

A Step-By-Step Guide For Rebuilding a Country

What Does God Want You to Do?

Unedited Transcript

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Guys didn't recognize me in on the way in, I felt a little bad about that. If you would, please turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 1. Let's go ahead and do a shout out as well this morning. This one goes to 12 men who have been meeting for seven years on Wednesdays at 6:00 pm, at the Wakeshma Community Church. They're called the Wednesday Night Men's Group, the leader is David Mackaluso. I looked both of those words up on Google Pronunciation, so I think I've got it right. I hope I do fellas.

Yeah, I've forgotten how to do shout outs. These men have been meeting for 7 years, and they're joining us in the video Bible study now and so I wondered if you would join me in helping give the Wednesday Night Men's Group a rousing Man in the Mirror welcome. One ... I have forgotten. One, two, three, hoorah. Oh man this is ... Yeah, okay. Well, I've been up since 1:30, so I've got half of an excuse anyway. The other part is being gone for 6 weeks, or 5 weeks, or whatever it is.

Yeah. I'm back from China, Malaysia and Singapore, 4 cities, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Singapore, which is a city, Beijing and Shanghai and I can tell you that there is a deep hunger for God among men in Asia. I can also tell you that there are leaders who are on fire to disciple men in Asia. I can also tell you that we have, Man in the Mirror, we have the right man to pull that off, his name is Mike Griffin.

We're very excited about his leadership over there. We have leadership erams in all four of the places, all four of those cities, so I probably will roll out some additional things to you but this is a bible study, not a missionary trip report but I wanted you to know it was a very successful trip, very exhausting. I was actually sick for the first ten days on antibiotics. That was a trip, but I'm glad to be back and I want you to know that this has been and always will be my number one priority, this bible study, more so than anything else that I'm involved in. This is the one thing that I always come back to that I long to do the most.

It was interesting, because over there, the number one topic that the leaders were interested in having me talk to the men about was this idea of purpose, that men don't feel like their lives have purpose, that they don't feel like they understand what God wants them to do, who God wants them to be, where God wants them to be and so forth. We have been talking about that here in the series Five Weeks to Live. We talked about the four universal purposes that God has for all men, love God love people, great commission, cultural mandate, but then also the particular calling, or their personal purpose, the way that God blends all of those together into a personal calling on our individual lives.

What I want to do today is begin a new series that actually is going to help each of us figure out a little bit more about that personal purpose for our own lives as well. The series is this: Nehemiah, we're going to be looking at the Book of Nehemiah, a step by step guide for rebuilding a country, or a church or a business, or a marriage family. We're going to be starting at Nehemiah chapter one. First up is going to be, the first step is going to be, what does God want you to do?

As we begin, let's just read the first couple of verses in Nehemiah One. The words of Nehemiah, son of Hakaliah, in the month of Kislev, which would be November, December, in the twentieth year, it's the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes, which is kind-of interesting because Xerxes, the father of the current King, would have been married to Esther, so this is in that time following Esther. It's in the twentieth year of that band, in my Bible it says that this is written in approximately 446 BC. Well, the return from the Babylonian captivity took place in 536 BC, so this is now about 90 years after the exiles have returned to Jerusalem.

"In the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year while I was in the Citadel of Susa, Hananiah, one of my brothers," and I can't figure out if it's a blood brother or like we talk about each other as Christian brothers, but possibly a blood brother. "One of his brothers came from Judah with some other men and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile and also about Jerusalem." What is this situation that's called this text into existence? Well, this next verse gives us a great insight into why we need to know about Nehemiah.

Verse three. "They said to me, those who survive the exile and are back in the province, are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has broken down and its gates have been burned with fire," so there's this terrible situation that's been going on. Everybody knows the text in Jeremiah 29, where it reads, "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you," and all of that. Well, it's now 90 years later and this country is in disarray and the country's in disarray because of continued sinfulness but also because there has not been somebody who has taken on the burden of doing something to rebuild this country.

Nehemiah comes on the scene, we all have the backdrop ... Boy, I'm having a hard time getting off the ground here today. Anyway, the backdrop of this text for us is that we have a country that we're concerned about. We have a country that we feel like our walls are broken down but it's not just that. Some of you have businesses that are overwhelming you with grief and calamity and trouble and some of you have marriages like that and some of you have families who seem to be coming apart. Some of you have churches that are in divisions and you feel like the walls are just coming down. The next question is, why did the Holy Spirit preserve this text about Nehemiah rebuilding his nation? It's actually a province of the nation. It says that in the text.

Well, the reason the Holy Spirit has preserved this is because nowhere else in scripture, nowhere else in scripture, are we given a step by step guide on how to rebuild a country, how to rebuild a business, how to rebuild a church, how to restore a marriage, how to repair a family. This is the most amazing book from this perspective. I have PHD in Leadership and Organizational Change, which required me to read the entire literature on leadership but I did it. The science, if you will, of management is only a little over a hundred years old but it's interesting that I have never read anything in management literature, I've never learned anything about Leadership and Organizational Change that you can't find in the Book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah is a step by step guide for how to do the thing that you have the burden to do. Why this is important is because you know what the problems are. In five minutes time, as a group, we can form little groups and in five minutes time, we could identify every single problem that you have, every single problem in the world, every single problem in this community. We could identify all of those problems almost immediately and then we could take another five minutes and I could ask you, what do we need to do to solve those problems? And I guarantee you, because we do this all the time in our Ministry with

men's discipleship, I guarantee you, you will be able, in five minutes, to identify everything that needs to be done to fix all these problems.

The problem is not that we don't know what to do. We do know what to do. We know what needs to be done. What is lacking is a step by step guide or a blueprint on how to actually do that, how to execute the what and Nehemiah is that guide. We learn something from the Book of Nehemiah that we would otherwise never know. We would never know what God's blueprint is to rebuild, to repair, to restore a broken down wall, a broken down country, marriage, family, business, church, whatever it is.

This is an extremely important series and probably very relevant in the context of where, depending on the pollster you follow, 60-65-70% of Americans feel like our country's heading in the wrong direction and also the divisiveness that seems to be so prevalent. How do we repair our broken down walls and what is your role in that?

With that in mind, we take a look here at this Book of Nehemiah. The first thing is, where do you start? It's going to be a step by step process, right? What does God want you to do? Well, it starts with whatever burdens you. Here's the thing, God has created a beautiful mosaic of spiritual gifts, aptitudes, abilities, so forth and he has prepared in advance a good work for each of us to do, a personal calling for each of our lives and it's going to be different for every single one of us. I remember when I answered the call to leave business and go into ministry. I just assumed all my friends would follow me. Do you know how many of my friends followed me? As far as I know, none. The reason is because my calling changed but theirs didn't, you see?

This idea of this burden, it's very personal. Now, Nehemiah, when he heard about this trouble, this disgrace, this wall of Jerusalem, that had broken down, these gates that had been burned with fire, he wasn't the first person to hear about this but he was the man the God laid the burden on to do something about it. Wherever your wall is broken down and you feel a burden for it, that's the place where you are supposed to be working.

If you feel a burden for the men problem, then men's discipleship is the place to work but if your thing is helping the needs of the poor, then that's your burden. That's where you need to be working. Or if you feel a call to exert yourself into the process of better government, then maybe public service or political office would be the thing for you to do. That would be the way to satisfy or to address the burden that you have but the thing is, is that there's something that burdens, maybe it's your marriage.

Some of us have marriages that are so difficult that we would just like to throw in the towel, we would like to just give up but we feel this burden, we feel this burden to do something about it. That burden's from God. That pain that you feel, that pain of a burden, that anguish, that horror at how terrible things have become, why don't you just walk away? Why don't you just walk away? Why don't you immigrate to Canada? Why don't you do that? You don't do that because the burden that you have is from God. God gives men burdens for some broken down piece of the world in which we live and he gave that to Nehemiah. What made Nehemiah different, he's leaving a very comfortable life, we'll read here in a minute, he's the cup bearer to the King, and leading a very comfortable life but he was open to what might be possible. He was open to what might be possible.

It starts with a burden. It starts with a burden. A burden and us being open to what might be possible. Are you open to what might be possible in your marriage? In your business? In your family? In your church? In our country? In our community? Are you open to what might be possible?

In verse four, "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven." He wept, he mourned, he fasted, he prayed. God put a burden on him and it was painful. God has put a burden on you for something and it is painful. Probably one of the main things to see here is the difference between a calling and an ambition. This is the shaping of a calling that's taking place here. God gives us burdens. He begins to place a calling on us to do something. The title of the series is about rebuilding or restoring a country or whatever. It starts with this burden that he gives to us and evolves into a calling and I think one of the main things to see here is the difference between a calling and an ambition.

You may want to build a business and I hope it works out but I hope it is the result of a calling that God has on your life to build a business and not because you see that business as a means to make a lot of money, so that you can be important, so that you can have prestige, so that you can have all the material things that other people don't have so that they will wish that they were you, or I hope you don't pursue your work or your whatever it is as an ambition, "If I could just make that much money then I would be happy. If I could just ... " all of these things you see, but rather that, when you see the trouble in the world and the disgrace in the world, when you see the broken down walls the gates that are burned, that you see that you can make a contribution to actually make the world a better place through whatever it is you're doing.

If you're a garbage collector, I don't know if we have any men that collect garbage here, it seems like they would be at work at this time of day, so probably not, but what an incredible contribution, a garbage collector makes to the welfare of humanity, so I would think it would be entirely possible to be out collecting garbage and actually do that as a calling, making life better for the members of your community. Let's talk about what's obvious in this text and what's obvious in this text is that to do something like what we're talking about, it's just going to take a man who can imagine that the thing is possible. This is what's going on with Nehemiah. He's beginning to imagine what is possible.

The big idea for this talk is this: the first step to every great outcome is to imagine it's possibility. The first step to every great outcome is to imagine it's possibility and this is what is beginning to take place with Nehemiah with weeping, mourning, fasting and praying, it was painful to him, right? It was painful to him.

The next thing I want us to see, or the next step in this, is let God give you his vision through prayer. So, he wept, he mourned, he fasted, he prayed and then as he prayed, God gave him a vision for how to change his country, for how to rebuild his country.

Let's read together. Verse five. "Then I said, Oh Lord, God of Heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands. Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night, who are your servants, the people of Israel." Then he says, "I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you," so he's not only confessing his sins but the sins of the father's.

"We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed your commands, decrees and laws that you gave through your servant Moses. Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses saying, If you were unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exile people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen, a dwelling from my name. They are your servants and your people whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Oh Lord ... " Watch this. Watch this. "Oh Lord. Let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servants success. Give your servants success."

Now, it's interesting, we don't exactly know for sure but it's highly probable that at this point, Nehemiah doesn't know what that success would look like specifically. "Give your servants success today by granting a favor in the presence of this man," and that would be the King. I got asked a number of times in Asia because a lot of these people had been following us for a long time, but I got asked, I don't know why I got asked this question over there and not over here, but one of the questions I got asked a lot was, how have you been able to maintain your passion all these years?

How have you been able to maintain your passion all these years? The answer is that, this is my burden. What I do is my burden. I'm no more passionate about this than I was about real-estate when that was my calling. I was a passionate real-estate ... If I was still a real-estate developer, I'd be richer than Donald Trump. Hey Donald, how do you like that? That's a joke, all right? Of course, we don't know what he's worth, so maybe ...

I was very passionate about that but I'm very passionate about this. I'm very passionate about this because I pray all the time I pray all the time that God will continue to clarify my vision, my calling. I pray all the time and he gives me his vision through prayer. We move in different directions, we all do. A vision isn't everything. There are also specific steps along the way and I pray about this all the time. That's all I pray about. Well, it's not all I pray about but I pray a lot about that. I would encourage you, if you know what needs to be done but you don't know how to do it, then pray that God will give you his vision. Pray that he would give you success and pray that he would grant you favor, you see? You see how that works? You see how that works?

Ideas are more powerful than labor. You've heard me say this before. Ideas are more powerful than labor. Ideas set forces in motion that once release can no longer be contained, this big idea is exactly that. The first step to every great outcome is to imagine it's possibility. I wonder what those other people were doing there in Jerusalem for 90 something years. For some reason, they were not imaging the possible. They were just looking at the circumstances and bound up by the circumstances. They were in bondage. They were in bondage. They were free, technically free, but they were in bondage to a lack of imagination. I just pray, I just pray that we can release all the latent energy that we have in this room and online and we could just all be able to go after the burden that God has put in us through prayer that results in a vision, so that we might be able to imagine what the possible would be.

Then finally, again, we're taking steps here. This is a step by step guide. These are the blueprints. Nehemiah gives us the blueprints for how to actually execute on what we want to do and what we know needs to be done. Be determined to act, even as you feel sadness and fear. Just be determined to act, even as you feel sadness and fear. Hey, every Friday afternoon, today's Friday ...

Every Thursday afternoon at 5:00, every week, week in, week out, Thursday afternoon at 5:00, I feel icky. 5:00 on Thursday afternoon is always the ickiest feeling time of the week for me and here's why:

Because it's at 5:00 on Thursday afternoon, that after a week of thinking about the topic of the week and a day of studying the scriptures and other materials and thinking about, I'm trying to think myself clear on the subject, it's at 5:00 on Thursday afternoons that I sit down with a blank sheet of paper and start to write a talk.

I have such fear. I'm seized with fear every Thursday afternoon at 5:00. Any of you have ever done any kind of racing, whether it's foot racing, or motorcycles, or cars, or any kind of racing, you know that feeling right before the gun goes off. You know that dread, that overwhelming anxiety that overtakes you, then once you get going ... Or the start of a football game, or the start of a basketball game, you know that feeling. That's not something to run from That's something to embrace. It's the way God has made us.

I think that in my early Christian life, I was taught to stuff that, that fear, anxiety, these kinds of emotions, were not Christian emotions. Nonsense. They're human emotions and we're humans before we're Christians and we're humans while we're Christians, so these emotions ... If you will read through first Corinthians and just examine the emotions of Paul. Paul was always afraid, anxious, worried. These are words that come up over and over and over again in the life of Paul and we see them here in Nehemiah, in the month of Nisan, now that's March and April, so we're looking about three months, okay? Three months from the time that Nehemiah found out about what was going on in Jerusalem, to the time he actually does something about it, acts if you will.

In the twentieth year, King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, "I took the wine and gave it to the King. I'd that been sad in his presence before so the King asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you're not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." Then Nehemiah says, "I was very much afraid," so sadness and fear. But I said to the King, "May the King live forever. Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins and it's gates have been destroyed by fire?"

"The King said to me, 'What is it that you want?' And then I prayed to the God of Heaven and I answered the King. 'If it pleases the King, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried, so that I can rebuild it.'" He had this burden that made him weep and mourn and fast and pray and then he prayed about it and God gave him a vision that developed and we now see the vision revealed here as he's talking to the King, this vision to return and be the man that would rebuild the city, rebuild the nation. What's your burden? Weep, mourn, fast, pray about it. Pray about it. Let God give you the vision and then do something, as the vision forms, do something about it, even if you feel sadness and fear. In fact, if you don't feel sadness and fear, there's probably something wrong with you. I say that because of something in the prayer of Jabez.

I have a shelf, I read this somewhere, keep a shelf of the 50 most important books for you, so I have a shelf like that. I don't have no idea how many books are on it but a lot. The prayer of Jabez, a proper theologian might say, "Well, that's a strawy little book to have on your 50 most important books shelf," to which I would say, "You don't know what you're talking about Mr. Theologian." Because of the pages 45, 46 and 47 and we have put one copy of this, pages 46 and 47, on your tables, if you want. One of you can take that. I figured somebody might want it.

What I want to do, is I'm going to read from this book, a lengthy passage, something you should never do in a talk but I'm going to do it, all right? This is Bruce Wilkinson and he's a friend of our ministry and a friend of mine. He's helped us immensely in our ministry. Here's what he writes:

"Now you've done it, gone over the edge, gotten in too deep, come up smack against the cold stone of reality. You are unable to hold on to the life you reached for. Having dared to ask for an enlarged ministry, more than a few Christians have faltered at this point in their spiritual transformation, they receive blessings on a scale they hadn't imagined possible. They've seen God stretch the limits of their influence and opportunities but suddenly, the rush of wind under their wings stops. Helpless, they start to plummet."

Sound familiar? Maybe your new business opportunities threatened to outrun your experiences and resources. Maybe the teenagers who have started congregating in your kitchen suddenly seem to be influencing your family more negatively than you are influencing them positively. Maybe the new ministry opportunities you prayed for and received are turning out to require a person with much more ability than you will ever have. Man, I know that one. You have taken up an armload of God's blessings, marched into a new territory and stumbled into overwhelming circumstances. Am I talking to anybody yet?

"When believers find themselves in this kind of quandary, they often feel afraid, misled, abandoned, a little angry." Bruce said, "I did." "Talk about plummeting, I felt out of control and lead nothing like a leader is supposed to feel and most days all I could see was the ground rushing up at me. It was early in our ministry adventure, the doors had opened up, all I could do was say that I was feeling like the wrong man for the job."

Then, very upset, he went to see an older man named John Mitchell, a Yorkshire born Bible teacher, who was a mentor to him and he said this, "I was still trying to describe my crisis in some detail when he broke in," "Son," he said, and his kindly broke, "That feeling you're running from." Now, what is the feeling that he's running from? It's the fear. It's the anxiety. It's the sadness. It's the weight of the burden itself. It's feeling like, I'm not the right guy for the job. I can't do this. That feeling you're running from is called dependence.

Now, listen to this very carefully because this can change your life. "That feeling you are running from is called dependence. It means you are walking with the Lord Jesus." He paused to let the words sink in and then he continued, "Actually, the second you're not feeling dependent is the second you backed away from truly living by faith." In other words, if you don't have an icky feeling at 5:00 on Thursday afternoon, you're depending on your own strength. "I could do that, you know? I have enough education and knowledge in the Bible, I don't actually need God to put together a message. I could do that on my own strength and you can do your job if you want to," he goes, "Well, you don't need God to do that. You've done it for 20 years. You know how to do it. You don't have to depend on God but here's the thing, if you do, you're going to feel this dependence in emotions like fear and anxiety, sadness because you're the servant. You're not the master."

Golly, I ran this thing over too. It's so long. I can't believe this. I wish you could have seen me over there in Asia. I was so good. I was good. I think they prayed for me more than you guys pray for me. I think that must be it.

We want to rebuild our country don't we? We want to rebuild our churches. We want to rebuild our broken down walls, wherever they are but we need to know what the steps are to do it. God has given us this blueprint in Nehemiah. The first part of this, the first step is to just imagine what can be possible and accept all of the ambiguity and the ambivalence that comes with that and then we'll talk more about it as we continue.

Let's pray:

Our dearest Father, thank you so much for this great book. Sorry I didn't do you justice this morning but I do believe that the proper ideas are coming through. Lord I pray that each man here would at the end of this series, not only know what the problem is and what to do about it but also have this blueprint for how he can actually make an impact for the burden that you put into his heart. Lord, I just ask each of these brothers now, to ask themselves the question, what is it that God wants me to do? We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.