

**REBUILDING A HOPE-FILLED FUTURE FROM THE RUBBLE OF YOUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES - Studies In Nehemiah - Part three**

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**BUILDING WISELY THROUGH COMMITMENT TO FELLOWSHIP**

**Nehemiah 3:17-21** - "After him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. [18] After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. [19] Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. [20] After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. [21] After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib."

What a strange passage for a sermon text! And it's typical of the wording of this entire third chapter. I didn't read the whole chapter because it's the kind of chapter that could easily bore you to death. There's a kind of monotony in the words and names and repetition - the same phrases over and over again.

But while the passage is monotonous, it also marks the point in the book where the **actual work of rebuilding begins**. After all, walls don't go up by themselves. And God didn't put the walls up for the people.

There is **praying**. There is **preparing**. There is **planning**. Nehemiah has done all of those things. But, no matter how you slice it, there must come that time of participating - of actually setting the hand to the task. That's what this third chapter is all about.

More than we might think at first glance, **this is a chapter about fellowship**. It probably doesn't look like it to us, because we've really changed to a concept of fellowship that is miles removed from the main premise of the Bible.

Many Christians would be shocked to discover that fellowship isn't just coffee and doughnuts in the fellowship hall after church. There's nothing wrong with that, but that's not all that fellowship is about.

This is a chapter about people who see a job, and set their hearts to **work together to get it done**. In fact, as you read this chapter, you will find that the words **"next to him" occur 25 times as the people rebuild the walls**. People were joined side by side. Walls were going up in their proper place, without breaks or gaps because there were no breaks in the **work force**. There was a linking up in labour together. The **walls** were joined and solid because the **people** were united in labour, shoulder to shoulder.

This leads to the first principle of this passage:

1) **THE REBUILDING OF THE BROKENNESS OF YOUR LIFE CANNOT BE COMPLETED ON YOUR OWN**

This is a great chapter about **cooperation**. It illustrates in living flesh what is taught in the New Testament in passages like **Romans 12:4-8** - "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. [6] Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; [7] if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; [8] the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

These are Paul's words about building, not **walls around Jerusalem**, but the **Body of Christ**. And his obvious point is simple. To build a healthy church - a church without gaps and holes in its structure - **each person has a role to fill**. God uses each of us to build up each other's lives. In other words, God cannot accomplish all He wants to accomplish in **my** life without **you**. And God can't accomplish all he wants to accomplish in **your** life without **me**.

We know from other passages of Scripture that Paul likened the spiritual life to running a race. But now we discover something else: **The race is a three-legged race**. I can only cross the finish line **linked up to you**.

In fact, it's the weaknesses and foibles and limitations of others that deepen and sharpen my own discipline and wisdom and grace. God uses the fellowship of others in the church to **increase my resistance to sin, to give me strength in united prayer with the saints, to bring me spiritual understanding of His Word, to help me grow in making wise and holy decisions, to expose my own sins through the sometimes irritating habits and words of others**. After all, I can think I'm pretty patient if I only have to live with myself. It's the sins of **others** that bring to the surface of my life all my anger, envy, pride, etc.

Cut it any way you want, **without the rest of the church, there will be huge holes in the structure of my soul**.

Get involved in some kind of mid-week ministry. Get your whole family into Christian Education. Work with Bread of Life. Join a Core Group on Wednesday night. It's **your own life** you'll be rebuilding.

If I were God I wouldn't have included Nehemiah chapter three in the Bible. Nobody's going to read it right through anyway. I would have put more parables, more of the miracles of Jesus, and a lot more stuff about heaven. **But the Holy Spirit wants me to know that the**

**walls of my life don't go up without Hashabiah, and Ezer, and Eliashib and Uriah.**

This chapter is the Holy Spirit's way of saying, **"Don, don't ignore the people I've put into the church to build your life! Don't think you can do it without them.**

Just look at the verses I read at the beginning of this message (3:17-21). Take any one of those unknown names out of the picture and do you know what you have left in the wall? **Nothing but a big hole.** Or, as so often happens, the person on the right or the left, has twice as much work to do.

## 2) GOD IS A GREAT RECORDER OF NAMES

This really is a very important chapter of Scripture. Why isn't it enough for the Holy Spirit just to say, **"And a whole bunch of people all worked very hard on the walls. They all served faithfully until the job was done. God bless everyone of them!"?**

Because God doesn't see what **"people"** do, or what **"the church"** does, or what **"Cedarview"** does. But He **does** write down what Tammy Fenwick or Gladys Gordon, or Laurie Garrett does.

Do you know the names of every person who's looking after all the children in the nursery, or in children's church today? God writes all their names down - every week. We shouldn't be bashful or hesitant to say this. Jesus said they would be both **remembered** and **rewarded** for what they do every single week.

Do you know the names of all the people giving out Bread of Life baskets this week? God does. He writes down all of their names as they serve Him. That's the principle of this boring chapter. God loves to record and reward unknown names.

## 3) HE RECORDS THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO DON'T DO THEIR ASSIGNED TASKS FAITHFULLY

**Nehemiah 3:5** - **"And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord."**

I'm not quite so happy that God records my **laziness** as well as my **industry**. The Holy Spirit distinctly singles this group of men out. **Technically they had done nothing bad.** They didn't rob any of the other workers. They didn't take off with any of their wives. In fact, they didn't even do anything to hinder the work of the others. **They simply didn't put their hands to the work themselves.**

So these reminders of God's attentiveness to individuals - right down to the recording of their names - is to **help us to live our Christian lives mindfully** - to keep our **destiny** before us - never to merely be **man pleasers** - never to be one thing in public and another in private.

After all, **God didn't need to write those names down so He wouldn't forget them.** He has no memory problems. He wrote them down so **we wouldn't forget their permanent testimony to either the faithful reward for working for the Lord, or the punishment for ignoring the work at hand.**

## 4) NOTICE THE EMPHASIS ON THE ENTRY AND EXIT POINTS OF THE CITY WALLS

**Verse 1** - the "Sheep Gate", **verse 3** - the "Fish Gate", **verse 6** - the "Jeshanah Gate", **verse 13** - the "Valley Gate", **verse 14** - the "Dung Gate", **verse 15** - the "Fountain Gate", **verse 28** - the "Horse Gate", **verse 31** - the "Inspection Gate"

I know from reading many of the expositions of the book of Nehemiah that there's a tendency to pull all sorts of weird and wonderful sermon ideas from all of the images in the book. Some people find all sorts of symbolism in each and every gate. They find lessons in the name of each gate. I think things get stretched a little out of shape some times.

But at least allow me this one point of application when it comes to the gates mentioned in the text. **Whatever else is meant, at least this much is certain - gates were very important when you lived in a walled city. Gates represented the means of both access and egress. Everything entered and exited through the city gates.**

In fact, **you controlled the quality of life inside the city by how well you managed the traffic at the gates.** A city could be ruined by what it allowed in. It could also be ruined by what it refused to put out.

I think you can see the point of application to the rebuilding of our lives as well. The Scriptures actually talk a great deal about the gates of our lives - the things we allow to **enter** and **exit** from our hearts:

### a) **There are things that we allow entry into our lives at our own destruction:**

**Matthew 5:29-30** - **"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."**

Notice the emphasis on **first entry points**. **Find out your weaknesses**. **Discover what brings sin into your heart!** Fix your attention on the **entry points** of your life. Your eternal destiny hangs on your willingness to deal ruthlessly with the entry points of sin.

**Matthew 13:22** - "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."

**Sin isn't always openly destructive**. It doesn't always devastate the life **instantly**. Worry and a love for wealth destroy the soul, but in non-dramatic ways. **They starve the inward life of the Word and Spirit gradually**.

**Ephesians 4:26-27** - "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and give no opportunity to the devil."

That word "**opportunity**" is the word "**topos**" - the Greek word from which we get our English word "**topography**." Like a place on a map, **anger, cherished and warmed in the mind, will carve out a specific place for the devil to base further operations in your thinking if you entertain his lies**.

All of those verses are merely a sampling of the warnings of Scripture on the importance of keeping the entry points of your mind protected and secure.

b) **There are also things that we allow out of our lives that must be kept in.**

**Revelation 2:4-5** - "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. [5] Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

These words are a specific warning to a church that had kept a lot of things out that they should have kept in. Jesus praised them for this - **2:2** - "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false."

**But they also let slip away something that they should have kept closely guarded in their hearts**. They didn't notice their passion and purity of devotion to Jesus grew cold.

But nobody **monitored** this. Nobody was **watching the gates**. Nobody saw it slipping away. Here's another area: **James 4:17** - "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

Paul says our lives are to be "**full of good works**." Underscore that little word, "**full**." What is the path to this fullness? Or, to put the question in its negative form, how do lives become **less than full**? **How do we become spiritually empty?**

The Apostle James tells us: There's something of a **spiritual drainage** that takes place in our lives when we know, by conscience and the Spirit of God, that something needs to be done, but either through **pride or plain procrastination** never get around to doing it.

And that failure doesn't just leave me where I was before. **It's not just non-growth that happens. It's a spiritual minus - an actual reduction of God's renewing work. There comes a diminishing of the glory of the Lord in my life!**

**"Keep your heart with all diligence."** That's another way of saying, **"Keep the gates of the walls of your life in good repair!"**

Life is never determined merely by the **conclusion of things**. Life is largely determined - and the course is largely set - **in the beginnings of little things - little things ignored or little things allowed**.

I can still remember the excellent words from **Jim Rohn's "The Formula For Failure And Success"** - "Failure is not a single, cataclysmic event. We do not fail overnight. Failure is the inevitable result of an accumulation of poor thinking and poor choices. To put it more simply, failure is nothing more than a few errors in judgment repeated every day.

Now why would someone make an error in judgment and then be so foolish as to repeat it every day? The answer is because he or she does not think that it matters.

On their own, our daily acts do not seem that important. A minor oversight, a poor decision, or a wasted hour generally doesn't result in an instant and measurable impact. More often than not, we escape from any immediate consequences of our deeds.

If we have not bothered to read a single book in the past ninety days, this lack of discipline does not seem to have any immediate impact on our lives. And since nothing drastic happened to us after the first ninety days, we repeat this error in judgment for another ninety days, and on and on it goes.

Why? Because it doesn't seem to matter. And herein lies the great danger. Far worse than not reading the books is not even realizing that it matters! Those who eat too many of the wrong foods are contributing to a future health problem, but the joy of the moment overshadows the consequence of the future. It does not seem to matter. Those who smoke too much or drink too much go on making these poor choices year after year after year... because it doesn't seem to matter.

But the pain and regret of these errors in judgment have only been delayed for a future time. Consequences are seldom instant; instead, they accumulate until the inevitable day of reckoning finally arrives and the price must be paid for our poor choices - choices that didn't seem to matter.

Failure's most dangerous attribute is its subtlety. In the short term those little errors don't seem to make any difference. We do not seem to be failing. In fact, sometimes these accumulated errors in judgment occur throughout a period of great joy and prosperity in our lives.

Since nothing terrible happens to us, since there are no instant consequences to capture our attention, we simply drift from one day to the next, repeating the errors, thinking the wrong thoughts, listening to the wrong voices and making the wrong choices. The sky did not fall in on us yesterday; therefore the act was probably harmless. Since it seemed to have no measurable consequence, it is probably safe to repeat.

But we must become better educated than that!

If at the end of the day when we made our first error in judgment the sky had fallen in on us, we undoubtedly would have taken immediate steps to ensure that the act would never be repeated again. Like the child who places his hand on a hot burner despite his parents' warnings, we would have had an instantaneous experience accompanying our error in judgment. Unfortunately, failure does not shout out its warnings as our parents once did. This is why it is imperative to refine our philosophy in order to be able to make better choices. With a powerful, personal philosophy guiding our every step, we become more aware of our errors in judgment and more aware that each error really does matter.

Now here is the great news. Just like the formula for failure, the formula for success is easy to follow: It's a few simple disciplines practiced every day.

Now here is an interesting question worth pondering: How can we change the errors in the formula for failure into the disciplines required in the formula for success? The answer is by making the future an important part of our current philosophy.

Both success and failure involve future consequences, namely the inevitable rewards or unavoidable regrets resulting from past activities. If this is true, why don't more people take time to ponder the future? The answer is simple: They are so caught up in the current moment that it doesn't seem to matter. The problems and the rewards of today are so absorbing to some human beings that they never pause long enough to think about tomorrow.

But what if we did develop a new discipline to take just a few minutes every day to look a little further down the road? We would then be able to foresee the impending consequences of our current conduct. Armed with that valuable information, we would be able to take the necessary action to change our errors into new success-oriented disciplines. In other words, by disciplining ourselves to see the future in advance, we would be able to change our thinking, amend our errors and develop new habits to replace the old.

One of the exciting things about the formula for success – a few simple disciplines practiced every day - is that the results are almost immediate. As we voluntarily change daily errors into daily disciplines, we experience positive results in a very short period of time. When we change our diet, our health improves noticeably in just a few weeks. When we start exercising, we feel a new vitality almost immediately. When we begin reading, we experience a growing awareness and a new level of self-confidence. Whatever new discipline we begin to practice daily will produce exciting results that will drive us to become even better at developing new disciplines.

The real magic of new disciplines is that they will cause us to amend our thinking. If we were to start today to read the books, keep a journal, attend the classes, listen more and observe more, then today would be the first day of a new life leading to a better future. If we were to start today to try harder, and in every way make a conscious and consistent effort to change subtle and deadly errors into constructive and rewarding disciplines, we would never again settle for a life of existence - not once we have tasted the fruits of a life of substance!"

So here are the life lessons from today's teaching - There are three:

- a) Build your life in the commitment of **fellowship with the body of Christ**.
- b) Remind your soul of the constant notice and remembrance of Father God - a God who records and remembers both **faithfulness** and **neglect**.

- c) And always, if you work at anything important in your life, ***keep the gates of your life with all diligence.***