

# Nehemiah: The Principle of a Passionate Calling

*Nehemiah 1, 2, 4, 6*

Good morning men! I just want you to know what an honor it is for me to each week be able to come here and open up God's word with you together and to see how that applies to our daily lives. One of the most compelling needs that I have in my life and it's a need that every man has, is that I just really need to feel like my life has purpose. That it's going somewhere, that I'm making a contribution. Actually, that's why I quit High School! I was in the middle of my senior year and nothing seemed to be purposeful, nothing seemed to be connected, nothing seemed to be going anywhere. I know that you feel exactly the same way, and men are different to varying degrees. Some men are just like me, I can't go three minutes without feeling like there's purpose to what I'm doing; it just has to be there. Other men are a little more relaxed about that, but all men want to feel that their lives count, that they're making a difference, that they're making a contribution, and that our lives are going somewhere.

So today I want us to talk about how God has planned to meet this need that we have for purpose, how God has programmed us, hard wired us as men in particular, to have a deep sense of need for our lives to feel like they are going somewhere. The purpose of the talk today is going to be to help you figure out how you can confirm God's calling on your life, or figure out how you can know what it is and then have the determination to do the thing that God wants you to do, the thing that will give you that sense of purpose.

We're going to be looking in Nehemiah today, but first let's do a shout out. We've got a new group joining us, The Gateway Community Church of the Nazarene in Redding, CA. This is the second new group in Redding in the last month or so. There are seven guys, and they say they are yearning for God, and so they are using the online videos. Bob Rupert is their leader, and I wonder if you would join me in welcoming this new group to the Man in the Mirror Men's Bible Study. One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're glad to have you with us!

## **The Burden of What Breaks Our Hearts**

All right, so the series is *How God Makes Men*, the message today is *Nehemiah: The Principle of a Passionate Calling*. The first thing I want us to look at is the burden of what breaks our hearts, and we want to look at the story of Nehemiah and just see how God operated in Nehemiah's life, how God brought Nehemiah from a person who was comfortable, maybe complacent. He had a great job as the cup bearer to the king, Xerxes, the guy who tasted the wine to make sure it wasn't poisoned... Maybe it wasn't that good of a job after all! He lived, so I guess it was okay! So he had this really great job and then something happened in his life that broke his heart and gave him this incredible burden to do something that would have real purpose, and we're going to take a look at it. In the first chapter of Nehemiah his brother, Hanani, comes and brings news that Jerusalem is in shambles.

Now this is a century after the first exiles have gone back, the temple has been rebuilt. Ezra rebuilt the temple, but the city is in shambles. Verse 3:

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace."

Just think about your home town, maybe this is it, maybe it's someplace else, but just think if your community had been ravaged and was in great trouble and disgrace:

... the wall is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire. When I heard these things, I sat down and wept.

Why did he weep? Well, he felt the burden of the problem, it broke his heart. You have things in your lives that when you hear about them, they either make you weep or have a flood of emotion because they are deep burdens to you. Reading on:

... For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

So not only does it make him weep, but he mourns what's going on. He fasts over it, he prays about what's going on, and then he says:

... I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you.

So he repents, and I would just say to you that if you see something that burdens you, the first step towards doing something about that is to humble yourself. It's to pray, it's to repent, for whatever your role in causing that problem and that role of every other Christian in creating that problem. It's to repent, it's to repent on behalf of you and on behalf of all of us who are believers that we would have let this city, Orlando, become one of the international capitals for sexual trafficking. You didn't even know that did you? This is one of the capitals of human trafficking, Orlando, FL. How would we let that happen? So some of you right now are probably feeling like God has just grabbed your heart and he's just squeezing your heart! I can't believe this is happening, and you feel the burden. Whatever it is! Whatever it is that makes you feel the burden. It could be working with addicts, it could be working with the poor, or it could be fatherless children.

I heard a story this week about a man who went to an all pro-dad camp with his two kids, and there he saw three men who brought thirty boys! Thirty fatherless kids to this camp, and they would do things, they had different stations on the camp. They would go from station to station, the fathers and their children, and at one station they would do a tickle attack. The father would tickle attack the children, and then at the next station the children would tickle attack the dad. Then at the next station the father would tell each of the children how proud he was of them and why, and then at the next the father would give a fifteen second hug. Except there were only three adults for those thirty fatherless children, one mentor for every ten boys, so even though the boys were at the place where they could actually address the issue of them being fatherless, there weren't enough men there. There weren't enough mentors there to give those boys what they needed, even though they were in the one place where they might be able to get some help.

So maybe it's something like fatherless boys that just grabs your heart. I'm talking about this and you just feel like, "Oh my gosh I can't stand this!" You feel like screaming, you want to jump up and run out right now and you want to go do something about it! That's what's happening to Nehemiah! That's how God works! God takes problems in the world that need to be redeemed, places where his creation has

been broken, and God if he wanted to could fix them himself, but he has so ordered the world that he chooses you and I to go and fix those problems. God is always looking for a man to address whatever burden, whatever problem is breaking our city. Wherever our walls are broken down, God is right now looking for someone who will say, "I will fix that wall! I will rebuild that city! I will help redeem that broken thing!" And so he puts burdens on our hearts. He gives us things that break our hearts when we hear about them.

Now there is a difference between a problem that we grieve over and a problem that becomes a calling. We all feel the burden of saving unborn children, we all feel the burden of the breakdown of government and society, we all feel the pain of the moral decay we see going on around us. We all feel the pain of the poor, racism, divorce, you name it, we all feel these things. But the difference between feeling a problem and having something that just really breaks our heart is this, it is so deeply felt that the Holy Spirit inspires us to do something about it.

I remember we had a small race riot here in 1980. I remember that it made the national news. I remember being grieved about that. I remember having my heart broken about that. I grew up in a home where if I ever used a racial slur, I would still be black and blue! That just wasn't part of my upbringing. Many of you know my best friend for eighteen years was an African American guy, Tom Skinner, and so this is my life. So I was deeply grieved by that, but it wasn't just like what everybody else was feeling. Most everyone else, they'll hear about the problem and it bothers them but then they go on to the next thing. But when you can't go on to the next thing, that is the burden that is breaking your heart that God is using through his Holy Spirit, inspiring you, to call you to do something about it! So I did something about that, another story for another time. In fact I would also add that in many ways this Bible Study grew out of that civil disturbance because we started this thing called The Black White Fellowship and then that morphed into this, in 1986.

So how are you going to know your calling? Well you're going to know your calling, and many of you do, and those you who don't you will know your calling when God makes you feel the weight of a burden so heavy, that so breaks your heart that if you can't do something about it, you feel like you're going to go crazy! You just feel like you are going to go crazy! I can't take this anymore! Somebody has to do something! And then of course you've got to guard against that I'm the only one left kind of syndrome, but that's how God works. Don't you yearn for that? Many of you have that! Don't you love that you have that? Those of you who don't have it, don't you ache to have that kind of passion for something? My passion is men's discipleship. I am passionate about seeing men come to faith in Christ and then watching Jesus transform their lives as they present themselves to him on a weekly basis, on a daily basis. And then all of the downstream impacts of that, the marriages that are rescued, the families that are restored, the sense of contribution, the changing of the culture, the winning of other people, all of these things! In fact, if you look at every single problem that we face, behind that problem somewhere you will find a man who failed, and ironically, a man who probably got up this morning wanting to be successful! Nobody woke up this morning and said, "Well, I wonder what I can do today to have a moral failure?" But a lot of guys will, and so helping those men, and of course my foundation, you know my foundation, you've heard it before. My dad got involved in a church that had no vision to disciple him on how to be a Godly man, husband and father, which is why he went to the church in the first place! No men saw my dad walk through one of those doors and knowing what needed to be done, jumped into action and took him under their wing and disciplined and mentored and tutored him on how to be a Godly man, a Godly husband and a Godly father, and I'm still angry about it! But it's a holy anger!... Okay, it used to not be a holy anger! But a holy indignation, because it's just not right! It's wrong! It's just categorically wrong! It is a catastrophic moral failure that that guy wasn't disciplined, because that's what

he wanted, even if he couldn't say it when he came in. Guys come in here because they have a need, even if they don't know what it is. We know what the need is! We need to enlist them in the army of God, or re-enlist them, as the case may be, but then we need to teach them how to clean and shoot their weapon. So that's my passion, that's why I'm passionate about it. You heard why Nehemiah was passionate about what he was passionate about.

Here's the Big Idea for the day: **God makes men by turning what breaks our hearts into a passionate calling to redeem some broken part of the world.** That's it! God wants to make you into the man he wants you to be by giving you something that will break your heart so that you feel the burden for it. You feel the burden for it so heavily that you just can't stand it! You weep, you mourn, you fast, you pray, you repent, and that's the starting point. We'll get to the application.

### **You Are the Plan**

Second thing I want us to talk about, God has a plan. God has a plan for every place where the sting of the lack of the Gospel is being felt in our community, in your neighborhood, in your work place, or wherever you see your boundary. Maybe it's the county, maybe it's the region, maybe it's the state, maybe it's the nation, maybe it's the world, wherever the sting of the lack of the Gospel is being felt right now, God has a plan to redeem that broken part of the world. And what is the plan? You are the plan.

When God gets ready to redeem some broken part of the world, he always sends a man. He's always looking for a man who will feel the weight of the burden, who will let something break his heart, who will feel so filled up with the moving of the spirit that he weeps, that he mourns, that he fasts, that he prays, that he repents. You are the plan!

When Lazarus came forward from the tomb, Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth!" But what happened next? Jesus said, "Okay, now you remove the grave clothes." God doesn't need us, but he chooses to use us anyway. He wants us to remove the grave clothes, he wants us to rebuild the wall, he wants us to stamp out hungry children in schools, or whatever it is. He wants to use you to do that, to use me to do that. This idea really stirs something deep inside of us as men doesn't it? Doesn't it? Don't you feel stirred up? I hope you feel stirred up!

I'll tell you one of the saddest things in my whole life as a Christian man. It's a guy that I know, he's a Christian, he'll be in heaven, he'll be in one of the tenements, but he'll be in heaven! When he made his money, he checked out, and I tried to get this man involved in different things for twenty years, and I could never get him to move one little pinky to do anything except come out to the Christian parties, the prayer breakfasts, and things like that. He would never bring anybody, but he would always show up. He has never opened himself up to what God might want to do for him. He thought that Christianity was something that God was doing for him! That it was about him! That it was about his happiness, his glory, his peace! And there is certainly an element in which God wants us to experience joy and blessing, and success, you'll find all of these things in there. But they're byproducts; they're the things that only last when they are byproducts of figuring out what does the master need, and then doing those things.

Again, the Big Idea today is this: **God makes men by turning what breaks our hearts into a passionate calling that will help redeem some broken part of the world.**

How about you? Do you know what it is yet?

## Your Burden and Calling

Let's talk about your burden and calling a little bit. I want to give you four scenarios. Scenario number one, I don't know what to do. When I was early in my business career, I was sitting around one day having a pity party, of course it was all about me, and my wife says to me, "You know what your problem is?" And you know when somebody says that, the hardest thing in the world is not to go over the table and strangle them, so yes I knew what my problem was. But she says, "You know what your problem is?" I say, "No I don't. Tell me, what's my problem?" And she said, "You're self-absorbed. You're too focused on yourself. You need to get out of here, and you need to go out into the community and find some place where you can make a contribution," And bam! That quick, the spirit had confirmed with my spirit that she had just told the truth! And if your wife is like my wife, she always tells the truth, and I hate it! But this day, it really clicked, and so I'll tell you what I did. Some of you know the ministry Frontline Outreach, and I knew the guy that ran that, so I went down to them and said is there anything here I could do to help you out? And I got involved a little bit. And I'm just telling you bam! Just like that my pity party turned into a joy party as I started doing something for someone else because I felt a burden for that, I felt a calling to do something about it!

So, if you are in scenario one and you don't know what to do, get over it! Look, you've heard me say this before, if you don't know how to serve God, that's because you're walking around with your eyes closed! You're walking around with your ears stopped up, there are desperate needs that need men of God to step up and rebuild that wall everywhere! You can't walk fifteen feet without finding some major crisis that threatens the very fabric of our community! Get out there and get off your rear, put your antenna up and start asking some questions. Keep looking until you find that thing that breaks your heart. And when you find that thing that breaks your heart, let it break your heart! Find something that makes you want to weep! Just a thought.

Second scenario. I'm reluctant to begin. You know all the reasons, but you just have so many problems. I just need to get my life together, and then I'll serve God. Well guess what? If I felt like that I wouldn't be here today! There wouldn't be a Bible Study if I did that, because like the rest of you I have unbelievable responsibilities and demands on my time! I have a lot to do, you have a lot to do, but I don't prioritize based on what the world wants me to do. In fact when somebody asks me if I can help them with something, I always say the same thing, I'll do anything God wants me to do. But then if I don't feel like that's something God wants me to do and you start leaning in on me, I'll try to be nice but eventually I'll say I'll do anything God wants me to but only that. That's just not something I feel called to do right now.

So, if you don't feel like you have time, reprioritize. Paul said, "I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven." Once you get the vision from heaven, the calling on your life, it is disobedience not to pursue it. So reprioritize. You can do that! We reprioritize all the time! You can do that!

Third scenario. I'm trying, but to be honest it's a struggle. All of chapter 4 in Nehemiah is about how much of a struggle it was. Some of the leaders opposed Nehemiah, they didn't want him there and they rallied people against him. In fact they got up a group of people, hopefully we wouldn't have this happen today, but they got together a gang. So Nehemiah and his wall builders that he recruited, they had to work with swords strapped to their sides, and only half of them could work at any one time because there was such opposition. Expect opposition. There's no greater joy than doing your calling, but let's face it, most callings are just plain hard! That's why he needs a man with some back bone to

answer that call! And also somebody that really does feel called to do that thing, because here's the thing, if you sign up for some kind of service, and you don't really feel called to do it, it is going to be hard! And when it gets difficult, unless you really have a broken heart, something that is a burden on the basis of some deeply felt connection to this, what are you going to do? You'll say, well this is just too hard, I give up! But let me tell you, as hard as men's discipleship is, and a man is a hard thing to reach, as hard as it is on those days when I feel like giving up, at the end of feeling like giving up, you know what I feel like? Going on! Because I can't do anything else and really be happy! I can't do anything else and really feel alive, it's my purpose, and it's my passionate calling! What is yours? Maybe you don't have one yet, but now you know how to get one. Get out there! Maybe you haven't started yet, even though you know what is. Now you know what to do, reprioritize. Maybe you've tried and you find it really hard, now you know what to do, lean into Christ! You can't do it, which really is the answer at the end of the day. How are you going to pull it off? You're not! But Christ can pull it off! Jesus Christ is all the fullness of God in a human body, and he wants to use you and he wants to use me.

The final scenario, it's really happening. It's really happening. Right now it's going on, you know what your calling is, you're engaged, and you've seen the fruit of that. And there's such joy! Victor, I told you about Victor, he's from Honduras, he's an American citizen, but God has given him this burden for Honduras that breaks his heart, this burden for Latin America that breaks his heart. And he didn't sit on that, instead he helped organize a trip down to Honduras, and they went up into the mountains. Into villages where there was no electricity, they had to take a generator to run their laptop and power points. In one village they had a *Success That Matters* seminar, and they had thirty-four men come to this event. The pastor was astonished! He said there had never in the history of this village ever been thirty-four men come together for a spiritual reason! In all the little villages up there, the churches are filled with women. At max, two or three men, everybody else is women. Women are degraded by their husbands in these villages. The regularly physically and verbally abuse their children, and thirty-four of them came out to hear Victor answer his call to tell them how to be disciples, how to be Godly men, Godly husbands, and Godly fathers. The next day, within twenty-four hours, women were coming to the pastor and said to the pastor, "You would not believe the difference that just twenty-four hours has made in our home." Because there was such a vacuum of knowledge of how to live God's way in the family in that village. But these men were hungry; they sucked it up, because this was where the sting of the lack of the Gospel was felt!

Now fast forward. Victor goes back for another trip only three months later, and here's what he found. He found that the seven churches in one little village had doubled the number of men in attendance and that there were one hundred and fifty men serving God in that village. There were men coming to the meeting place who had to walk three hours to get there along dangerous mountain pathways, and all of that happened because one man responded to the burden that God had put into his heart, and a wall is being rebuilt. So the question for you, what do you see that needs to be fixed? What do you see that needs to be redeemed? What do you see that needs to be restored? The Big Idea: **God makes us by turning the things that break our hearts into a passionate calling for you and me to help redeem that broken part of the world.** Let's pray.

### **Closing Prayer**

Heavenly father, our dearest father, we are each mindful that you have great plans to redeem every broken part of this world. We know that the fields are ripe for harvest, but the workers are few, so Lord we would just ask that in our Bible Study, here and for all those men that are online, that we would be a force; that all of us together, each and every one of us, Lord, you would give us that burden, or confirm

it. That we would be the men who weep, we would be the men who mourn, we would be the men who would fast, we would be the men who would pray, we would be the men who would repent, and we would be the men that you would give the calling to redeem this world. And Lord, if just we would do this, if we all would do this, God it would change this world! And so I pray that only your Holy Spirit can do this in our hearts, and we can resist your spirit, but I pray right now, Lord, that there would be no man here who resists what you want to say this morning! And everybody said, amen!