah and talking about this wall construction project. The walls have been rebuilt! The wall needed to be rebuilt to provide safety and security to the City of God, the Holy City of Jerusalem. But more importantly, a city without a wall was a disgrace. The name and reputation of God was being mocked. For the reputation and glory of God Nehemiah and the people have been working diligently. Now, after 52 days of construction, the wall is done! So we'd 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, there are 13 chapters in Nehemiah. Let's keep reading and find out why.

**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" (verses 2–3).**

What are we seeing here? We're seeing that the city was getting organized: Leaders are put in place: Hanani was set up as the mayor and Hananiah was the chief of police. Gatekeepers were stationed at each gate with the instruction to keep the gates closed; both important functions in a city. You need good leaders and you need to set up guards to protect against negative outside influence.

**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 (verses 4–5).**

For most of the rest of the chapter, the people are listed out in this genealogical record. Instead of reading all of their names,

I'm going to point out selected verses representing the categories they fell into.

- In verse 7, *"The list of the men of Israel"*
- In verse 39, *"The priests"*
- In verse 43, *"The Levites"*
- In verses 44 and 45, *"The musicians"* and *"the gatekeepers"*
- *"The temple servants"* are listed in verse 46
- Solomon's descendants are in verse 57
- In verses 61-63 there's a group who can't prove their Israelite heritage. As a result, they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean.
- Verse 66, *"The whole company numbered 42,360"*
- Verse 73, *"The priests, Levites, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of Israelites, settled in their own towns."*

This chapter starts out so well. "After the wall had been rebuilt." Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem to lead this monumental task. The people of Israel have put aside their personal agendas in order to build these walls to bring glory to God. Everyone worked in beautiful teamwork next to one another. They've endured through external opposition and internal friction.

But something isn't quite right. There's a big problem. Verse 4 tells us that hardly anyone is living inside the city. This is the capitol of God's land. This is the city where God dwelt in the temple. This is a city with newly built walls. This is the city that was meant to display the glory and splendor of God.

And while it's been rebuilt physically, it's a ghost town. It's not much of a display of God's glory if it's empty. The surrounding nations that were mocking God because of the broken walls will shift their mockery to an empty city if something isn't done about this. The logic of the surrounding nations would be: if your God is so great, why aren't any of you living in the city where his presence dwells? That's a good question!

I did a quick internet search this week for the Best Cities to live in. There are tons of sites on this topic. You know you've looked at these before, dreaming of a better life. And if not on a website, you've longingly watched *House Hunters International*, dreaming of a better life in some exotic far-away place! My favorite is Roatan, a small island off the coast of Honduras.

One of the websites I looked at is Niche. Before it ranks cities, it describes their process: *Explore the best cities to live in the U.S. Niche ranks cities based on livability using grades for weather, safety, schools, and access to activities, jobs, housing, and transportation. A high ranking indicates that a city offers a high quality of life to its residents.*

Rankings:

- 1 – Cambridge, Mass
- 2 – Berkeley, CA
- 4 – San Francisco, CA
- 5 – Manhattan, NY
- 6 – Sunnyvale, CA

You might be wondering where your city ranked: Redwood City or San Carlos Since the minimum population was 100,000 we weren't considered.

Here's what I noticed about every one of these cities: people were living in them. Lots of people. That may seem like an obvious and ridiculous observation. You might be questioning my skills of deduction. Of course, people are living in the Best Cities. But doesn't this reveal why it was such a problem that hardly anyone was living in Jerusalem? Nehemiah knew this was a problem and verse 5 tells us that God put an idea in Nehemiah's heart.

That's the same thing that happened in the beginning of this book. As Nehemiah prayed for four months, Nehemiah 2:12 tells us, *"I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem."*

Two times when Nehemiah faced a problem, a problem that stifled the glory of God, God put an idea in Nehemiah's heart to remedy the situation. But it's important to clarify that Nehemiah isn't bothered by a personal problem or challenge he's facing. He's bothered because the reputation and name of God are being mocked.

His first step toward solving this problem of repopulating the city is registering all the people. He needs to assess who's available to move in. That's what he does in most of chapter 7. This is the historical background setting up what happens next over in chapter 11.

There's a reason for skipping over chapters 8–10 today. Chapter 11 picks up the story where chapter 7 leaves off. Nehemiah knew that in order for the people to be willing to resettle the holy city they had to be touched deeply within their hearts by the Lord. Imagine living in the suburbs, loving it, and someone comes along and tells you that it's God's will for you to move into a kind of run down, deserted city. How would you react? You would want to know for sure that this was God's plan for you.

But this situation is even weightier. Everyone is living on family land. Moving to the city would involve leaving their birthright; their legacy; their inheritance. People don't make decisions like that unless God is telling them to do it. And in two weeks we'll see it was that kind of heart preparation that took place in chapters 8-10.

So let's pick up the story in chapter 11 to see how the city was repopulated.

**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 (Neh. 11:1-2).**

There are three groups of people who, motivated by glorifying God, moved into Jerusalem: The leaders; ten percent determined by a lottery; volunteers.

Verse 1 tells us that the leaders were the first to move. These are great leaders. They're willing to personally sacrifice for the cause. People will usually follow a leader who's sacrificing for something great.

In contrast, we've all been around people who try to lead without setting the example. There's the boss who tells everyone to work long hours, but cuts corners on her work hours. And the CFO who recommends layoffs to stop "unnecessary spending," but then buys himself brand-new luxury office furniture.

As a leader, part of your job is to inspire others around you to push themselves to be better. To do this, you must show them the way by doing it yourself. Didn't Jesus Christ do this when he left the perfection of heaven and entered our physical world? In everything he did, he set the example. He never said, "do as I say, not as I do." Instead, he said, "I'll do everything you could never do so that you can rest in my grace." What a leader!

Where is the Lord calling you to lead?

The second group of people to move was determined by casting lots. Verse 1 describes how 1 out of 10 were chosen. This was an ancient way the Jews had of determining what God wanted them to do. When they entered the Promised Land they apportioned the land to the various tribes by casting lots. It's hard to imagine God's will for our lives being determined by a roll of the dice but God seemed to honor that process when his people did it in faith.

Try to imagine that you're standing in a large crowd for the drawing of lots. Everybody's there. Your family's name is in the bin. You know that if it's drawn, **everything** will change.

There's no mention in the story of how these draftees reacted. It doesn't say they were excited nor does it say they groaned in exasperation. Any conclusions we'd draw would be speculation.

But here's what's not speculation: we know they were willing. They weren't setting the pace of a leader. Nor were they the volunteers, which I'll talk about in a moment. These were the people who didn't know exactly what to do, but they were willing to do what God made clear.

Where is the Lord asking for your willingness?

The third group to move into Jerusalem did so voluntarily. This word points to an inner sense of compulsion to act. When the

lots were cast, these were part of the nine who were free to return to their own land, but God was tugging at their hearts to move. Verse 2 tells us that the people commended them for doing this.

In Benson's Commentary he points out that "these people were worthy to be honored because they denied themselves, and their own safety and profit, for the public good, and the glory of God ... for no doubt, more profit accrued to those who settled in the country where they had as much ground to cultivate as they wished, compared to those confined to the city."

Where is the Lord calling you to step up and voluntarily work for his glory?

As I think about these people moving into Jerusalem, I can't help but think historically for a moment about the people who left the Foster City Campus to help us start the South Campus three years ago. People who said, "I'll lead the usher team, the coffee team, the greeter team." Staff who said, "Sure, I'll start with you." Others who said, "I'm willing to do whatever is needed." Because of these 100 pioneers we were able to start a new church in Redwood City. To God be the glory. But we couldn't have done it without our pioneers. Thank you for being willing to be part of this great adventure.

Through the rest of chapters 11 and 12 the people and where they lived are listed. We'll read just one more verse from these chapters. Nehemiah 11:20 brings this story to a conclusion with one simple sentence.

**The rest of the Israelites, with the priests and Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, each on their ancestral property.**

What are we to learn from this story of repopulation? God always calls his people to show his glory. For these Israelites, this meant rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem and repopulating the city. God wanted Jerusalem to be an epicenter of blessing to the whole world. For us today, God has called us, his church, out of this world to reveal his character, his love and his mission.

In the Great Commission, Jesus told his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations." The Apostle Paul said the same thing in a different way: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us"* (2 Cor. 5:17, 20).

John Piper said, "God created us for this: to live our lives in a way that makes him look more like the greatness and the beauty and the infinite worth that he really is." When we do that we are showing God's glory. We are designed for this.

How might the Lord be calling you to do something to give him the glory he deserves?

- Start a Bible study at work.

- Maybe do a prayer walk around your neighborhood each night.
- Maybe divide your current Home Group so more people can be added.
- Think about how your words and attitudes either glorify God or reveal your sinfulness. Maybe God is calling you to make a change here.
- Maybe like Nehemiah God will put an idea in your heart.

Showing God's glory will involve personal sacrifice. For these Israelites, this meant leaving their family land and moving into the city. They would be leaving their birthright; their legacy; their inheritance. For us today, this means we leave the idols of our

hearts. We leave the idols of comfort, power, control and acceptance. We leave the deepest motivations of our hearts that we think will give us life. And in exchange we open our hearts to the fullness of God.

What would cause you to wait? Many people rationalize ... When I have more money, more time, more relational harmony, more free time, less stress, on and on and on. Let's unite together as God's people on the peninsula and step out in faith to glorify God in our lives.

*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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