

NEHEMIAH

From Vision to Action

November 10, 2019

Passage: Nehemiah 2:4-8, 17-20

What we want people to know: When God gives you a burden and a vision, you must take the steps necessary to put a plan in place to fulfill the vision, even when facing opposition.

What we want people to do: Make a plan of the steps you can take to implement the vision God has given you for the burden that He has placed on your heart.

Good morning Cross Point Church! This is the third week in our series on Nehemiah, one of our favorite Old Testament stories amongst the staff. Each week your staff gets together for devotions and earlier this year we worked through the book of Nehemiah, and when I say we worked through it – we did this little book for about 10 weeks! We enjoyed the study so much that we decided to share some of our thoughts on it with the whole church family.

So, in the first week Pastor Vince shared some of the background of the book and about how Nehemiah was given a burden to see the wall rebuilt. He challenged all of us to spend time with God and ask Him to give each of us a burden for something – to show us something that tugs at our hearts and makes us feel like we must do something about it. Then last week, Pastor Dave talked about how once Nehemiah received that burden from God, He didn't just rush into action and start doing whatever came to his mind to help. He took the time to spend with God, in prayer and meditation, waiting on God to open the right doors and show him the plans that he should make to get the wall rebuilt.

We're going to pick up the story from there this morning and talk about how Nehemiah took the vision God had given him and put it into action. Now, this is part of the story that we can all relate to, even if you don't yet have a specific thing that God has given you a burden for. How many times have we had a great idea and we never did anything about it? I know there are countless times that Julie and I have been driving in the car, or are out somewhere and we think of a great idea, only to forget about it or never do anything about it later. How about more important things that we see and then brush aside? How many times have we seen a news story about a family in need or children in need and thought that we are going to do something about it...but never followed through?

Nehemiah got the vision, waited on God for the plan and then took the steps that God showed him to make that plan happen. I believe that sometimes when God has given us a passion or a vision for something, we get the idea that He will just make things happen, when the reality is that we have to take steps to put the plan into place. God isn't going to do the work for us, He is just going to help guide us in the work that we need to do.

God won't do the work for us, but He will show us the work that we need to do.

In our part of the story this morning we picked up where Nehemiah was going to the king to share the burden that God had given him to rebuild the wall. This was the first step that he knew that he had to take in order to fulfill the vision that God had given him. The king had to give permission and allow the plan to move forward, and Nehemiah knew that he had to work within the rules. It may not have been easy to go to the king with such a personal request, but he knew that it was the first step in God's plan. When it came time to make his request we are told, in verse 4 "with a prayer to God in Heaven, I replied..." Nehemiah took the time to remember God and call on God for his help as he made his request to the king. God wasn't going to give this king a vision of the wall being rebuilt so that when Nehemiah requested it God had already done part of the work. No, God sent Nehemiah to do the work and He was right there with him while he did it. There is a difference there – God didn't do it for him, but he prepared him and went with him while he did it himself.

*I think that sometimes we pray for or hope for the miracle when God is asking us to be the miracle ourselves. There are times when we ask God to do something that He may have already done, but we don't like the way He did it because it requires something of us. Nehemiah could have had his heart pulled for land of his ancestors and spent his time praying for God to do a miracle and make that wall be built back up overnight by the snap of His fingers. God didn't do that though, and He didn't need to, because He had Nehemiah to rebuild it. *Nehemiah could pray for a miracle, or let God use him as the miracle.**

Many of you know that before coming to Cross Point we lived for three years in Haiti. We have actually been working in Haiti for 17 years and previous to that we spent time helping with church planting work in Nicaragua. I spent time on sugar plantations with refugees in the Dominican Republic and just a week or so ago returned from Sierra Leone with a group from this church. I have seen poor people in a lot of settings. I have held in my arms children suffering from malnutrition and tuberculosis. (TB kids Story)

People will often ask me "Why doesn't God do something about that?" – and that is a legit and hard question. I myself have struggled to answer it at times, but I think that we get the answer in the story of Nehemiah. The answer is that God already did something about it – He created the Church – we, you and I, are the answer to those prayers and to that question. God already did something about it, and what He did was send us. It's up to us to then do the work to bring about the change.

God sent us to do the work that brings about change.

Back to Nehemiah and what he did to make the change and fulfill the vision that God gave him. He not only waited and listened, but he also had a plan of attack. He put all of his ducks in a row before going to the king and asking permission. All of the follow up questions that the king had, he was able to answer. He did his homework and was ready to go step-by-step through his plan.

We read in this passage that he had specific people and specific tasks for them to do and asked the king for letters from him to tell those governors to let Nehemiah do it those things with those people. Nehemiah didn't wait to get to those places and then deal with a new set of people that he had to convince to let him do the project. He knew the best way was to get letters from the king stating that he already had permission to do it. He thought ahead and he had planned for potential outcomes. He didn't take a "wait and see" attitude, he was pro-active and made contingency plans.

In the middle verses of this chapter Nehemiah goes to the wall and inspects it. He doesn't do it with a crowd watching him, because he was not ready to answer all of the questions that may have for him while he was looking at the project. He went out to the wall at night, looked over all of it and developed the specifics of his plan to rebuild it before telling the people about what he was doing. He wasn't being secretive, he was being smart. Nehemiah understood that it is better to have your whole plan ready before sharing it with the people you are trying to help. I learned this lesson the hard way several times working overseas. A friend of mine told me "Under-promise and over-perform rather than over-promise and under-perform". It took me a while to learn that lesson, but it is a lesson that Nehemiah thought through ahead of time.

Think through the details before beginning your work.

Let me give you an example of how I messed this up before. Several years ago, maybe 10 years ago now, I was working with a friend who had a school in the worst slum in Haiti – Cite Soleil. Cite Soleil is a terrible place full of gangs, disease, extreme poverty and tens of thousands of people living in garbage. Mother Theresa visited Cite Soleil sometime in the late 90's or early 2000's and people traveling with her said that she called it "the place that God forgot". Well, I was there with about a dozen friends and we were doing a project in the school building and decided that we will also feed the kids of the school a good, hot meal that day. We sent money ahead for the food and to pay some wonderful ladies to cook. They made a spectacular meal of rice, beans, vegetables and sardines with a nice red hot sauce. I had told my friend, the principal of the school, that we would feed all of the kids that day – there would be plenty. Well, needless to say there was a bit of a problem in my planning – I didn't account for all of the possibilities that could occur; I didn't think through all of the potential problems and have a plan.

When we began feeding the kids in the school, since the building itself had no roof and big open windows, children from all over the slum began to show up for food. All sorts of kids showed up for school that day that hadn't been in school for weeks! I had only thought about the 200 kids a day who show up to school and planned for them, I hadn't thought about the other 200 kids enrolled that are hit-and-miss in their attendance. I didn't think through the plans, I didn't think through the possibilities, I just began my work without thinking through the details. So, here we were in one of the 5 or 6 worst slums on the planet feeding some kids and turning other kids away, having rocks thrown into the building and having hundreds of little hands sticking through the windows and under the doors begging for food. I had over-promised

and under-performed – and from that day forward I tried to always think through all of the details before starting a project.

Now we are at the point where God has given a passion, you've worked out the details, you've thought through the potential outcomes and you're ready to make the change! Now comes the next big thing – you have to get some help! You cannot do it alone! You need to be able to rally some support around you and build a team that can help you see your mission through.

Inspire others to join you in making your vision a reality; you can accomplish more together!

Nehemiah knew that he wasn't going to be able to build that wall by himself. He needed to get the people behind him and willing to do the hard work alongside of him to see it through. We read in verses 17-20 that he excited the people by rallying them around the project. All of them together were able to accomplish the task at hand. They trusted his leadership because he had done all of the hard work setting everything in place and they were inspired to be a part of it.

Add section about everybody helping in their own way in their own location; everybody had a part to play, etc.

Here at CrossPoint Church we were inspired over a decade ago to begin our work in Sierra Leone. We followed all of the right steps and began a work there that continues to this day. Like I said earlier, Pastor Dave and I just returned from a trip with a few others from the church and I want to close out today with some updates for you on the work that you have been a part of in Mebolah.

SIERRA LEONE PRESENTATION